

Midnight

By Allyson Diana

*For my daughter for she truly inspires
my soul ...*

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Prologue

The Death of the Princess



he funeral was beautiful.

Crimson, white, pink and red roses outlined the casket that held the love of his love. The one girl who knew him better than anyone, who talked with him about the things he never revealed, not even to his father, the one confidante he had always relied on.

It had been one year earlier that he had attended another funeral. In many ways it was different from this one, but there were similarities to it as well. The funeral home of *Pine and Fulson* was the same. Mr. Robert Pine who had done the arrangements was the same owner his father had worked with when his mother died the previous year. Mr. Thomas Fulson stood at the door waiting for guests to arrive just as he had done before for his mother's friends and relatives.

He had been seventeen when his mother passed. At eighteen standing here again, the feeling of loss that encompassed him was threatening to tear him apart from the inside out.

No one would see it on his face. He smiled at friends from their high school that just days earlier, she

and he had walked through the halls with, ate lunch with, and went out with. He greeted the many teachers even the principal Mr. Henry Marlen attended with his wife, Laura and their son, Peter, a grade below him. Principal Marlen expressed words that were reminiscent of the same words he heard at his mother's funeral over and over. *'Sorry for your loss'*; *'she was a wonderful person'*; *'we are going to miss her'*. Words that were intended to provide comfort, compassion, support. He thanked them for their words and returned their caring handshakes and heartwarming hugs, grateful that they had come to pay their respects to her.

The differences were very apparent though in the two funerals. For the past two hours of the receiving line, it had only been him who spoke as the guests arrived. It wasn't from lack of her relatives being present. Her mother, Diane, usually a controlled woman with much opinion to say about everything, and who held her emotion tightly to her was visibly, and it seemed, uncontrollably upset. The display was surprising to him, not for the fact that she had lost her eldest daughter, but for the fact of her unusually emotional behavior she exhibited. Thomas, her father, stood by Diane, with their other daughter, Catherine during the long procession of people that poured into the funeral home. Thomas was stoic revealing neither emotion nor loss at the event. He was not a talker, it was true, but the absolute absence of anything to say about his daughter was very unlike him. He often praised her.

Her sister was much like their mother. Catherine cried much of the time, hysterically even to the point that several times he had to stop greeting and hold her until she calmed down. This behavior was most strange to him. Catherine, or as he had always called her *Kitty Cat* since he had started dating her sister as a junior, was not prone to hysterics, at least he hadn't thought so for the year and a half he had known her. There were many things that didn't make sense.

Even the circumstances leading to her death were confusing. The haunting phone call several hours before to him, and the funeral itself, or more accurately the lack or desire that her parents seemed to have in providing a funeral at all for their daughter, because of their emotional state.

All of it never did make much sense, not to him or to his father, Joseph, who had tried without success to calm the family down throughout the days following her death. It seemed to just get worse the more they discussed arrangements and details.

Finally he had decided, against his father's advice, to take care of the funeral himself. Pay for the expenses and give her what she would have wanted if not a lot less than she deserved.

He sent both of his credit cards that originally contained no balances, to the maximum credit levels. The remainder he paid from his own saving account. The total was well over ten thousand dollars, a steep price for an

eighteen year old graduating from high school, but it would have to be enough. In the end, it was.

He knew there could be no amount that would equal her life and no funeral that would honestly be beautiful enough, caring enough, loving enough to his satisfaction. He did his best and hoped that she would be pleased with it. It was in silence that he told her how loved she was, how much she will be missed, and how lonely he was without her. During the four days from when she was pronounced officially dead, even without a body for that casket, he kept his innermost feelings on her to himself, and only revealed his deepest emotions in words secret to everyone, but her: a silent solace amidst the nightmare. Without it, he may have been taken to the brink from which he would not escape again.

She had been, would always be the love of his life, the princess of his dreams...and she was *dead*. There was a finality that shook to his very soul and broke his heart too many times to count. After awhile he just stopped counting.

Dreams were a fantasy of the past. Reality became more real with each passing moment of that funeral.

His princess was gone.

He was alone.

There was no happily ever after.

Death has a way of doing that to the bravest of hearts.

*The Prince Has Awakened**Ten Years Later*

“*A*ndrew...”

The voice belonging to his latest *date* broke through his thoughts. He looked at her and smiled. Something he had been told, he always did well. The soft expression on her face said he had accomplished it once again.

“Yes, Rachel,” he replied softly with a pleasant tone that caused the woman before him to smile back.

“I just wanted to make certain you were still with me.”

He touched her hand softly, throwing her another one of those smiles.

“Of course I am. What can I do for you?” His voice took on an even softer tone.

Rachel averted his gentle green eyes.

“Well...perhaps another drink,” she said, searching for words.

He gently took her wine glass from her hands. As he walked away, he could feel her eyes on him. Although he didn't reveal his emotions, something he had become a master of, inside he smiled to himself.

Resistance is futile, he said in his mind. It had been a saying from *Star Trek* that eventually turned into a joke of a friend of his from high school. It was in reference to his ability to make women swoon. He didn't exactly like the implication during his younger years, but found it nonetheless always amusing and, he had to admit, unmistakably true. Which, in his line of work, was extremely advantageous.

"White wine, please," he replied to the bartender who looked up at him as he arrived at the bar holding Rachel's glass.

"Anything else, sir," he said, quickly.

"No thank you."

"I have to know..." a woman suddenly said near him. He turned calmly to face a brunette, probably much older than himself of twenty-eight years, though her makeup and dress tried to make her younger.

He waited. He wasn't one to add small comments into conversations before they began. It made the conversation much longer than he needed to be.

"Are you from here?" She asked smiling up at him. "Because if you are I am shocked I don't know you. Anyone with your obvious taste in clothes and your..." She hesitated. He took the opportunity to end this.

"No, I'm not from New York," he said, pleasantly, threw her a smile and walked away.

Again, he could feel her eyes on his back as he continued to meet up with Rachel at the other side of the

room now talking with several people who seemed interested in what she was saying.

Conversations such as that one were commonplace. Inquiring of him in any way they could. It was, he had noticed, a quick unrehearsed ploy to speak with him. Flattering to some perhaps, he found it downright annoying. He would have rather spoken about them, the world, politics, investments or anything that didn't involve his own life. He never liked to discuss himself. It was another advantage to his line of work. He had many over the years.

"Here you are," Rachel said, smiling and wrapping her arm around his.

It wasn't a protective motion, more obsessive, but he was used to that. Andrew handed her the wine and smiled. The advantages he did possess that made these women want his services often came with obsessive women who needed to feel loved. Protected. Cared for. It wouldn't last long, but he never disappointed, and they always received what they paid for - *a perfect escort*.

"They are discussing things that you would have more knowledge of, darling," she chimed in with.

"Rachel tells us that you are an investor," a man sporting an expensive name-brand suit Andrew knew of well.

He didn't have any of that brand but it wasn't from a lack of funds. He simply didn't like the feel of them. He went for a bit more expensive and a bit more

comfortable. Playing the part, dressing the part, being the part was all about comfort, he had learned early on.

“I have a few,” Andrew replied, vague and interesting. It was his specialty.

“What of Redden Industries? We were discussing the possibility of their stocks this year. I know, I know...” the man said, quickly. “There isn’t good management, but they are clearing that up. Many good things happening with them now, do you own any?”

“No. Are you from Royal Air?” Andrew asked, pleasantly.

The man hesitated. A man standing next to him, in a definite suit of quality and comfort, laughed.

“He got you, Bill,” the second man replied.

Bill didn’t seem amused. Andrew went right to work.

“I’m sorry, but the reason I asked is Redden Industries has taken off in this past year and much of that has occurred because of their relationship, I understand, with your company?”

Bill smiled and nodded. The embarrassment he had felt washed away in an instant. For the next fifteen minutes Bill told Andrew, Rachel and the other man, Andrew found out to be named Greg, all about the expansion and improvement that Royal Air has done for Redden Industries. By the end of the conversation Bill and Greg were both impressed with Andrew’s information and know-how about investments, but more so, impressed with Rachel Lidden’s choice of a *date*. The

latter was discussed when Rachel excused herself for a moment.

“I’m shocked,” Bill started as soon as she was out of earshot. “Rachel usually brings losers to this every year. Where did she find you?”

“And how did she convince you to come to this?” Greg interrupted. “You have to be bored mostly with these people. Not exactly in your league, Andrew.”

“I mean Rachel’s got a great head on her shoulders and all, but she isn’t exactly exciting.” Bill said then quickly added, “no offense.”

“She’s fascinating. The way her mind works. She developed the entire marketing campaign for Eden, Inc. last year. Her emphasis on quality has made Eden re-think their entire strategy. Last week they closed at fifty-four.”

Andrew concluded causing a brief pause in the conversation as Bill and Greg looked at each other.

“Good point,” Bill said, smiling.

“Hey, you let Rachel go, I might try for her,” Greg said, smiling.

“I’ll be going back to California after the conference this weekend,” Andrew said simply, knowing exactly what reaction he would get.

The look on Greg’s face and the subsequent smile to himself proved Andrew correct.

“Well, have a pleasant trip,” Greg finally said and shook Andrew’s hand.

“Nice meeting you, Andrew. You got a last name to go with your first?” Bill asked.

The question was not surprising and Andrew knew exactly how to answer it.

“That’s better left unsaid.”

Bill and Greg both smiled.

“Not wanting to advertise how much money you have, eh?” Greg said. “Understood. But you know, eventually I find out everything.”

Andrew smiled. Greg and Bill walked away contented with themselves. Andrew saw Greg stop Rachel on her way back into the room. He knew why. A few moments later, Rachel stood next to him.

“Do you know that Greg Fitzsimmons just asked me out?” Rachel said, genuine shock in her voice.

“That sounds good,” Andrew replied.

“Good, Andrew? That is amazing. He never even talked to me before tonight. You must have really impressed him. He was in full competition mode.” She smiled. Softly, she said, “thank you. You are incredible.”

A few hours later, Andrew was away from the party, the people and the business talk, back in his hotel room, a few doors down from Rachel. He had one more day of this conference; including a formal dinner tomorrow night and a cocktail party preceding it. Rachel wasn’t certain if she wanted to attend the luncheon

tomorrow so he would have to find out later about that, but for now, this time was his own.

He went into the bathroom, stripped of his business attire, wrapped a towel around his waist, hung up his suit in the closet provided and took off the dry cleaning slip that was provided on the hanger. He would get it cleaned when he returned. He didn't need it again for this trip. He looked over the clothes hanging in the closet, pulled out a comfortable pair of slacks and a shirt, placed them on the bed, and went back to the bathroom.

Removing the towel, he stepped into the shower. The water turned hotter as he tried to lose himself in it. This morning he had begun this *date* by picking up Rachel for the flight to New York. They had arrived at three o'clock in the afternoon and proceeded directly from the airport to the hotel in a rental car. He knew where he was going. He had stayed at this hotel while in Manhattan for another *date* a year ago. After they received their rooms there was enough time to change and get ready for the opening reception party in the grand ballroom. It was now past eleven and his muscles that were tight had started to relax against the steam of the shower. He closed his eyes and tried to be himself.

The water felt good against his skin and he leaned against the back of the shower, letting it pour over him. He ran his fingers through his dirty blond hair that reached almost to his shoulders. It was cut in a fashion that made it easy to wear either down or tied back. Not exactly businesslike, but no one had ever complained. He

had received many compliments, as a matter of fact, about it.

Cropped hair wasn't one of his things. He had it that way for years when he was younger, but by seventeen he had started to grow it out. Maybe it was his mother's death that caused him to want a change or more conceivable, falling in love with Camille Anne Moore, the most beautiful girl in Hillsdale, California, and if Andrew were asked, in the whole world.

Everyone called her *Cami*, but he often renamed her, '*Princess*'. Sometimes he'd even say '*his princess*', and that she had been in every sense of the word. He had saved her once and wanted to for the rest of his life.

From the moment she bumped into him in that hallway of their high school and dropped her books, he was taken with her. Her beautiful emerald green eyes that lit up when she saw him. Long flowing red hair that caught the sun everywhere they went, desirable curves that enticed him every moment. The way she laughed, smiled, talked, even breathed when she was sleeping, it was all alluring and fascinating to him. From that moment on she always made him feel like he could conquer the world, and for a time, Andrew felt he truly did.

He had done everything in his power to keep her with him. Loved her with all his heart. Lived to see her, be with her, make love to her, and hold her in his arms. Nothing would have ever changed that.

He did everything to make her happy, including worrying about his own looks, something he was not

inclined to do before she entered his life. He had been aware he had a nice look about him from years of being told that he was ‘*cute*’, ‘*handsome*’, and all those terms to refer to good looks on men. He had always been healthy and athletic. He kept his body in good shape developed first from a love of the outdoors given to him by his father, and then a certain peace he found in exercise. This led to a body that was often described by girls in his high school as ‘*unbelievable*’, ‘*sexy*’, ‘*hot*’, and all those terms used to refer to the opposite sex. In his adult life the sentiments have been the same, some changes were made in the descriptions used, but it all meant the same thing: he was desirable to women, many, many women. This fact was another one of those advantages in his work. However he only ever wanted Camille Anne Moore to look at her, to want her, to love him. He had been seventeen and he was completely lost in love with *his princess*. Nothing matched it, didn’t even come close, not before, not since.

Andrew tried to push down those thoughts of Camille and his life together, but they always crept in, he couldn’t stop them, and he wasn’t certain he wanted to at times. Thinking about her always made him feel closer to her. He could still remember perfectly what she used to say to him after they had exhausted themselves with the pent-up desire of youth.

“I love your voice, Andrew. It makes me feel safe.”

Safe was important to *his princess*. She needed it every moment and he had only been happy to oblige her request. Although he never would have thought she could make him feel safe, but somehow she did. He was comfortable with her. Right from that first terrible moment he had met her. It had been years before that hallway in high school. It was a moment she never recalled when he knew her, but that never left him.

“Are you ok? Are you ok? Are you hurt?”

Suddenly a knock was heard on the door of his hotel room. Andrew’s eyes snapped open, his memories coldly halted. He turned off the water and stepped out. The knock continued.

“Andrew,” he heard Rachel call on the other side of the door.

“You’ve got to be kidding,” he said to himself, an annoyance clear in his voice. He pulled a towel around his waist and stepped outside the bathroom.

“Andrew,” she called again.

“Just a moment,” he said pleasantly, quickly putting on his pants and his shirt lying on the bed.

He took the towel and dried his hair hastily throwing it back in the bathroom and closing the door. He passed the full-length mirror as he went to the door of the hotel room, but he didn’t look at himself. If he had, he might have taken another moment to tie his hair back or put on shoes or button his shirt the entire way so as not to

reveal his chest, but he didn't look. He just went to the door and opened it quickly, causing Rachel to almost fall into him.

For a brief moment he stood looking at her. There was no annoyance in his eyes though he still felt it. He had mastered that ability a long time ago. Her eyes quickly scanned him and the look told him he should have checked himself before he opened the door. Desire held in her eyes before she tried to collect herself.

"I...need," she stammered. "I need you to come downstairs with me. I'm sorry I forgot about this engagement. Mr. Williams and his wife wanted to have a drink with us after the party."

She explained further, but Andrew only nodded.

"I am sorry, I know we were supposed to be done, but..."

"It's fine." Andrew responded quickly. The voice was pleasant still, but he could hear a bit of an edge to it and stopped it immediately. "I just need to change."

"No, you're fine. It's casual," she answered trying to look anywhere but into his green eyes.

That seemed to be more difficult for her.

"I think I should put on some shoes though," he said, smiling.

"Yea, that would be good," she smiled back breaking the tension that was thick in the air.

She stood there for another moment. Then realizing what was happening quickly backed away from the door.

“I’ll just wait out here.”

“Thank you.”

He closed the door quietly and turned to the mirror on his right. Seeing for the first time what he looked like.

He shook his head.

“Very smart, Andrew.” The annoyance this time was completely reserved for him.

2

Midnight Services

“ow did it go?”

Alexander asked Andrew as he stood inside his office at *Midnight Services*, the exclusive escort service developed by Alexander Hart eight years earlier.

“It went fine,” Andrew answered trying to rap up the conversation quickly. He had a list of things he needed to get done, including that suit being cleaned.

Alexander shot him a look of disapproval.

“A little more info, buddy.”

“Went to the parties, had an unscheduled late night meeting with her boss....”

“Wait,” Alex interjected. “What late night meeting?”

“She forgot about it,” Andrew casually sat down, knowing the conversation was just starting.

“You went,” Alex’s voice held disappointment. Andrew shrugged it off.

“It was fine.”

“Everything is always ‘fine’ with you. That’s not what I meant.” Alex moved closer to his friend.

“Unscheduled meetings are not allowed. Stop being accommodating, Andrew. It doesn’t help you or the client.”

“I think it helps the client,” Andrew said and shot him a quick smile.

Alex hid his own.

“Still not the point. You are the top paid employee of this company. You can’t just give in to them. We have to uphold the contract.”

“You’re right. I’m sorry, Alexander,” Andrew replied genuinely.

“Good. No more unscheduled meetings.”

Alexander pulled out an envelope and handed it to him.

“This is for you.”

Andrew nodded, took the envelope, placed it in his jacket pocket, and stood up. Conversation over.

Andrew slipped into his Porsche, a car that he hadn’t particularly wanted, but nonetheless bought, mostly out of necessity if nothing more. He used to lease his cars, but it ended up being more of a problem than a

solution to one. Circumstances made it easier to buy. He would keep it for a year or so and then trade it in for another one. He did like the feel and handle of this model, a Boxster, he couldn't deny, and the color - *black*.

He pulled out of his reserved parking space that didn't contain his nameplate, but rather the logo of *Midnight Services* – a glass slipper with the background of a clock striking midnight. At the right side of the clock there is a Royal Crest that Alexander designed. The graphic is as unique as the business itself, and it was Andrew who was the only one that knew why it was called *Midnight* and why it contained that graphic referring to the fairytale – *Cinderella*. If Cami were alive, Andrew had thought many times, she might have been the second person to understand.

Back in their high school days, Alexander would always call Cami, *Cinderella*. It was due to his fascination with Andrew and her relationship and an added strange obsession with the fairytale. It wasn't because of any romantic notions that *Cinderella* interested Alexander, though. It was pure fascination with the concept of the story itself.

'So this Prince meets this woman who miraculously never reveals her name or anything about herself all night to the ruler of the kingdom.' Alexander would say.

'She impresses him and the entire court of snobbish, spoiled little brats, as well as to be so convincing that she is able to deceive her stepsisters and

stepmother at this ball who have no idea of this woman's identity.

Then the Prince in an effort to find his perfect princess from the night before, who turns out to be a maid in her own home, disliked by her family and most likely society at the time, goes off with a glass slipper and hope.

Let's face it - this is a huge scandal if the prince takes her as his wife. Under normal conditions his kingdom would be overthrown and he would be ousted as the ruling body. Meanwhile Cinderella would be left alone and unable to protect herself from the onslaught of the royal family. However this doesn't happen, and I believe it because of the matter of that fairy godmother and the Midnight time she strictly enforced Cinderella to be home by.

Midnight means something but it is never revealed in the story. That is the only possible reason this could work. Without midnight, Cinderella and the Prince never would have gotten away with it. Not in that time or today. It's all about Midnight and how it is able to transform a simple girl into a princess and a Prince into a decent person.'

That was the explanation Alexander had told Andrew and the one he reiterated to Cami one night when she asked about why Alexander was obsessed with the fairytale.

Midnight Services, created during Alexander and Andrew's college days, was based off of this concept that always intrigued his friend. However why the idea of the

business came about at all, was something of another interesting tale.

The expenses of Cami's funeral had cost Andrew a lot of money. Money he didn't have, and though he was always the responsible one and continued to pay down his debt the best he could while attending college and trying to get on with his life, Alexander knew his friend would never get back on track without some source of good, really good income. For Andrew the gesture spoke to Alexander's friendship to him, but for Alexander, it was a possible way to save Andrew, even if he didn't want to be saved. And he didn't.

The idea of *Midnight* was simple: exclusively advertise on the Internet and create the perfect date for a price. The result was an escort service that provided fantasy but strictly meant business. Alexander explained that the company was the fairy godmother, so to speak, and the escort was 'midnight', or in other words created the magic.

Andrew had been the valedictorian of their high school, received a perfect score on his SATs and was a straight 'A' student. He had received a full two-year scholarship to the University for architecture and even got a job working in a firm after college and on weekends. He was very good and made some money, but not the kind of money that would pay off his debts, so he took Alexander up on his offer.

Andrew had worked out the business setup while Alexander worked out the marketing. Before long, they were in business. It took off quickly.

In the beginning, Alexander even worked as an escort for a while, but he proved to not like the demands of it. Ironically, he didn't like having to be the women's fantasy, having to be '*midnight*'. He would rather sell it than be it. Eventually, he found out he was very good at selling.

Andrew, who had more reasons not to be an escort than to, took to it quickly and efficiently. The first *date* he went on, the business made five hundred dollars, Andrew made three hundred - a generous tip from the women he went out with. After that, the price kept steadily climbing as requests poured in. Referrals were the heart of the business and Alexander knew that. Soon he was hiring more escorts and developed a high profile client list.

Unfortunately, the clients needed to be taught about a legitimate escort service as much as anyone. Business Contracts were strictly enforced, just like that '*midnight*' timeframe of the fairy godmother. There were to be no mistakes about what the contract entailed for client or escort. Solicitations of any kind were forbidden. All requests went through the main office.

Andrew took his own privacy to new levels with these rules. Clients never called him directly. He would get the information from Alexander, and if he chose, would set up a time and place to meet and discuss the

details. At this meeting he would offer a contract or turn them down politely. The client would be able to use another escort, however, it was completely understood that he was not available then or for the future. If you struck out in a meeting with Andrew, that was it. No second chances. Alexander began referring to this as *'missing midnight'*.

Thus is how the legend was started.

Now, Andrew was the most sought after escort in the business on both coasts and he was hired by some of the most prestigious people in business. This all caused his salary to increase by leaps and bounds. Currently, he was at five thousand for two hours and nearly everyone he worked with wanted much more than two hours no matter the cost.

It wasn't just his 'prince-like' good looks and well tanned, well built body that attracted the price, that was just the icing on the cake. It literally was the *'midnight'* factor that Alexander knew from the beginning that would make it happen. He had seen it years before in high school. Highly intelligent and able to adapt to any situation and person were Andrew's true talents. Manners, pleasantness, and overall knowledge of a variety of issues from politics to business investing made him an idle *date* for anyone who wanted class, charm, elegance, intelligence and grace. Andrew was full of all of it – a true prince in modern day. Even Alexander often thought it was too good to be true.

Needless to say the income Andrew made on the service cleared his debts and caused him at the age of 28 to be successful and rich in the world's eyes. He could stop working and live off his investments for a lifetime if he chose, but Andrew liked the travel, meeting new people, studying and sometimes even being the fantasy for a night or two.

He had been to France, London, Virgin Islands, Tahiti, Mexico, Switzerland, the Cayman Islands and almost the entire United States, including Hawaii and Alaska on *dates*. Life was good. It would never be great in Andrew's mind, but he tried to keep his loneliness at bay by engaging in short lived, high paced relationships, always outside of the clients, with a few women lasting no more than a week or two. Anything beyond that would have made life complicated, and Andrew was all about simplicity.

He drove along the stretch of highway he knew all too well. It led to his house, designed and built from the ground level up, four years ago. Although the architecture is gothic revival style, it is completely modernized and resembles more of a castle than a house, located on the Bay.

As he turned down his private drive and saw the house come into view a feeling of loss overtook him for a moment. It often occurred after a trip away. Returning to the house, his one solace did make him long for Camille more than he wanted to admit. In some ways, he always felt uncertain about the circumstances of her untimely

death. He let the feeling come for a moment and then pushed it aside as he had learned to do for the last ten years.

His cell phone rang as soon as he had stepped out of the car . He pulled it out, checked the number it displayed and answered carrying his bag from the airport with him to the steps of the house.

“Hello,” he said into the small speaker.

“Hey, you just get in?” The male voice said on the other side.

“Yea. Literally, I’m walking in as we speak.”

“I’ll be there in a few minutes.”

The phone hung up.

“David...” Andrew hesitated.

Then he hung up the phone, shaking his head at David, his friend of the last four years.

Walking into the beautiful foyer with a staircase directly in front would have made anyone gasp at the amazing sights before him or her. But Andrew had seen it, designed it inside as well as out, found most of the furniture himself. The sight wasn’t shocking or gasp-worthy to him any longer. He turned to the beautifully ornate 1870 Grandfather Clock that stood to his left and looked at the time displayed. It read four thirty-five in the afternoon. He glanced down at his own watch, it read: 4:15 PM. Shaking his head he placed his hanging bag over the Victorian Era armchair to the right of the clock, opened the clock front, adjusted the time and moved the chimes to begin. The *bong* sounded as it started back up.

“You’re getting faster, my friend,” Andrew said to it.

He picked up his bag and headed upstairs to his bedroom.

3

A Pirate Knight

“**M**ey”

David Ross said as he entered inside Andrew’s house. Ten minutes had past since his phone call. He was standing in the foyer looking around.

“I’m upstairs. I’ll be down in a moment,” Andrew called back.

“No problem,” David walked into the living room directly right of the front doors and made himself a drink at the table that always held a decanter, usually with bourbon in it, Andrew’s choice drink, when he drank at all.

“You won’t believe what I heard,” David started, raising his voice.

“What did you hear,” Andrew said, walking into the living room behind David.

David turned to him and smiled.

“Atkins is going bankrupt,” he held up his glass to Andrew, “and I am responsible.”

He clicked the ice cubes together, smiling. Andrew walked past him not commenting. He went directly to the table with the decanter, poured himself a small drink and took a sip.

“So, what do you say?” David asked.

“Another one bites the dust,” Andrew answered, casually. David laughed.

Andrew looked at his friend, a brilliant businessman in his own right. David worked for *Hidden, Inc.*, a large company that specialized in buying out smaller companies that often posed as a threat to Hidden’s clients’ businesses - A true-life pirate. The company, though legitimate, always made Andrew uncomfortable, and he knew David could do better on his own.

“Don’t you think you could help companies get out of debt, David? After all you’re good at the other side, it has to work both ways.”

“Sure, but why would I?”

David took another drink and watched Andrew carefully.

“Was I too harsh?” He asked, quietly.

Andrew held up his hand, “just a bit,” he said, indicated with his thumb and forefinger the amount.

“Yea, I know. I can’t help it. It warms my heart.”

Andrew looked over at him for a moment.

“No it doesn’t, David.”

There was a silence between them. David thought for a moment while Andrew took a sip of his bourbon.

“Maybe not, but it’s all I’ve got right now. I’ll work on being a do-gooder when I need to. So, how was New York City?”

“The same as it was two months ago. Although musicals have changed a little on Broadway and several restaurants are out of business,” Andrew replied.

“Trudy’s?”

“No.”

“Eaton’s?”

“No, David.”

“Peterman’s Deli?”

“No.”

“That’s fine then,” he concluded.

Andrew let out a laugh.

“David you’re a pirate,” he finally said.

“I like to think of myself as a knight protecting the interests of the kingdom.” David sat back, smiling.

“And by the way, your majesty,” he started, using a nickname that Andrew wasn’t fond of, but he let it go once again. That was something Andrew could never figure out about his friendship with David, he always let things like that go with him.

“Your business colleague and myself had lunch the other day.”

“Alexander and you had lunch?” Andrew asked, genuinely surprised.

Andrew knew that Alexander did not like David even in a casual sense.

“I insisted,” David answered.

“Alexander must have loved that,” Andrew replied, shaking his head.

“Not so much, but what’s important is that we worked out an arrangement.”

The tone and words made Andrew look suspiciously at his friend.

“What arrangement?” He asked carefully.

David could make up all sorts of schemes since he had met him at a party while on a *date*. David had been concerned at the time with why he was dating the client. Very concerned, even offering his own advice about the woman that he had obviously dated himself once for real. That conversation led to many more until somewhere between business, politics, and women, they become friends. More questions of Andrew from David led to him revealing what he did for a living. Something Andrew never did before. David took the job he had surprising well. It didn’t seem to affect him. This all led to David being the first person Andrew could be around that let him be him – since Cami’s death. Well except Alexander, but that was a different story.

Alexander expected things of him in business. He knew that, but David didn’t expect anything. He already seemed to live up to any expectations David may have had. That made Andrew comfortable around David. Although the look his friend was giving him at that

moment was somewhat unsettling. It was a trait that Andrew had almost gotten used to of his friend.

“Alexander doesn’t understand what kind of person you are, Andrew,” David began. “He knows you as someone who can help him, but helping you, well, that just isn’t in his nature.”

“Alex and I have been friends since high school. We....”

“He’s jealous of you, Andrew,” David interrupted.

“Jealous?” Andrew let out a smile of disbelief.

“Don’t ignore it and don’t act like you don’t know. It will be a problem, mark my words.” David took another drink.

“That’s ridiculous, David. Alexander is a...”

“Loyal friend,” David interrupted again. “I don’t disagree, but that doesn’t mean he has your best interests in mind. Listen, you aren’t the kind of person who can be controlled. You need freedom.”

“I have freedom, David.” Andrew got up and poured some more bourbon into his glass, walking to David and refilling his.

“No, I’m not talking about job freedom.” He paused. “Life freedom.”

“Where is this going?” Andrew sighed, sitting down.

“Alexander was trying to convince me he is concerned for you. He feels you haven’t moved past Cami,” David corrected himself as to not sound too

familiar with the love of Andrew's love that he had never met, "Camille's death."

"I'm..." Andrew started.

"Fine. I know," David looked at his friend earnestly. "Listen, Andrew, I have never lost someone that close to me. I can't imagine what it feels like, but I can tell you from where I sit, I agree with you. Not that you're fine, because that's just what you say to get people off your back..."

"I do..."

"Come on, nothing wrong with it. If I had all the people around me constantly bothering me about my life, like you do, I would..." David paused, "well, I would like it, but I'm not you."

Andrew held back a smile.

"The point is, Andrew, something's got to give. Alexander is the one who can't get past it."

"Cami and Alex were close."

"He was in love with her, Andrew. I don't need to have seen them together to know that." David took a moment. His expression showed that he thought he had said too much.

"I know," Andrew said finally and sighed. He took another drink.

"Good. Then do yourself a favor, don't let him help you in dealing. Cause he needs more from you than you do from him. Which I imagine has always been the case."

"Alexander's a great guy. I'm not..."

“I’m just stating facts, my friend. Did it ever occur to you that maybe *you* should stop being such a do-gooder?”

Andrew genuinely laughed this time.

“Do-gooder? David, I get paid, rather large amounts to go on *dates* with woman I don’t care about.”

“What’s wrong with that? I go on those dates all the time and I’m the one paying. Your concept is much better. If I didn’t have to be so nice to the women, I’d sign up.”

Andrew looked at him.

“What?” David said, innocently.

“What’s this arrangement?” Andrew finally asked.

“You need time away.”

“I just got back, David.”

“No, real time. Your time.” David’s expression told Andrew he was serious.

“I don’t want a vacation.” Andrew stood up. David followed.

“I do.”

Andrew looked at him, curiosity in his eyes.

“I think that’s a great idea. Get away. Have some fun.” Alexander said as he sat down on Andrew’s living room floor.

He had arrived at a very early hour this morning, using his key to enter the house. The only other key was

Andrew's. The matter of the key was becoming a mistake in Andrew's mind as Alexander kept doing this morning visits.

Andrew had been sleeping on the floor in front of the fireplace, something he did often. A mistake in design, he often said to himself. He should have put a fireplace in the bedroom. Someday he was going to get to that, he told himself.

"Alexander," Andrew said, trying to wake himself up. He had gone to bed sometime around four am and it was now six.

Alexander waited, but Andrew just stood up and walked into his kitchen.

"I'm making coffee," he announced as he exited the living room.

"Great. I need some," Alexander said, getting up and following him.

The kitchen was large with more counter space than anyone ever needed, especially a bachelor who wasn't home much. A center block covered the middle and was directly below the pots and pans. They hung from the ceiling. If you needed one, you simply had to reach up and get it, if you happened to be Andrew's height of 6'2" that was fine. Alexander was only 5'5", making that endeavor a bit of a problem. There was a way to pull them down if you knew how, but Alexander wasn't versed on medieval style kitchens. In the wooden cabinets that covered the walls on three sides were

authentic cups, dishes and such for a kitchen if you lived in the 11th century.

The glassware, nice plates, etc. were all located in beautiful hutches and displays in the dining room, another room of enormous size. In the kitchen there was a wooden long table complete with benches that Alexander sat down on.

“Where are you planning on going?” Alexander asked as Andrew went about making coffee in an urn that looked old, but actually was a modern coffee maker.

“New England,” Andrew stated, throwing the beans into a grinder located on top of the urn. He flipped the hidden switch in the back and the noise was deafening for a moment.

“Why there?” Alexander asked, clearly surprised. “It’s nice in Mexico, or...”

“We’re going to Vermont,” Andrew flipped another switch and the coffee began to brew. He leaned against the counter facing Alexander.

“My grandfather’s place.”

“Oh.” Alex paused. “Who’s we?”

“I’m going to show David the place. Maybe do some skiing.” Andrew said casually and turned, reaching up and opening a cabinet. He pulled out two simple pewter mugs, placing them next to the coffee pot.

Alexander knew the pewter kept the coffee hot, he had learned all about these things since Andrew had lived in this modern day castle of his. His friend was a connoisseur of the Middle Ages. Mainly, the 5th-14th

Centuries. That is unless it was discussed with Andrew, who would often get into a disagreement over the 5th century being the beginning. Apparently, Alexander had learned, there were many scholars, Andrew being among them, which believed it started before then. Anyway, Alexander didn't really think about it. He had always thought this 'castle' of Andrew's was more fairytale time. He had been told once that fairytales took place mainly in the late 1700s and early 1800s, and Andrew had said that was the Renaissance Period. Whatever period of history it all comes from, Alexander was certain about one fact, Andrew liked the past with a desire for modern sensibilities if not convenience. He had to admit his friend was good at combining the Middle Ages and today, in a fashion that would be enviable to anyone who had seen his house. Alex didn't pay much attention in history class, but he loved this house.

"David can't go," Alex said, quickly.

"He can't?" Andrew said it amusingly, but Alex didn't catch the tone.

"No."

"Alex, you're not jealous, are you?" Andrew smiled to himself and pushed down on the spout to pour the coffee into the two cups. He handed one to Alex.

"Jealous? No, I'm concerned. David is..." Alex searched for a word that didn't sound as terrible as the ones in his head.

Andrew just smiled to himself as he put out the sugar for Alex. It was a wooden bowl with a cover on top

and a small spoon that fit into a carved out place on the top.

“He is...” Alex scooped out five spoonfuls and then placed the spoon itself in the cup and stirred just as Andrew was about to hand him a spoon on his own.

Andrew looked down at what he had done and just put the spoon he had brought away.

“Alex, it’s fine. It’s only for a few days next month. I just need you to cancel any clients. I didn’t see any on my schedule, but sometimes you schedule things that you forget to tell me about.”

“I do have one for Marisa Grenning that Monday you return. She’s the vice president of marketing for...”

“I know who she is.” Andrew answered, cutting off Alexander’s words.

“Don’t you like her?” Alex said, drinking some of his coffee.

“This would be our third date since last year, I would rather...”

“She likes you, what can I say? She always requests you. She’s willing to pay any price, Andrew.” Alexander was smiling up at him.

“I bet she is.”

Andrew turned and walked out of the kitchen drinking his coffee. Alexander followed him into the living room. Andrew moved the fire around, letting it die, while Alex sat down on the sofa. Andrew sat on the fireplace hearth not looking at him.

“Andrew, did something happen with Marisa? And why didn’t you tell me?” Alex’s voice took on concern.

“No, no, it’s just that I don’t like it. Sooner or later we’ll be an item in the minds of her co-workers, if not, many organizations that she works with. It’s makes it more difficult.” Andrew took another sip of his coffee.

“About this, Andrew, you go on this one date on Monday with Marisa and then I’ll tell her that you will be unavailable for...let’s say, four months.”

“How about I just *be* unavailable?” Andrew said. That same annoyance he avoided in his voice with clients was apparent now.

“You don’t like her?”

“She’s pushy, rude and fake.” Andrew stood up, walking away. “Set it up, but I want to have a talk with her before Monday. Look, I have a meeting at nine this morning. I have to shower, change and do some things. Let yourself out, all right?”

Alex looked over at his friend as he past him.

“You ok, Andrew?”

Andrew turned to face him and looked like he was about to say something then he smiled briefly.

“Great. Have a good day, Alex.” He disappeared down the hallway.

“You too.” Alex said, absently.

The diner wasn't where Andrew thought they should have met, but he would make due. It was one of those remodeled dining cars from the old railroads where luxury was everything. Unfortunately as Andrew walked inside, luxury seemed to be the first thing they remodeled. The tables were nothing special, round, white linen, not even good white linen. The chairs weren't ornate or elegant, more like arm back chairs of the 1960s than 30s, but they did have red faux-velvet seats.

No expense spared, he said the joke to himself and secretly wished he were anywhere but in *The Queen's Majesty* restaurant at that moment.

"You must be Andrew," the woman he knew was Sarah Dillinger, an account executive for Linderberry's, an exclusive department store that catered to women with their husband's money to spend. If they weren't so exclusive they might have a future, but Andrew didn't believe exclusivity was necessary going to help this business. It worked for Porsche. It didn't work for everyone. Of course that didn't make an opinion for him of Sarah Dillinger. He didn't know her.

"Miss Dillinger," Andrew said, standing at the table she was sitting at.

She stood up and went to shake the hand he had outstretched for her. Andrew took her hand in his and kissed the top of it gently. She blushed.

"Please," he said, holding out her chair for her to sit back down. She did.

He sat across from her and smiled at her as she continued to look at him.

“I didn’t know if you drank coffee,” she said, apologetically looking towards the two cups of coffee on the table.

“I do. Thank you,” he smiled again.

Sarah didn’t blush, but she took her napkin off the table and placed it on her lap. Fidgeting with it more than was necessary. Andrew was all too used to the behavior. He took the lead.

“Miss Dillinger, thank you for meeting with me this morning.” Andrew said, politely.

“You can call me Sarah. And what do I call you?” She said, quickly. Her eyes told him she regretted asking that.

“Andrew is fine,” he replied. His voice even and gentle. “I would like to ask you a few questions, Sarah, if that would be agreeable?”

“Sure,” she said, quickly, taken back a bit by his words.

“The engagement that you have requested my presence for is in Black Lake. I need to understand what it entails and how you would like me to proceed?” Andrew’s words were having a great deal of an effect on Miss Sarah Dillinger.

“You speak very well.” She said and then quickly added, “that was terrible of me. I’m sorry.”

“Not at all. Thank you. I enjoy compliments as much as the next person.”

“I’m sorry. I just didn’t expect you to be....”

She fumbled for the words, “you.”

“Is that a problem?” Andrew asked, sincerely.

“No, no. It’s perfect.” She smiled at him.

Andrew returned it.

“Very good.”

“Well,” she started, “the party that I would need you for is the last day of the event. Do you know of Black Lake, the wild west and all?”

“I’m aware of its location. I have never been there myself, though.”

“Neither have I.”

“But it sounds fascinating.”

“I hope so.”

The conversation continued with Sarah doing much of the talking. She told Andrew about the party, who would be there, and what her job at Linderberry’s is. As the conversation about the date drew to a close, Andrew decided it wasn’t a bad opportunity to see Black Lake, one of the old Wild West towns that were still operating. It was a little less wild these days, but definitely unique.

“Sarah, I believe we have a date.” Andrew said, calmly and smiled at her one more time.

“Really? I mean...you want to go with me?”

“I would be honored.”

She smiled and breathed.

“Great. So what happens now?”

“Midnight will contact you with the information you will need. I shall pick you up at your hotel in Black Lake, fifteen minutes prior to the event. Do you understand how this works, Miss Dillinger?”

“I’ve never done this before, but I was told from a very reliable source that you are the best. And I want the best.” Sarah said, smiling.

“Then I will be the best.” Andrew reached over and gently took her hand, kissing it again. She turned away.

He kept her hand in his for a moment, causing Sarah to become uncomfortable.

“Sarah, we need to behave normally.”

“Is there such a thing with you?” He let go of her hand and she shook her head quickly. “I’m sorry,” she smiled a bit, “it’s just you’re so...perfect and charming and...you’re like some sort of prince out of a fairytale. God, I could never get a date like you.”

“You just did, Sarah.” Andrew replied.

“True.” She smiled again.

“I have to go, but I shall see you on the 15th. Enjoy your morning.” Andrew stood up. Sarah looked up at him for a moment, studying his features.

“Can I ask you a question, Andrew?” He didn’t answer, but picked up the check at the table. She decided to proceed.

“Do you do this for everyone?”

He smiled at her and leaned down, “have a wonderful day, Sarah.”

As he walked away, he heard her start to say, “I can take care of the . . .”

Andrew smiled to himself, walked up to the register at the bar and handed them a credit card that read Midnight Services on it with his name above. The same logo was on the card.

The girl at the register looked down at it and back to him. She swiped the card and smiled briefly. He smiled back. She handed him the receipt to sign.

“What’s Midnight Services, if I can ask? I like the logo. Cinderella, right?”

Andrew nodded and signed the receipt.

“So what do you do?”

“Make dreams come true.” He said, simply and smiled, handing her the receipt back.

“Good luck with that.”

“No luck required. Just magic.” He said, softly and smiled. She smiled back.

“Have a nice day, Laurie,”

“You, too,” she called to him as he left.

4

A Rescue fit for a Prince

“e have to go, David.”

The flight leaves in less than an hour,” Andrew said, impatiently to David in his apartment. He had been waiting for the past forty-five minutes while David had been apparently still packing for their trip planned a month ago.

“I know, but if I forget something,” David said, passing by him again.

“I’ll buy it for you. Let’s go.”

“Nice of you, but you can’t get my products in Vermont. Believe me.” David looked over his place one more time threw some things into a carry-on bag and turned to Andrew.

“Ok, I’m ready.”

“You are seriously taking all these bags for a few days?” Andrew said.

“Yea.” He picked up a hanging bag and his carry-on walking out, leaving two more suitcases in the living room. Andrew ran his fingers through his hair and sighed picking up both suitcases.

“You are worse than a woman.”

His cell phone rang just as he was about to place the suitcases in his car.

“Be careful with those,” David called from the front seat.

Andrew looked at him for a moment, wondering secretly if David would survive this trip. *Five days with him*, Andrew thought. Maybe he wasn’t quite ready for this.

“Hello?” Andrew said as he hit the button on his cell phone and put down the suitcases.

“Andrew.”

“Hey, sweetie,” Andrew said, taking on a friendly and happy tone. “How are you, Kitty Cat?”

“I’m fine. I’m so glad I caught you though. Where are you?”

“At my car. Is something wrong? You sound...” Andrew started. David to get out of the car and looked over at him.

“No, no, I just wanted to see you.” Catherine, Cami’s sister, said on the other side of the phone line. “I need to talk with you about something important.”

“Well, I’m leaving for a trip away, can’t it wait until I get back?”

“I don’t think so.” She answered. The tone in her voice was apparent to Andrew.

“What happened?” He said, seriously.

“I think we should meet as soon as possible.”

Andrew looked down and rubbed his eyes with his hand quickly, taking a breath.

“All right, I’ll be there in a few minutes.” That statement caused David to look at him, strangely. Andrew looked back. The expression made David walk towards him.

“Ok, I’ll see you then. Bye.” Andrew said and hung up the phone.

“What’s wrong with her?” David asked, knowing all about Catherine Ellen Moore.

She was a constant in Andrew's life if not for linking him completely to his past with Camille then for general support and encouragement for the now twenty-six year old. Cat was not someone David was fond of. They had met once and that was enough. She is a self-centered little girl who had Andrew at her beck and call, 24 hours a day. David knew Andrew felt an obligation if not somewhat of an older brother role to Cat since her sister died. However, that didn't give the girl a right to constantly cry on his shoulder and drag him into every part of her miserable existence. If there's any reason that Andrew wasn't moving on from Camille's death, David felt it had to do with Cat. She had spent these past ten years reliving every moment of her sister's life with Andrew right there for support.

"She says she has something important to tell me. I'll just be a little while. Could you..." Andrew started to ask, David stepped in.

"No problem. I'll take care of it."

"Thanks."

"What time tomorrow would you like to fly out?" David asked, knowingly.

Andrew looked down for a moment and then back to David, "I'm sorry."

"She's not."

When Andrew arrived at Catherine's place, a small one-bedroom apartment across town, she was distraught to say the least. He could tell she had been

crying and she looked like she hadn't gone to work for a few days. There were pizza boxes, ashtrays filled with cigarette butts and ice cream cartons everywhere.

"Cat," Andrew said as soon as he saw her.

She rushed forward and hugged him tightly, breaking out crying.

"I'm so sorry," she said over and over again through tear-choked sobs.

"Hey, hey, shhh, calm down. It's not all that bad," he said as if to a child.

"Yes...it...is," she said.

Andrew pulled her gently away from him and looked down at her. She stood 5' 4", which was five inches taller than her sister stood, however knowing both of them it wasn't hard to figure out the older one. Cami had a sense of responsibility about her that the women in his arms right now never could quite grasp onto.

"Catherine..." Andrew said, causing her look up at him. It was rare that he used her full name but she knew it meant business.

"I just don't know where to start," she said, calming down a bit. She led him to her couch and sat down. He followed.

"I want to go away from here. Just go away. Everything reminds me of her," Cat said, trying not to cry again.

"Sweetie, you can't run away. You'll just end up back where you started." Andrew said, softly.

He reached down and pulled out a tissue from the box in front of him, handing it to her. She took it and looked up at him, smiling a little.

“I thought Princes were supposed to carry handkerchiefs or something?” She said, chiding him.

“I’m all out,” he smiled at her, “besides,” he added, “they aren’t very sanitary in today’s day and age.”

“You take out all the fun,” she said, hitting him lightly on the arm.

He waited a moment and then looked at her seriously.

“Cat, what’s wrong?”

She stood up, walking in front of him to her television.

“I don’t know. I mean, I do, but I don’t.”

“You’re not making any sense.”

“I know.” She looked away, thinking. When she turned back to him, fresh tears were in her eyes.

“Oh Andrew, if you only knew...” she said, softly, then looked down. “It’s Robert,” she said, quickly, causing Andrew to look confused for a moment.

“Robert? I thought...”

“He stopped by the other day.”

“You two broke up last summer?”

“I know,” she looked down.

“I don’t understand, Cat? Is he harassing you?”

After a moment, she walked back to the couch and sat down.

“No, no. Robert? Please.” She said all in one breath. “It’s just that...” she paused, looking down again. Andrew was about to say something, but she didn’t let him.

“I can’t stop thinking about her. Would she be proud of me, Andrew? Would she love me? Would she....” Cat started crying again, falling against him.

He wrapped his arms around her and comforted her.

“Cat you have to stop doing this to yourself.”

“I know.” She said against his chest. “It’s just I’m so alone.” She looked up at him.

“Mom and Dad don’t want to talk about her and no one else loves me like you do. You understand.” As she spoke, she looked at him with eyes that made him look away.

He had experienced this Cat before. At the funeral, one week after the funeral, one month, one year, and on and on. He knew she was hurting, but he also knew Cat never was very close to her sister, not that that made the pain less, maybe it was more. Either way, he couldn’t let her do this to herself again and again.

“Cat, you have to stop.” He finally said and moved a bit away from her to look at her directly.

“Don’t you think....”

“No, I don’t. And neither should you. I love you, Cat, but you are just looking for someone to take away the pain. I would never be able to do that.”

“Andrew, you are perfect and you understand me and...” She began, moving closer to him.

“No, Catherine.” He said firmly. She stopped moving.

“Why?” She said, louder. “What is wrong with me?”

“Nothing.” Andrew said, honestly, feeling horrible and angry at the same time.

“It’s about her, isn’t it?” She said harshness was in her tone. She quickly changed to a softer one. “Oh, Andrew, when will this pain end?” She reverted back to the little sister and Andrew shook his head.

“You have to let it go, Cat. Cami will always be with you. She loved you very much.” Andrew said, comforting. “I know she did.”

“Andrew...” she started, sitting up and looking straight at him for a moment.

“Would you ever hate me?” She asked, catching Andrew off-guard.

“No.” He answered. “No, Cat, I could never hate you.” He smiled at her. “You’re my Kitty Cat. There’s nothing you could do that would ever make me hate you.”

She smiled.

“I hope you mean that,” she said as her smile faded and she placed her head down.

Andrew picked up her chin to look into her eyes.

“What are so afraid of?” He asked, gently. “And don’t give me Robert. I know that’s not true.”

She turned her eyes away. He let go of her chin. She stood up walking back to her television. After a moment, she turned back to him.

“There is something I should have told you a long time ago.” She said and walked away.

“But I couldn’t. I didn’t...” she stammered and then gave up all together.

“Cat, whatever it is, you can tell me.” Andrew said, standing up and walking to her side.

“I wish it were that simple, Andrew.” Cat moved into her kitchen. Andrew followed.

“Catherine Ellen Moore, spit it out. This is torture.” Andrew finally said, causing Cat to turn back to him, leaning against the counter.

“You have no idea.” She said.

The tone of her voice, the look in her eyes, made Andrew feel scared for the first time in ten years.

There was a long silence as they held each other’s eyes.

“Cami isn’t dead.”

Andrew didn’t move, nor speak for several moments as he kept his stare on Cat.

“I can still feel her. She’s still here with me. Sometimes,” Cat said quickly trying to find the words, “I think I see her.”

Andrew took a breath and walked up to her.

“See, she’s always with you. There’s your proof.”

After that, Cat calmed down to the point where hysterics were through if not completely her emotional stream. They went out to dinner. Andrew bought her something other than cold pizza and ice cream. That night, she wanted him to stay until she fell asleep. He agreed, but that then he would have to go, he had stated.

“Goodnight, Andrew,” Cat said hugging him one last time as she went to lie down in her bed.

As he let her go, she leaned over and kissed him quickly on the lips. He didn’t return it.

“Cat...”

“I just wanted to know,” she said, mischief in her eyes. “I could never do what I’m told. You know that.”

“Get some sleep.” He said.

“Andrew,” she said as he moved to the chair by her bed, it was one he knew well on many other nights where she needed to him to stay until she fell asleep.

He looked up at her, waiting.

“Do you think I’m pretty?” She asked.

“Yes, I have always thought so,” he answered truthfully. She smiled.

She was a beautiful young woman. It’s true she didn’t possess her sister’s emerald eyes rather her mother’s brown ones. She didn’t have hair the color of red, but was brown also, just as her mother. She was petite though didn’t have the curves of her sister and Andrew believed she didn’t eat enough. Judging from her thin frame, certainly not like her sister.

Cami, though only 4'11" tall, possessed a perfect well-proportioned frame to match. Those proportions and her other qualities: red hair, green eyes, beautiful face had enticed many boys at their high school, including himself every day that he knew her. Catherine was pretty and he knew many boys were interested in her during their younger years as well. He loved Catherine, protected her, cared for her and wanted to help her, but for Andrew his heart remained with her sister, and it always would.

Catherine was studying his face as he looked at her.

"But you'll always love her, won't you?" She asked. It wasn't really a question or an accusation, but a fact.

Andrew smiled at her.

"Get some sleep, Kitty Cat," he said, affectionately.

"What exactly is wrong with Camille's sister, Andrew?" David asked.

They sat in his house the next day, eating lunch and all packed again for their trip later that afternoon.

"Wrong with her?" Andrew asked, taking a bite of his sandwich.

"She's obviously got problems." Andrew looked at him, confused.

“Oh, come on, she calls you every time she goes off the deep end, which by the way, is a lot. Something’s got to be wrong with her?”

Andrew wiped his mouth with the napkin and looked over at David.

“Yea, that’s what I thought,” David said, smiling. “You know what I’m talking about. She’s driving you crazy.”

“I’m fine.”

“I know she’s got some idea in that head of hers about you and her getting together,” David said, causing Andrew to look back at him.

“Don’t play innocent with me. I know what that girl is thinking. It’s sick. You’re supposed to feel sorry for her because she lost her sister and in all that crying and carrying on, you’re supposed to comfort her, tell her every thing will be ok and then the two of you in your grief and sorrow fall passionately in love with each other. If you ask me, Andrew, she’s the one with the fairytale obsession.” David’s voice took on disgust as he spoke.

“Look, it’s your life, but man, that would make me mad.”

“David, it’s not like that....”

“Like hell it isn’t.” He interjected quickly. “Tell me she doesn’t try to get you to hug her. That she doesn’t try to kiss you. Make you feel sorry for her,” he animated a girl’s voice as he continued, “oh, Andrew, what can I do? I miss my sister so much. I see her everywhere.

You're the only one who understands," his tone changed back, "give me a break."

Andrew tried to hide a smile. Deep down what David was saying he knew to be true, but the expression on his face was what caused him to laugh.

"Go ahead and laugh now, buddy, but when you figure out this whole thing is a lie, you'll think different."

"It's not a lie. She is upset about her sister and she is having problems dealing with it."

"And you're not."

"Cat's...emotional," Andrew finally said.

"Yea, all over you."

"David...all right so she's a little needy, but it hasn't been easy for her. Her parents are no help. They won't even speak about Cami. They act as if she never died. That she just went away and any moment she'll walk back through the door. It's strange."

"It's better than calling you."

Andrew genuinely laughed this time. David looked at him, confused.

"Her parents calling me? That would be funny."

"You guys weren't close?" David asked.

"No. I don't think they really liked me," Andrew said, some sadness was in his voice.

"Really? There are people out there that don't like you, Andrew Whiete? I'm shocked." David smiled a bit.

"Thomas and Diane Moore would have loved to see me far away from their daughter."

“Why? I’m not a parent, but as guys go, you aren’t that bad. Unless you were some kind of rebel in high school I don’t know about.”

“No, it’s not like that. Her father was always cold to me. I don’t know why...” Andrew trailed off.

“Listen, we don’t have to talk about this.” David said, quickly.

“It’s just I guess I never understand why they didn’t like me around. And her mother, whew,” Andrew said, expression in his face, “she really didn’t like me. She used to answer the door like a security guard. I would ask if Cami was ready and she would say,” Andrew’s voice took on a harsh tone imitating Cami’s mother, “I’ll check. Don’t move,” he shook his head.

“She was not a happy woman.”

“Well, too bad their daughter had to go and fall in love with such a loser,” David said, mocking.

“Yea, tough luck for them.”

“You’re not about luck, Andrew. You’re magic,” David raised his eyebrows on ‘magic’.

Andrew laughed.

“Yea, that’s me. Magic all the way.”

“Hey, don’t knock it, you get a lot of money for that magic of yours,” David smiled. Andrew nodded.

“So,” David started, “what was she like?”

It took Andrew a moment to respond. The question wasn’t what he expected.

“Cami?”

“Yea, Cami, can I say that?”

“Cami’s fine, that’s what she liked. She never liked Camille.”

“But you call her that.”

“That was different,” Andrew looked down a bit, recalling a memory.

“Special treatment...I’m liking her.” David smiled and Andrew smiled back.

“That was Cami. She was always doing things for me. She could cook anything and it tasted great. She was funny, warm, loving...” he paused and looked at David, sideways, “energetic,” David smiled, “but very sincere. I wouldn’t say she was always truthful, but,” Andrew was lost in another thought. David waited.

“She was real.”

“She sounds nice, Andrew.”

“Yea, she was,” Andrew said, softly. “She was the warmest person I ever met.”

There was another silence before Andrew wiped away a small tear from his eye.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to bring up,” David said, quickly.

“It’s nice to talk about her. I don’t enough.” He smiled quickly at David.

“But we have a plane to catch and I really want to make this.”

“Looking forward to the trip?” David asked, watching Andrew clear the dishes and walk to the sink.

“Yea...” he said, slowly. “I am.”

David smiled to himself.

A few hours later they were on a plane headed for Logan Airport in Boston and the first leg of their trip to Vermont and Andrew's grandfather's log cabin.

"I don't know," Alexander said to the woman in his office.

"Please, Alexander," she replied back.

"He's going to kill me," Alexander said, more to himself than her.

"You know he won't," she placed a comforting hand on his arm. He turned to her. "You're his best friend."

Alexander sighed and moved slightly away.

"Things change."

"Some things will never change, Alexander," she said, softly.

He had always loved her voice.

"How did you find me any how?"

She held up the *Midnight Services* business card.

"It's all you, Alexander. *Cinderella*, how could I forget?" she smiled.

Alexander handed her a piece of paper.

"That's his phone number. But do you know what you're doing? He may not take it as well as me. I'm accepting."

She smiled again. Alexander had to turn away. He always loved her smile.

“So, what exactly is *Midnight Services*?” She asked.

Alexander looked up at her for a long moment.

5

The Battle Begins

“*Is there ever a time you don’t flirt,*

David?”

Andrew asked as they picked up their shoes, carry-on items, keys, and anything else TSA needed to check at the security booth of the airport.

“No,” David answered flippantly. “I don’t have your grace. If I did, I wouldn’t have to flirt.”

“Are you kidding?”

David stopped and looked at him, a hurt expression on his face.

“What?” Andrew said.

“You’re supposed to feel sorry for me. I have to work at it, you don’t. Sympathy.” David looked at him with a puppy-dog expression, causing Andrew to laugh.

“Give it up, David.” David shrugged his shoulders and continued walking.

“There isn’t anything you work at when it comes to women,” Andrew said. “You’re a nice looking guy,

you have style and more products than any woman could ever want.”

“Yes, I am and yes, I do,” David said, walking up to him.

“And that is what makes you a scary individual, Mr. David Ross,” Andrew concluded.

“You’re jealous.”

“Horribly,” Andrew joked.

Andrew’s cell phone vibrated in his coat pocket.

“Wait a sec, I’ve got a call,” he said, turning to David.

“No, no, no. We are going,” David said looking at him.

Andrew looked down at his cell phone. He sighed.

“It’s Cat,” he said.

David walked back to him.

“Andrew, this is your life. And mine. And we are going away. She will survive. What could possibly be so important in the twelve hours since you last saw her?”

Andrew looked at him for a long moment. Then hit a button on the phone.

“Don’t,” David said and was about to say more when he saw Andrew put the cell phone back in his pocket.

“I turned it off,” he replied.

“That is a good first step. I’m impressed,” David said, smiling. “You ready for the Triple Diamond, your majesty.”

“Are you, knight?”

“I like that, knight,” Andrew laughed. “Of course, if I remember correctly a knight is called ‘sir’.”

“No way.”

“Or if they are in charge of all the knights, it’s ‘master’.”

“You wish,” Andrew said, walking past him to the gate.

“He didn’t answer,” Cat said to the woman standing before her.

“No, it went to voicemail.”

“Did you leave a message?” Cat asked quickly.

“No, Cat, I am not going to leave a message on his cell phone. Are you crazy?” She said, frustrated and a bit annoyed at Catherine.

“Well, what are you going to do?”

“Keep trying, that’s all.”

“Why? Why not just leave and start over?”

“I am and why didn’t you tell me about this *Midnight Services?*”

Catherine looked over at her for a long moment.

“It’s a business. I don’t like business stuff. I’m not even sure what they did, but he travels a lot.”

“It’s an escort service, Cat,” she said, annoyed again.

“A what?” Cat’s look was of surprise.

“You didn’t know?”

“No. I thought...escort....you mean I could have paid to be with him?” Cat turned away but the woman heard her.

“No, you couldn’t have. He’s too expensive.” She said, looking disapprovingly at Catherine.

“Of course, he is.” Catherine looked down upset and then quickly looked back at her. “You mean he’s a...”

“Escort,” she answered simply. “It is a business, Cat.”

“Yea, but...”

“Catherine, don’t,” she said, quickly.

“Come on, like it didn’t cross your mind.”

Catherine smiled.

“No, it didn’t. He would never do that.” She said, softly.

“It’s been a long time, you don’t know what he would do,” Catherine looked at her, causing the woman to look away for a moment.

“He’s changed, believe me.”

“She wanted you,” David said as they walked out of Logan airport in Boston, Massachusetts and towards their rental car.

“David, let it go,” Andrew replied walking behind the rental sales representative.

“I can’t. It amazes me how forward they are,” David said, then ignored the subject as the cold hit his bones, “it is cold here.”

“It’s Boston.” Andrew replied. “In December.”

David pulls his thin leather coat around him tighter.

“Hey, where is this car? We have been walking the entire parking lot.” David turned to Andrew, “does he even know?”

“I’m sure he does, David.”

“Here we are,” said Chris, the man who had waited on them moments earlier.

He was wearing the blue shirt with rental car company’s logo and name with a blue heavy jacket also with the rental car company’s logo and name on it.

“You have to be joking,” David said in an over exasperated sigh. “I am not going in that.”

Andrew looked at the vehicle. It was a shiny red Jeep Cherokee.

“If I can deal with the color, you can deal with the car,” Andrew said, quietly to David.

“I like red.”

Andrew shot him a look. David shrugged it off and walked around the car.

“Great, Chris,” David started. “So if we get caught in a blizzard, we’ll all set, right?”

“Actually this is a very good car for mountain driving, driving in snow...”

“Thanks. Save me the speech. I don’t want to buy it. Seriously. I would never buy it.”

David walked away from Chris while Andrew approached him.

“Thank you, Chris. Are we all set?”

“Yes.” Chris said, carefully. “Mr. Whiete, could you sign here, please?”

Andrew signed and within a few minutes they were on the road headed towards downtown Boston.

The radio stations on the car kept switching in an odd phasing in and out that if Andrew didn’t know better sounded more like the beginning of an alien abduction story than being the 29 year old man sitting next to him in the car.

“These radio stations don’t play anything good,” David pushed the button to shut off the radio.

“Thank God,” Andrew replied from the driver’s seat. “I never thought you’d stop.”

“So ok, I’ve got to know...” David said, pausing and sitting back in his seat. He waited, when Andrew didn’t response he continued.

“Why are you friends with Alexander?”

Andrew looked over at him then went back to the road.

“Alex is a great friend.”

“I know I’ve heard that answer before. I mean really, what do the two of you have in common?” David

opened the glove compartment and began sifting through it as he waited.

“We come from the same town, grew up together, even though we really weren’t friends until high school.”

“Junior year, right?”

“He wanted me to run with him for Class Council,” Andrew said, taking a left down New Chardon Street.

“Let me guess, he ran for President, you Vice,” David said, shaking his head.

“Yes,” Andrew turned to him.

He turned his attention back to the streets and took a left at Cambridge Street.

“And you won, he didn’t.”

There was a pause, as Andrew turned right onto Tremont Street. He nodded his head.

“Of course,” David laughed.

“Don’t David, he was upset,” Andrew said, turning right again onto Park Street and then onto Beacon Street.

“We’re here,” Andrew, said as they pulled up to the *Fifteen Beacon Hotel*, their destination for the night.

The sky had already been dark for many hours since they had left San Francisco Airport at 2:05 PM and arrived here in Boston at 10:40 PM.

David looked up through his windshield at the enormous building towering ten stories high in front of him.

“This is good,” David said.

After a few minutes at the reservations desk, David flirting with both the pretty woman at the front desk, and the female concierge who explained to David all about the bars available at this hour, of which Andrew thought he listened remarkably well to, they were finally in their suite - two adjourning rooms that could serve as a big one – nearly 900 square feet. It was something David commented on immediately, along with the disgust he had for the complimentary champagne the hotel left with a fruit platter.

The discussion of the beds in the two rooms came shortly after. David laughed about the fact that one was a canopy with the Italian linen 300-thread count explained by the bellboy who escorted them in.

“There you are, your majesty. Just like home,” he said turning to Andrew.

Normally embarrassed by such behaviors, Andrew just smiled and shook his head, handing Greg, a generous tip.

“Thank you, sir,” Greg said, “is there anything else you need?” Andrew shook his head no. Greg nodded at him.

“Have a pleasant stay at the Beacon,” Greg said and exited through the main entrance of the room.

“David, you’ve never stayed at the Beacon?” Andrew asked as he followed David to the second adjourning room.

“No. And honestly I didn’t think I would be on this trip,” he said, seriously.

“Why? What’s wrong with it?”

Andrew was surprised. He thought he knew David’s scrutinizing tastes and he felt the Beacon would be appropriate for one night before they head off to the cabin. *Certainly no luxuries there*, Andrew thought and held back a smile at the thought of David being at the cabin.

“I mean I thought you would down-scale for this trip, Andrew,” David said, looking back at him.

“I know you’re used to these things, but I thought you’d ‘rough it’ or something on your own trips.” Disappointment was evident in his voice.

“I’m sorry, David. I thought you would like it.” Andrew felt genuinely upset for David. He seemed lost.

“I do like it, but I expected something else from you,” David walked up to him, “it was a good start with that car, though. Don’t worry about it, just an image shattered. I’ll get over it.”

David walked away.

“If it were up to me, David, I would have driven all night to get to the cabin.”

“Ok,” David said, quickly turning back to him, excitement was in his black eyes.

“Don’t you want to rest?” Andrew asked. “I thought you wanted to see Boston?”

“It’s a big city, been to many. Let’s go.”

He smiled with an excitement that made Andrew smile and let out a small laugh.

“All right, let’s go.”

David rushed over to the bar area in the room and pulled out the four half bottles of liquor that were complimentary, two glasses and a few bags of peanuts. Andrew looked over at him.

“There won’t be any liquor stores open this late. We’ll need something when we get there,” David answered packing it all up in Andrew’s carry-on bag still at the door.

“Good thinking,” Andrew replied with a smile.

They proceeded outside with their bags and Greg carrying three of David’s. They were back on the road for the three and a half hour trip to Mount Mansfield in Underhill, Vermont.

“You want me to drive, Andrew?” David said at a tollbooth in Concord, New Hampshire, about an hour into the trip.

“No, I’m fine.” Andrew said.

The car had been quiet except for the switching of the radio stations for the first ten minutes of the trip and again about a half hour in or so. Now there was a comfortable silence that was only interrupted with David’s endless question:

“Are we in Vermont yet?”

The answer had been the same for the past hour:
“No.”

The silence was something Andrew was used to, but for David it was a new experience. He usually was the talker. Andrew was a little surprised he was so calm. *Maybe vacation agrees with him*, he thought as they merged onto I-89N.

“Is it hard?” David asked suddenly perking up after the tollbooth.

There was a silence that hung in the air now. David was about to ask again.

“What?” Andrew asked, looking over at him.

“Being a...”

“Escort.” Andrew finished the thought.

“Prince,” David said, smiling.

Andrew lowered his head, hiding his own smile.

“No, it’s not hard.”

He was about to make a joke about the lack of battles and dragons to fight these days, but he decided against it.

“I just do what they want.”

“That would be hard,” David said, understanding.

“It’s like acting. You play a part. It doesn’t mean anything,” Andrew said, distantly.

David turned to him in the car. The passing lights were reflecting off the windshield of the jeep shining in a way that David stared at it for a long moment. Finally, Andrew turned to him.

“What, David?” He said, sighing.

“Nothing. It’s just...I couldn’t do it. I mean in business I have to be hard, tough. You know close the deal and all, but that’s business. People mostly understand that. You are dealing with people. Doesn’t it ever get to you?”

“You can’t let it,” he answered simply.

“What if you do?” David asked, concerned.

Andrew glanced over at him, his eyes cut into David.

“I don’t.”

The conversation ended. Silence enveloped them again. Finally, David spoke.

“So what’s the worst date you’ve ever been on?”

He smiled and looked over at Andrew.

Andrew thought for a moment and then let go a smile.

“I saw that,” David said quickly. “What was it?”

“Jennifer. Her family is in real estate.”

“Hollins Real Estate?” David questioned.

Andrew turned to him surprised.

“Yes. You can’t...”

“I know. So what happened?”

“We went to a charity event.”

“The Annual Panda Gala,” David said.

“Is there anything you don’t know?” Andrew said, shaking his head.

“I know rich people.”

“Anyway there was an ice sculpture there of a...Panda.” Andrew hesitated and looked sideways at David.

Instantly they both laughed.

“A panda ice sculpture? That’s great.”

“It was for a good cause, David.”

“So what happened?”

Andrew turned to him.

6

The Cabin

“*I* still can’t believe you did that,

Andrew.

You’re lying,” David said as they stopped at the log cabin in Underhill, Vermont.

“I did. She was out of control and drunk.” He said, getting out.

Andrew opened the back door and leaned in to get his carry-on. He looked over at David, “and I never lie David.”

Andrew stayed locked on her eyes to emphasize the point. David took a moment before he continued pulling both their bags out.

“Excuse me, your majesty,” He said to himself and smiled, closing the car door.

“Now, it’s not the Beacon, David, or anything you’re used to,” Andrew started as they walked up the path. “Let me get the lights on.”

Andrew went faster towards the cabin. After another moment, sensor lights illuminated the cabin.

“Oh my god...” David said, breathlessly. “It’s an actual log cabin.”

Andrew stood next to him again, smiling.

“I know. Isn’t it great?”

The cabin was situated on a beautiful array of pine trees that surrounded it on all sides. The small pathway leading to it was a stone walk. There was a large porch in front that was completely lit. The cabin itself was small and quaint but it held a certain glow that night. It wasn’t lost on David Ross.

“Come on,” Andrew said walking up the stone path.

David followed.

“And this is yours?”

“Yep. My grandfather gave it to me when he died.”

David looked shocked. Andrew smiled to himself and pulled out the key. They walked inside.

“Ok, now I know it’s you,” David said. “No one else would decorate like this.”

“Actually most of this is my grandfather. Well, except he wasn’t actually a hunter,” Andrew said,

referring to the antlers above the fireplace in the living room.

“Are they real?”

“Unfortunately, yes,” Andrew answered. “I was going to get rid of them, but I can’t help the poor deer now and I have grown fond of them over the years.”

“Antlers?” David asked. He had walked into the center of the room, directly across from the antlers.

“My grandfather loved them.” Andrew said coming up to the side of David.

“Wait,” David said quickly and turned to Andrew. “There is running water and plumbing and...”

“What do you mean?” Andrew said, seriously.

“You mean there isn’t a bathroom or a shower or a...” Andrew couldn’t hold back his smile any longer.

“Nice try,” David said back to him, annoyed.

“Bathroom on your left down the hall, bedroom on the right, the left and far right. Take your pick,” Andrew said, trying not to laugh.

“But David,” he said, looking right at him, “there is only one bathroom. I expect to use it once in a while.”

David nodded towards him, “no problem.”

David chose the biggest bedroom on the far right. It used to be his parents’ room when his family would come up to visit his grandparents. He got the room on the left. It was considerably smaller, but he always liked it. The view of the mountains was breathtaking in the mornings.

Andrew threw his bag on the small bed and turned on the light. The light on the bureau lit up the entire room. He smiled as he looked around. There was a picture of him and his parents next to the light. He picked it up, looking at it for a long moment. He remembered when it was taken. He had been about ten, only a year before his grandmother had died. His grandfather passed on three years later, but he was never the same person after his grandmother died. The picture had been taken on the front porch of the cabin. They were all smiling. His mother was looking over at his father. He always liked this picture. He smiled at the memory. He replaced it on the bureau as David entered.

“I’m glad I didn’t take this room,” he said as he stood at the doorway. “It’s small.”

Andrew let go of the memory and turned to David.

“It used to be food storage.”

“Really? So this is where they kept the animals.”

Andrew looked at him strangely.

“Did they have to slaughter them in here, too? Cause that’s creepy, Andrew.”

“No, David. It was a pantry closet for storing food, cans, winter supplies.”

“Oh.” David shrugged, “what do I know about country living?”

“So why did your grandfather have a log cabin in Vermont? I thought your family was from California.”

“My mother is. My father was originally from Vermont. But when he met my mother he moved to where her family was.” Andrew stated.

“Nice dad.”

“Yea, he is.” Andrew said, lost in thought for a moment.

“So your dad grew up here?” David asked.

“No, they lived in the town of Underhill, but my grandfather built this whenever he had the time. They came here for vacations. My parents and I came here every year when I was younger.”

“Summer vacations in Vermont. I don’t know...” David suddenly looked up at Andrew, “he built this?”

“Yea.” Andrew answered. “My grandfather was a builder. He built houses all over Underhill and Chittendon County.”

“So that’s where you get the architect thing from?” David said, half-smiling.

Andrew walked past him and smiled. David followed him to the living room.

“My grandfather and I used to sit out on that porch every morning and he’d tell me all about building, wood, nails. We built the shed out there together, one summer,” Andrew smiled. “It was great.”

“I take it I can see that tomorrow when there’s light,” David said.

“Sure.” He paused. “You got those bottles?”

“You do. I put them in your bag.”

Andrew got up, went into his bedroom and returned carrying the four bottles and the two glasses.

“You know, David we have glasses here.”

“Yea, but those were nice glasses.”

“I know. I paid for them.”

David broke out laughing.

“Of course you did. Do-gooder.”

“Pirate,” Andrew answered back.

They fell into Andrew’s old memories of summers gone by and David’s childhood in Tucson, Arizona, a place he stated he despised. Talk of girls, dates, life and dreams long since forgotten. It was well into the early morning hours that they decided to get some sleep.

The next several days passed by quickly. Andrew showed David the places he went to as a child, while David talked all about his failed relationships with women back in California, his career in piracy and how much he wanted to own his own business someday. They went skiing a few times and went into town to see the sights. For David after seeing Mount Mansfield, the largest mountain in the State of Vermont, he was pretty much done with the sights. The small quaint New England town of Underhill didn’t exactly provide the nightlife David was accustomed to, but even for his city living he enjoyed the simplicity of it all.

The final night Andrew said he would cook dinner for them and went into town to buy all the supplies. He returned with several bags of groceries and some more liquor. David was happy about the liquor.

“Man, you can cook,” David said after eating his second plateful. “Where did you learn that from?”

“I didn’t really,” Andrew said, clearing their plates and sitting back at the table. He picked up his glass of wine and took a sip. “I just enjoy it, once in awhile.”

“Don’t let the California girls find out, Andrew. There are a sucker for a chef.”

Andrew smiled and looked away. He seemed lost for a moment.

“You ok?” David asked.

“Yea,” he turned to him and smiled. “I just really missed this place.”

“When was the last time you were here?”

“Right after Cami’s funeral. My father took me here to clear my head.” He picked up the wine bottle and poured himself another glass.

“Did it work?” David said drinking the last of the gin from the Beacon Hotel in a martini.

“No.” Andrew said, taking another sip.

“Maybe he just wanted me to get away from them.”

“Cami’s family?”

“He was furious at them for me paying for the funeral and I’m sure mad at me for offering.” Andrew said, looking down.

“You paid?”

“Yep,” he picked up his glass and drank the remainder of the wine down in one gulp. He placed the glass on the table. “Do-gooder.”

David took a long look at his friend as he replenished his glass from the bottle.

“Sometimes, the world needs a do-gooder, Andrew.” David said, trying to be comforting.

Andrew looked at him for a moment and then focused back on the glass in his hand, taking another sip.

“They wouldn’t even greet people at the wake. Can you believe that?” His voice held contempt, a tone David had never heard from him before. “Their *own* daughter and they can’t pull it together enough to say thank you for coming and paying respects to our daughter,” Andrew finished and took another sip.

“Then when it was all over. They just left. After that, I only saw them when I went to see Cat and even then there were...” he stopped and took another sip, this time bigger. “There were not nice people.”

“I’m sorry, Andrew,” David said. “Maybe they...”

“They what, David?” Andrew’s tone turned darker. David could tell he was getting angry.

Andrew stood up, picking up the bottle in one hand about to pour when he stopped and looked at David.

“They needed time,” he spat, “they needed to deal with their loss on their own. They needed space,” he

poured the wine into his glass and placed the bottle down on the table.

He backed up and hit the wall of the kitchen. He leaned against it for support and took another gulp of the wine.

“Andrew, don’t do this,” David said, standing up. “It wasn’t your fault. You couldn’t have known what they would do.”

Andrew shot a look at him. David backed off.

“Oh, I knew what they were capable of. I knew it ever since I had met them,” Andrew said, darkly.

“When you were seventeen?”

“No.” Andrew shook his head and moved away from the wall towards David.

He put down the glass on the table and leaned down placing his hands against the back of the chair he had been sitting in.

“I met her before then,” Andrew said, shaking his head. “She was only fourteen, David,” he said, looking at him, trying to hold the tears back. He took a breath and continued, “She was hurt, there was blood everywhere. I didn’t know what to do. I…”

“Andrew, you’re not making sense. What are you talking about? I thought you met Cami in high school.”

Andrew backed up and looked like he was going to fall, but he steadied himself on the back of the chair and walked to the living room. David followed quickly.

“You see they knew,” he said shaking his head and throwing a sarcastic smile towards David, “they knew it was me. I was the one who helped her that day.”

He stood in front of the fireplace, the deer antlers above his head and a blazing fire behind him.

“They knew it was me, David.” He said again.

“I helped her, but I couldn’t help her when they came,” he turned away and leaned on the mantel.

“She was so scared. She held onto me and kept telling me not to let her go.”

David walked to him. When Andrew looked at him, only one tear escaped and slid down his cheek.

“You did your best, Andrew. How old were you?”

“Fourteen,” he said, softly. “We were the same age.”

“Right.” David took his arm, but Andrew moved away and straightened himself.

“I’m fine,” he wiped away the tear and went back to the kitchen.

He began to clean up the dishes, David watched him for a moment.

“Andrew,” David began walking slowly into the kitchen. Finally, Andrew looked over at him leaning with his hands on the sink counter.

“Why was she bleeding?”

Andrew stared at him for a long moment.

“I don’t know,” he put his head down, defeated.

“Didn’t Cami tell you...when you knew her later in high school? When the two of you were dating?” David asked, quickly.

“She didn’t remember?” David asked. A slow recognition came over David’s face at that moment.

“Didn’t she remember you?”

Andrew looked up at David with sad eyes.

“No.”

7

Back Home to the Castle

“ just got back,”

Andrew said on his phone at the house. He was smiling and shaking his head, looking towards David standing a few feet away from him.

They had just arrived back from the airport a few minutes earlier.

“Needy,” David whispered referring to Alexander on the phone.

Andrew hid a smile.

“All right, Alexander, I’ll stay here.” He hung up the receiver of the antique-looking phone.

“What is with him? Doesn’t he have other employees to worry about?” David said.

“I don’t know. He seems anxious about something. He’s acting strange,” Andrew said, deep in thought.

“Believe me - normal behavior from him,” David said and added, “listen, I got to go.”

“Yea. I’ll talk to you later.” Andrew said moving into the living room still thinking about Alexander.

“Hey...” David said, causing Andrew to turn around. “I had a good time, you know...for Vermont.” David smiled.

“It was great,” Andrew said, smiling. “Thanks.”

“We should do this again.” David paused.

Andrew nodded. “Soon,” he added.

Andrew looked over at him.

“David, I’m sorry about last night and all. I just drank too much. I don’t usually do that.”

“Are you kidding? I’ve got blackmail material and that is what makes friendships stronger.” David smiled. Andrew returned it and was silently grateful for David not making a big deal out of it.

“You would know.”

“Have a nice day, your majesty.”

“You too, knight.” David nodded to him and walked out the door.

Andrew smiled to himself and took off his jacket. His cell phone fell out of the pocket. He kneeled down, picked it up. He realized it was still off and pushed the button. The screen illuminated. He looked down at it. The screen said he had ten messages, all from Cat. He

shook his head and placed it on the table in the living room taking his bag off the floor and headed upstairs. As he passed the Grandfather Clock it looked at the time. It read: 7:10 PM. He looked at his watch, it read: 7:10 PM. He was shocked.

“Good job, old boy,” he said to the clock and headed up the stairs.

The cell phone vibrated downstairs, but Andrew couldn't hear it. He had jumped into the shower.

“Andrew!”

The loud sound of Alexander's voice broke him out of his peaceful calm. He turned off the water and stepped out, pulling a towel around his waist and opening the door quickly. On the other side, Alexander stood looking annoyed.

“Why are you upset? I was the one taking the shower?” Andrew said, smiling to himself.

“We need to talk,” Alexander started.

“Can I get changed first?”

Alexander looked at him, annoyed still and then moved aside so Andrew could pass. He followed Andrew into his bedroom. The bathroom was inside the master bedroom. As Andrew passed him he stopped and looked at him with an expression that was lost on Alexander.

“Unless you are dressing me....” Andrew tried to make it sound like a joke, but Alexander's look wasn't of amusement.

Andrew shook his head and shrugged his shoulders, walking to his dresser and pulling out some clothes, laying them on the bed.

“What is wrong with you, anyway?”

“I’ll be downstairs,” Alex said, distantly. “Just don’t go anywhere,” he added and walked out of the room.

“Where am I supposed to go?” Andrew said to himself and shook his head at his friend.

After a few moments, he was wearing a pair of slacks, a comfortable red shirt and shoes. He debated for a moment about putting his hair back, but he didn’t have anywhere to be, so he decided against it. He walked downstairs and into the living room.

“Now what is it?” He said and stopped cold in his step.

“Hi, Andrew,” Cami said, softly. She smiled a bit.

“This is what I needed to talk to you about.” Alexander said, quickly, standing up.

“Are you all right? That’s a stupid question. I know I was shocked, too? Believe me? I thought I was having a nervous breakdown. But you’re not. You’re not hallucinating. You’re not dreaming.” Alexander had been walking to him, now he reached his shoulder and added softly, “she’s real.”

Andrew stood in the arch between the living room and the hall. He couldn’t move. He couldn’t breathe.

“I tried to call you, but you weren’t answering your phone,” she said, moving a bit towards him.

“I need...” Andrew suddenly said, breathlessly, and leaned with his back against the arch. Immediately he fell down.

Alexander and Cami rushed to his side.

“Are you all right?” Alexander said.

“Andrew, I...”

Andrew started breathing heavy and the two on either side of him were very concerned.

“Andrew, you need to breath,” Cami said, touching his arm.

That only made it worse.

“I...” He said in-between the gasps.

“Don’t talk,” Alex said quickly and turned to Cami. “Cami, call an ambulance.”

“Just breathe, Andrew,” Alex said over and over, but Andrew didn’t hear him anymore.

Everything went black.

8

The Princess Returns

hen Andrew came to...

he was disoriented at first. The white walls, the uncomfortable bed he was lying on. Slowly, recognition took over. He was in the hospital he had passed out at his house *when he saw*...instantly he flew up into a sitting position on the bed.

“No, no, Mr. Whiete. You need to lie down,” a nurse’s aide said coming up beside him.

“I...” he started, but she interrupted.

“You are fine, but the doctor wants to take a look at you. He’ll be here soon,” she lied him back in the bed, pulling up his sheets.

“You hyperventilated and passed out. Do you remember that, Mr. Whiete?”

He looked up at her. She smiled nicely.

“Yes, I remember. I was at my house.”

“Good,” she said, soothingly. “That is very good, Mr. Whiete.”

“I have to leave.”

“After the doctor sees you then you...” the nurse said. Andrew got up again.

“Mr. Whiete, please cooperate...”

“He is not very good at that,” Cami said, smiling and entering the room. Alexander was close behind.

“He will need rest so make this brief,” the nurse said. “And you...” she turned back to Andrew, “stay put.” After a moment the nurse exited the room leaving Cami, Alexander and Andrew in silence.

From the moment Cami had walked in Andrew’s eyes were on her and hers on him. They continued to stare

at each other. Cami smiling, Andrew amazed at the sight before him.

“Andrew...” she finally said, softly, walking towards him.

He got up from the bed quickly and walked away from her. She stopped and looked down.

“Maybe...” Alex started, but Andrew interrupted.

“I need to talk with....” He paused on her name, continuing to stare at her.

“I understand,” Alex said, slipping away quickly and out of the room.

Andrew was still dressed in his clothes from the shower. The shirt was unbuttoned and he had no shoes on. He had felt the cold floor when his feet hit it. He finally broke the stare and looked away.

“I know this is unbelievable,” she said, slowly, carefully. “Andrew I didn’t know any other way...” She trailed off, but quickly added, “I wish...”

He looked back at her and she stopped speaking. Andrew studied her in silence. She looked exactly the way she did ten years ago. There might have been minor changes, but he didn’t notice them. She wore the same kind of dress she always wore. It clung to her curves and fell on her beautifully. Her hair was the same rich red color. Her eyes were as emerald green as they ever were. Her lips, her face, her voice all the same.

“You look exactly the same,” he finally said in a voice so soft it was barely audible, but Cami heard it and smiled at him.

The same smile, he thought. Exactly the same one he remembered.

“Andrew, I know I have a lot of explaining to do, but I want you to be well first,” she said, softly moving a step towards him.

He looked away and let out a smile he didn’t expect.

“Same old Cami,” he said more to himself, but this time his voice was louder. “Always trying to take care of me.”

Andrew looked up into her beautiful face and smiled at her for the first time. She smiled back.

“You look great,” she said, softly.

“You were dead, Camille,” he said suddenly causing her to lose her smile. Her expression changed to sadness.

“I know. I buried you.” The words weren’t meant to be cruel, but there was a coldness to them that ripped through Andrew’s heart. The look on her face told him it had affected her also.

“I know.”

He looked away and walked to the window in the small room, facing it and leaning an arm against it. She remained where she was. A long silence, deafening to the two in the room, continued for several painful moments.

“So, where were you, princess?” He said, not using the term as an endearment in any sense of the word.

“Away,” she said looking at his back.

“Away,” he repeated and shook his head.

“Did anyone know of this away place that you went to?” He asked, accusation was clear in his voice.

“My parents...” Andrew’s shifted subtly. There was a pause. “Cat...”

This time, Andrew turned around to face her.

“Cat,” he said, firmly and annoyed. He walked to the other side of the room. “Cat knew you were alive.” It was a statement, but she answered it anyway.

“Yes. Andrew, I didn’t know...”

“What’s that, princess? You didn’t know you were alive? Or you didn’t know that they had played this charade?” He walked towards her quickly, causing her to back away a step. “Or maybe,” his voice louder and turning darker, “you just didn’t know that we had a funeral, a casket, a wake. Is that what it was you were going to say, Princess?” The words were very controlled and Cami looked strangely at him.

“Andrew I didn’t know that they said I was dead. Not for three years. If I had known in the beginning...I would...” she looked down, tears sliding down her cheeks.

He grabbed her arms, quickly. She looked up at him, sharply. He was about to say something, but he felt her body against his. He leaned in without knowing or caring.

“Andrew please...” she pleaded with him.

He held her for a moment longer. Her breathing was quickening. The tension filled the air around them. He wanted to reach down and kiss her, hold her, tell her how much he had missed her and...he broke the hold. She nearly fell from it. He walked back to the other side of the room.

When he turned back to her there were tears in his eyes. Cami’s tears were streaming down her face.

“Andrew...”

“No! You tell me,” he said, walking slowly to her. “You tell me right now, how this could happen? How you could leave....me?” He was fighting the tears with everything he had inside him.

She looked at him, but didn’t speak.

“Tell me!” He yelled, quickly. She jumped at his voice.

“Tell me! Why would you do this?! What did I do?! Didn’t I love you enough! Tell me now!” His voice was loud and he was moving closer and closer to her.

“Tell me!”

“You’re scaring me!” She yelled and crumbled to the floor in front of him, crying.

He took a breath in sharply and went down next to her, pulling her in softly, holding her to him.

“I’m sorry, princess, oh god...I’m sorry, I...” he didn’t finish. He started rocking her back and forth gently.

He reached down and brought her face up to meet his eyes. Slowly, all the feelings he had kept hidden away, kept deep inside him, came flooding back to the surface. She was here. She was in his arms. He had prayed for this. He had wanted it so desperately for so many nights...so many lonely nights.

He leaned down closer to her. He could smell her. He closed his eyes and moved closer to her lips. When he felt them upon his, he let out a breath. Softly they kissed. Neither one wanting the moment to end or be broken. He leaned in further deepening the kiss. He heard her gasp and then put her arms around him. It was such a good feeling. She pulled him in tighter, holding onto him, like she always did. He put his hand around her back and pulled her to him. She fell against him. They continued to kiss. He didn't care anymore he just wanted to be here with her. He let everything melt away in that moment. All of these past ten years, the pain, the hurt, the anger, all of it left him as he relaxed and fell into her.

“Oh, princess,” he said, breathlessly when they stopped kissing for a moment.

Tears were streaming down their faces. He smiled at her. She smiled back. He sighed and kissed her cheeks, her forehead, her nose. He couldn't stop touching her. She laughed a bit when it tickled, but he couldn't stop. *His Princess was home.* If it was a dream, he never wanted to wake up.

The frenzy continued with both saying things they longed to say for ten years. Words of love, words of

hope anything that brought them closer together. Slowly, they calmed down, and not so slowly reality set back in.

“Andrew, I wanted to leave that place...” She moved slightly away from him. He let her go, but held her hand as she continued.

“I didn’t want to go. I wanted to tell you. I knew I couldn’t. I knew what Daddy and Momma would do,” she spoke quickly, trying to get it all out. “I didn’t have a choice.”

Andrew was looking in her eyes the entire time. He let go of her hand and backed away slightly.

“They said I had to go. I was sick. I needed help. You couldn’t help me. No one could, not until I went away.”

She had been averting his eyes as she spoke, he didn’t like it.

“Everything was so bad, Andrew. I didn’t know what to do.” She was lying and he knew it.

“I didn’t have a choice,” she reached out to touch his face, he backed away and stood up.

“Andrew...” she said from behind him.

“Don’t you understand? I needed to get help. I wasn’t well. You know that. I was...” she broke off and stood up.

“I didn’t have a choice.”

“No, Cami,” he said calmly, turning to her. He paused for a moment. She looked at him confused.

“You didn’t have the guts.”

“Andrew, I didn’t have a choice.”

Andrew didn't move, but his eyes weren't as soft as they had been a moment earlier. His voice was harsher.

"What did you think happened to me? To Alexander? To your friends? You think you could just be dead and come back and everything would be fine. Cami..."

"No, I just...I didn't..." She backed against the wall.

The words were hurtful, he knew that, but they had to be said.

"I would have done anything for you. Anything. Why didn't you trust me?"

He walked up to her and looked completely into her soft emerald eyes.

"I believed in you."

He shook his head at her, looking with disbelief at the woman before him.

"I'm sorry..." was all she could say.

He walked out of the room.

9

Prince Charming

“*I* hate these people,”

Rachel Sanders said as she stepped into the room with Andrew at her side.

It had been only one day since Cami returned from the grave, but after leaving the hospital he had to do something. Alexander had taken him away that night and didn't say anything when he told him he was going on this prescheduled date with Rachel Sanders, an oil heiress from Beverly Hills tonight.

He had kept himself busy with arrangements. She wanted a limo, so he arranged it. She wanted formal wear, so he got a new tuxedo. He didn't need one, but it wanted one. It looked great. The tailor said so, Rachel said so when he picked her up twenty-five minutes ago, and the woman checking coats gave him a twice over as he handed her Rachel's ridiculous fur. Even the women at the party were having trouble not looking his way. That was all fine with him.

Go ahead and look, he thought. After all, it's magic...and I am the best one at it. Just ask my dead...alive girlfriend. She'll tell you how damn magical I am.

"Andrew..." Rachel said. He stopped his thoughts and looked down at her.

She was boringly female, attracted in a mundane sort of way. Blond hair that was all pulled up in some design that looked hideous. Blue eyes that neither sparkled nor twinkled. A figure mostly gained from a personal trainer and her Daddy's money, where she never worked on her arms, obviously. She was too thin, too old

to be wearing the low-cut mess that she was. Too annoying to be interesting and too needy to be fascinating. But *he* was all hers...for the next three hours, and he wasn't going to waste his time thinking about Camille Anne Moore one more moment. He had a job to do. And he was the best.

“Yes, Rachel, what can I do for you?” He said, softly, leaning down, letting her smell his cologne.

She paused as if she forgot what she was going to say. Then just smiled up at him.

“Nothing, darling. I'm fine. How are you?” She said, sickeningly sweet, something she didn't have any sort of talent for.

“I am perfect.” He smiled. She lowered her eyes. “Would you like to dance?”

He took her hand and led her to the dance floor, not waiting for the answer. *Of course, she wanted to dance, who wouldn't?* He thought, and tried to clear his head, but it just wasn't working tonight. Everyone was watching them as he took her in his arms and danced her around the floor with elegance and grace he had learned many years ago. He could feel the eyes on him...*hundreds of eyes just watching, waiting...to see what I will do.*

He smiled down at her. She smiled back. As the song drew to its close, he leaned in and dipped her. It was a beautiful dip. She smiled up at him. As he gently brought her back upright, she was breathless.

“You are amazing, Andrew,” she whispered as they left the dance floor.

“It’s magic, Rachel,” he whispered back.

“Yes, it is, darling.”

The night progressed on. Men wanted to talk to him about finances, investing, business, anything they could think of. Women just wanted him. He was constantly busy between all of them and Rachel’s demands. That was exactly what he wanted. It kept him sane.

“Aren’t you...?”

A pretty young woman around Andrew’s age approached him while he got another drink for Rachel at the bar.

“I don’t think so,” he said softly to her.

“You look so familiar,” she continued and smiled at him.

“Are you sure we don’t know each other?”

“I don’t think so,” he repeated. This time he leaned down a little more waiting for the drinks.

She smiled again. He smiled back.

“So, what’s your name?” She finally asked.

“Andrew.”

“Hi, I’m Melissa,” she reached out her hand to him.

The bartender put down Andrew’s drink. He turned to him, pulled out some money, placed it on the bar, took the drink, and turned back to Melissa.

“I’m sorry, Melissa, I’m taken for the night,” he said, leaning down to her. “Maybe another time.”

He walked away. He could feel Melissa’s eyes on him as he proceeded across the floor to Rachel. He handed her the drink and smiled. She returned it.

“Thank you again, Andrew,” Rachel said as he walked her to her door that evening.

“You are the best.”

He smiled and took her hand, kissing it. She watched him as he did so.

“Such a gentlemen,” she said, smiling. “We should do this again.”

“That is your choice, Rachel. Good night,” Andrew said pleasantly and threw her one of his smiles.

“Good night.”

He walked back to the limousine as the driver stood at the open door for him.

“Thanks, Mark,” he said to him as he slid inside.

Mark closed the door and slid into the driver’s seat.

Andrew had known Mark for the whole of a year at Luxury Limo. He was twenty-three years old with Mexican heritage. This was his night job. Mark worked in construction during the day. Whenever Andrew could he requested Mark. He was polite, discreet and never been a problem.

“Andrew,” Mark said as soon as they were driving again.

Andrew looked up at him through the rearview mirror. He had told Mark to call him Andrew and to never use his last name. The man had done very well.

“Why aren’t you married?”

Andrew wanted nothing to do with the conversation, but his manners got the better of him.

“There are many women who like you,” Mark smiled into the mirror.

“It’s not what it looks like, Mark,” Andrew said back.

“I know women, Andrew, and that one,” referring to Rachel, “very interested.”

Andrew looked out the window at the lights passing.

The conversation after that didn’t consist of much more than a few comments by Mark about the different types of women Andrew dated and a discussion on the issue of immigrants in the United States. That occurred when Andrew wanted the conversation turned away from him. It did the trick beautifully. Mark had a lot to say about the issue.

Finally he reached his street. The limo pulled into the circular driveway and stopped at the front. Mark got out of the car, but Andrew had already opened his door and stepped out.

“Thanks, Mark,” he said, dropping a few hundred dollar bills into the man’s hand.

Mark smiled and put the money in his pocket.

“Anytime, Andrew. Have a good night,” he called after Andrew.

Andrew opened his door, went inside, not looking back. A few moments later, he heard the limo drive away. Inside his house didn't make him feel any better. An aching feeling hit him as he looked around at the emptiness of it all, Andrew sighed to himself. He walked past the Grandfather Clock without looking and straight upstairs to his bedroom. Inside, he closed the door quickly and leaned against it. His eyes closed. He could hear his own breathing. It was steady, but he knew he wasn't fine. He would never be that way again. He fought the urge to break down right there. Instead, he walked into the bathroom not seeing the gold trimmings on the fixtures that he had liked so much when he bought them. He opened the glass door of the shower and turned on the water. He leaned over the sink, looking into the mirror above it for a long moment, studying his face. He was almost surprised to see the reflection staring back at him. It looked different somehow. Older, or maybe he just felt it. Either way, he didn't like it.

He turned away and stepped back into his bedroom. He ignored the beautiful master bed that was imported from England and he had gotten at an auction in the valley. He didn't look at the two gold statues of winged griffins underneath the two large windows across from the bed. He walked over to the ornate 1843 mahogany nightstand unclasped his watch placed it down, untying his bowtie and placing it next to it. The oval

mirror with a beautifully carved frame containing a Florentine design hanging on the far wall didn't catch his attention either tonight. His eyes fell on the bureau underneath that mirror to *her* picture. He walked over to it slowly as if the very picture itself would attack him.

The picture he knew well. It had been taken one month before she *died*. *Not died, went away*, he said in his head. He could feel the anger inside him. He pushed it down. She was sitting on the ground in a small glade they had found driving around one day looking for a place to have the picnic she had brought. He could remember the details so clearly as if it happened just yesterday and not over ten years ago. She had been happy that day. The smile on her face was beautiful. For that moment, in that glade, so many years ago, she was his princess, and he was her prince. He believed it then. He believed in her then.

Now everything was different. Confusing. He fought the urge to let the tears come again. He would not. Not now. He had to think. His mind had never been in such a state before. He could always keep everything under control. *But with her...* it was different. Control wasn't something he had. Maybe he never did. Maybe it, too, was all an illusion, like the *magic*. At midnight, it ends.

He had never really given it serious thought before, but suddenly it occurred to him that if midnight was the time how did *Cinderella* maintain the *magic* after the Prince married her. He simply had pawned it off as

love and them living happily ever after. He was accepting of her pauper status and she accepting of him.

The thought stayed with him, worked around in his brain. She would need the *magic* to keep up appearances, *wouldn't she?* Maybe Alexander had been correct all those years. She couldn't act as a maid the kingdom wouldn't allow it. She had to learn how to be a real princess if the *magic* was gone. *Didn't she?* The prince and her couldn't rely on the fairy godmother, they had to take matters into her own hands.

Andrew looked up quickly, the clock downstairs chimed once.

Twice.

Three.

Four.

Five.

Six.

Seven.

Eight.

Nine.

Ten.

Eleven.

Twelve.

The magic was over.

Sinful Lies

 *hat the hell are you doing?"*

David said walking into Alexander's office, his eyes angry, his voice firm.

The female client sitting in the chair opposite Alexander stood up as soon as David entered. She turned to him, surprised. David ignored her.

"David, I'm in a meeting. Do you mind?"

"Yes, I mind! Your meeting is over," David turned to the client for the first time. She got up and walked out of the room.

"I'm sorry, Miss..." Alexander started but the door closed behind her quickly.

He turned on David, this time he was angry.

"What is your problem? You can't just barge into my office and..."

"Oh, yes I can. I have been calling him for three days and all I've gotten is an answering machine, an unanswered door, and a ridiculous explanation from psycho girl," David said. The last part he shook his head at.

"Psycho girl?" Alexander questioned.

"That little witch, Catherine. I went to see her and do you know she believes her sister is alive and

walking around town. Certifiable!” David paced the office, frustrated.

“Apparently,” he continued, “she told Andrew! I’m going to kill her! I’m surprised I didn’t.”

“David...” Alexander began.

“Don’t!” He turned on him. “Don’t tell me that I need to calm down or that everything is fine!”

“David...”

“No! One day, ok, two, maybe, three, it’s not good. Look, I may not have gone to high school with him and made him my best friend so that I could be popular –“

“What?!” Alexander said, suddenly.

“Oh come on, Alex, you couldn’t do it on your own. I don’t care about you. I care about Andrew and right now, I want to know what is going on?! And you’re going to tell me.”

He sat down in the chair the woman had just been in and waited.

Alexander took a breath. David stared at him.

“First of all, who the hell do you think you are?” Alexander started. “You burst into *my* office and you demand I tell you what is happening? I ought to throw you out. And that is exactly what I am going to do.”

He picked up the receiver to his phone and went to dial for security. David stood up, quickly and walked to the phone. He placed his hand over the button on the console, hanging it up.

“Do it again and I will rip it out of wall,” he said, very firmly and calm.

Alexander let the phone go and took a step back.
“Something happened, Alexander.”

Alexander looked around like a caged animal.

David kept his stare on him.

“There is not much I like and most people I don’t like at all. You’re one of them,” David walked around the desk to face Alex.

“Andrew, on the other hand, is one of the best friends I have ever had. And if he’s in trouble...”

“She’s back,” Alexander said, almost in a whisper.

David looked at him for a long moment. The silence was unbearable for Alex as he waited for David to throw a punch at him.

“You are all crazy,” David finally said and started to walk away.

“No, it’s true. I just found out a few days ago when you guys were on your...trip,” Alex said, carefully.

David stopped at the door and turned back to Alex. His face held shock and confusion.

“What?!”

“Cami is back. She didn’t die,” Alex said simply.

David took another moment scrutinizing Alex. Then he quickly ran his hands over his face and through his black short hair. He moved towards Alex, who moved away. He sat back down this time in Alex’s chair. Alex walked around the other side of the desk. David turned to him.

“Explain.”

“No, Alex,” David said as they got out of his bright red convertible sports car.

Alex getting out of the passenger seat tried to stop David as he came around his side to walk up to Andrew’s house.

“He can handle a lot more than you think, David,” Alex said.

David shot him a look that clearly said he didn’t agree with him.

“Mother Theresa couldn’t handle this,” David said and outstretched his hand. “Now give me the god-damn key, Alex.”

“I’m going in,” he said and walked in front of David.

“Oh, now you’re so concerned, are you? Three days, you don’t care, but now you care.”

“I care!” Alex shouted. “He is my friend, too!”

“Weren’t you missing him, Alex? Didn’t you need him for a date or something?” David said, calming down a bit.

“No, he called three days ago and canceled all his dates for the week,” Alex said, sheepishly.

David walked up to him on the front step.

“And this did not sent out alarms in your head?”

Alex didn’t look at him. He put the key in the door and turned it, opening the door. David and him

walked through. They both looked around; David towards the living room; Alex towards the dining room. Both men looked up the stairs and proceeded to walk.

“Let me handle this, David, I was there when she came back. I took him to the hospital.”

David stopped him, holding his arm.

“What hospital?”

“He had a...when he saw her...he passed out,” Alex said, then quickly added, “he’s fine, though.”

David shook his head at him.

“He’s fine. Great.” He paused. “I would have passed out if my dead girlfriend showed up in my living room after ten years. Who came up with that brilliant idea of a reunion?”

David looked over at Alex.

“Why am I not surprised?” He said, walking up the final steps.

“She tried to call him, but his cell phone was off.”

“Call him? And say what? Hi, honey, remember me, I was dead, well, funny thing happened on the way to my funeral...” David said, sarcastically.

“Well, there was no good way to say it,” Alex retorted. “It’s not like it was all easy for her.”

David stopped and looked back at him.

“Unbelievable. You’re taking her side?”

“No, it’s just that...”

“She’s pretty and you thought since she came to you first that you had a chance or something. I mean

maybe you do Alex, if Andrew is out of the picture, maybe she'll confide in you, huh?"

"It isn't like that," Alex said, defensively.

"Yea, right."

This time, Alex grabbed David's arm.

"I didn't know she was alive, either! I am not the enemy here! Stop yelling at me!"

David looked at him for a moment.

"Alex," he said, leaning in, "you're yelling at me."

Alex let go of his arm, quickly. David moved down a step to him.

"Look, this is about Andrew, not what you and I think of each other, ok? So let's just leave that out of it, right now."

"Fine," Alex agreed.

They walked the rest of the way in silence. As they approached the master bedroom, there was a feeling of dread that neither one of them wanted to express.

David walked in first and looked around. The bed was unmade and the covers were everywhere. There was a broken picture frame on the floor near the bureau. The picture lay on his nightstand. The watch and bowtie were still there as well. The large screen television that hung on the wall in-between his two walls was on, loud, playing some old movie that David didn't know of.

Alex looked over at him for a moment and walked to the bathroom door just as Andrew opened it. Alex jumped a bit.

He stood looking at them, not surprised, but with a non-caring expression on his face that now had a five o'clock shadow. He looked like he hadn't slept. He was dressed in shorts with a white bathrobe that was open. His hair was wet, though, so they assumed he had been taking a shower.

"Hey," Alex said first.

"I never should have given you that key," Andrew said. His voice was distant and hoarse.

"We wanted to see..."

"If I was dead," Andrew shot back at Alex.

He glanced over at David for a moment, without expression and then turned away, walking to the other side of the bed.

The music on the television movie got louder. David looked around for a remote, but suddenly it shut off. He looked back at Andrew. He was sitting on the bed, throwing the remote back down.

"Andrew, I just found out," David said, carefully moving to where he was sitting.

He looked up, sadness in his eyes. For a long moment he stared at David. David waited. It looked like Andrew wanted to say something, but then his eyes turned away.

"Great," was all he finally said.

"Are you all right?" Alex asked from the other side of the room.

David and Andrew both turned to him with an expression of annoyance. Alex nodded.

“What are you going to do?” David finally asked.

“I want to talk to her, David, but I can’t. I tried calling her a thousand times,” Andrew said, defeat in his voice.

“Catherine knew,” he suddenly said.

“I know,” David said. “I went to see her to find out about you.”

“She lied. They all did,” Andrew said, pulling his fingers through his hair.

“I don’t know what to do with that.”

“Nothing. It’s their lie,” David said. Very carefully, David asked his next question.

“Did Jen know?”

Andrew looked up at him. Alexander did, too.

“Jen?” Alex and Andrew said together.

Andrew turned to Alex for a moment.

“I don’t think she did, Andrew,” Alex said. “I mean she would have said something to you, right?”

“Would she?” Andrew said to Alex.

“Come on, she was with you. You guys were friends and...lovers,” Alex said, carefully.

“I wouldn’t call it that. It was more a matter of convenience,” Andrew said, putting his head down.

“She was Cami’s friend. She would have said something. She couldn’t have kept that from you.”

“Cat did. Her parents did. Even Camille did,” he said. David heard the break in his voice when he said her name.

“Maybe you should find out, Andrew,” David said.

“I can’t take anymore, David,” Andrew said, looking at him. Tears were in his eyes.

“If Jen knew, then she knew. And she slept with me anyway,” his voice was breaking up, tears were starting, “god, David...I was lonely. She was there. I didn’t mean...” he trailed off.

“There was nothing wrong with being with her, Andrew. What was it, a couple times a year?” Andrew nodded, “Don’t do this to yourself. She couldn’t have expected that you would become some sort of monk. She was gone. You have to move on,” David said, trying to help, but Andrew’s expression told him he was feeling far too guilty and lost.

“I slept with lots of women, David,” he said.

“She was dead for ten years, Andrew,” he said, raising his voice. “What were supposed to do? Stay faithful to a dead person?”

“I don’t know,” Andrew said. He choked back some tears. “I don’t know.”

“Andrew, you were eighteen years old. You had a lot of life to live. This is crazy,” David back up to the bureau.

“David,” Alex said looking over at him.

“No, I won’t let you do this.” David quickly crouched down, looking at Andrew. “You are a man, you have needs. That is all. Let it go.”

“It’s not just that.” Andrew paused for a moment.

“What?” David said. Alexander moved in closer to them.

“She lied to me.”

“She didn’t know that you had been told she was dead,” Alex said. Andrew turned to him.

“Yes, she had, Alex. She lied in that hospital room,” Andrew said firmly, his voice breaking again. “She said she didn’t have a choice, but she did. I gave her one.” He began to break down as he continued.

“That last night we talked...she was so upset on the phone. She knew then that she wasn’t coming back. I could hear the fear in her voice. I told her to tell me, but she wouldn’t. She said there was nothing she could do anymore.” He swallowed and tried to stop the tears that kept rising to the surface.

“I knew it. I knew it then. I knew it when they didn’t find her body over that bridge. I knew she would never have done that. I just didn’t believe...that she could...”

“Andrew,” Alex said, leaning down. “Her parents didn’t tell her that they had told you she was dead.”

“Yes, they did. I don’t know when, but she knew,” Andrew said.

“After she left the treatment center last week,” Alex replied back. “She didn’t know until she had left.”

Andrew suddenly laughed. Alex looked confused. David looked up at Andrew.

“God, she’s good,” Andrew said, shaking his head and standing up. “She always was.”

He turned to Alexander and walked up to him.

“Alex, she was told. She spoke to her sister. She asked about me. She wanted to know how I was doing and Cat told her,” Andrew walked away from Alex and paced in the room. His voice became more sarcastic as he continued.

“I was handling her death very well, she said. I didn’t cry. I didn’t get upset. Cat told her I was fine.” He looked at Alex intensely. “And she believed her.”

“How do you know this?” David asked, suddenly.

Andrew turned to him.

“I spoke with Cat on the phone two days ago.” He smiled a bit and shook his head, “if you just let her talk, she says all kinds of things.”

He walked to the wall on the opposite side of where Alex and David now stood. He leaned against it.

“You know, I don’t even care that Camille lied to me. I wish I could. I wish I could hate her, but deep down, I can’t.”

He slid to the floor, placing his head in his hands and crying uncontrollably.

David went to him, but passed by Alex stating, “Alex, call his father.”

Alex looked at David for a moment.

“Just do it,” David said and went to Andrew.
He was shaking from the tears.
Alex left the room doing exactly what David told
him to.

11

The King Enters

oseph Whiete lived only a short
distance from his son

– one hour and a half to be exact. But compared to San Francisco it could have been halfway around the world for all that Joseph knew about his son’s life in the past ten years. He was lucky to have seen him once every few months and sometimes, a few times a year. Although they had been close when Andrew was younger it hadn’t been the same since they had buried Camille and he had left for college. It was a regret that Joseph always had. He missed Andrew and he never failed to tell his son that when he did talk to him.

Many people had always commented that they shared many physical features and no one who ever saw them together, younger, or now, could deny they were family. Joseph’s brown hair, though when he was a child did have a sandy shade of blond, like his son, had gained

some gray in it, however that proved to be more distinguished than a problem. Joseph stood the same height as his son, but if asked he said he had a half-inch on Andrew and when they stood together some people could swear there was a slight difference. The physical characteristics did continue on their faces.

Joseph, now 52, still retained certain youthfulness about his eyes, the same light green color as Andrew's, though many would say, a more hazel color. He had a handsome face both younger and now more mature. The lines weren't as strong as Andrew's, but the similarities were striking.

"Hey, Mr. Whiete," Alexander said as he greeted him in the driveway. David stayed with Andrew upstairs.

"Alexander," Joseph said, getting out of his sensible car. His usual low tone was in his voice. It had frightened Alex a bit when Andrew and he were younger.

"How are you?" Alex tried to make conversation, something he wasn't too good at when moments of strife occurred in Andrew's life.

During the funeral, Alex had been so upset by Cami's death. He had cried quite a bit on Joseph's shoulder. That and many other times of embarrassment for Alex made this meeting awkward.

"I don't know. You tell me how my son is and I'll tell you how I'm doing," Joseph said, simply. Much like Andrew did.

"Something's happened," Alex said, carefully.

“Yes, you said that on the phone, Alexander. Yet you haven’t told me what.”

“I think you should talk to Andrew,” Alex said moving aside to let him pass.

“I agree.”

He walked past Alex into the house.

“He’s upstairs,” Alex called from outside.

Joseph looked over at him for a moment, sighed and walked back outside. Alex looked confused as he walked up to him and reached out hugging him. Alex hugged him back. It lasted a mere moment, but Alex smiled at him quickly.

“You all right?” Joseph said to the man before him.

“Yea. Thanks, Mr. Whiete.”

Joseph smiled at him and went back inside. His smile faded as he walked up the stairs of Andrew’s house directly to his son’s bedroom. He had seen the house throughout the years and always found it amazing how much space there was. He had commented to Andrew once about all the rooms, but Andrew didn’t seem to mind, so he had let it lie.

When he walked inside, he saw David, a friend he had met only twice, but still liked a great deal. There was something about the man that had made Joseph feel better that they were friends. He was a pain in the ass most of the time, Joseph was certain, but Andrew really enjoyed his company and that was not an easy task with his son. Best friends weren’t something Andrew sought

after. This David Ross was different and Joseph had known it from the start.

David was sitting on the floor opposite Andrew. Andrew was lying on the floor, turned away from David. There was a pillow under his head that he was clutching tightly. A pain that he hadn't felt since Andrew's mother died shot through Joseph's heart for his son.

David looked up at him as he entered.

"Hello, Mr. Whiete," David said, casually and gave him a small smile.

Joseph nodded back.

Andrew's head shot up as he looked up at his father. The look on Andrew's face, lost, defeated, alone, broke his father's heart.

"Andrew..." Joseph said and started towards him.

But Andrew was already on his feet going towards him. He fell against his father as Joseph pulled his arms around him.

David quietly stood up and left the room.

"Dad..." Andrew said, crying as he tried to speak.

"Whatever it is, it will get better," Joseph said, comfortingly.

Andrew's hold on his father lessened a bit. Joseph moved him to the bed and sat down taking Andrew with him.

"What happened?" Joseph said, softly as he looked at his son. "You look terrible."

Andrew laughed a bit and pulled away from his father to look at him.

“Sorry,” Andrew said, his voice hoarse and broken. He cleared his throat.

“Alexander looks like he lost his puppy and you...I’m not sure what you look like, but I’m sure there’s an explanation,” Joseph said.

Andrew nodded.

“You won’t believe it,” Andrew finally said.

“Try me. I’m open to possibilities. Your mother just thought I wasn’t,” he smiled.

“Mom...” Andrew said, looking up, tears started in his eyes again.

“None of that, Andrew. It’ll make me start,” Joseph said, trying to hold back his own tears.

“This is about you,” he looked down at his son, “and no using your mother to get out of it.” Andrew looked away.

“I’m onto you, Andrew. You change subjects to avoid talking about yourself,” Andrew looked up at him. “That’s right. I’m your father. I know you better than you think.”

“Cami’s alive, Dad.”

The expression on his father’s face was controlled, but he could tell it shocked him.

“I’m not crazy.”

“I would never think that, Andrew.”

“I would, after the last few days I’ve had,” he breathed a bit.

“How did you know?”

“She showed up,” he said, almost laughing.

“She showed up here, at my house. Just appeared. One day she was dead. The next day she was in my living room.” He put his hands in the air. “I don’t know what to do.”

Joseph took a breath of his own and sat back a little on the bed, looking directly at Andrew.

“It’s crazy. And a miracle. And I’m...” Andrew tried not to cry, but he couldn’t help it. The tears just wouldn’t stop once they started.

“Where has she been?” Joseph asked after a few moments.

“Her parents sent her away to a treatment center to get better,” Andrew explained.

“And she didn’t know that they had said she was dead?” Joseph asked, surprise was in his voice.

“She did. I don’t know when, but she knew. She showed up at Alexander’s office first and tried to call me, but I was out of town and...” He stopped speaking. His mind was working again for the first time in four days.

“That’s why she was so upset that day,” Andrew said more to himself to his father.

“Cami?”

“No, Catherine,” he said taking another breath and clearing his throat again. His voice was returning a little.

“She called me before I went to the cabin with David...”

“You went to the cabin...with David?” His father asked, quickly.

“Yea. It was nice, Dad. I really missed that place.” Fresh tears came, but he held them back.

Joseph smiled.

“But Cat called me just as I was leaving and I went to see her,” he looked up at his father, “I know what you going to say, Dad, but she sounded...”

“Upset,” Joseph said. Andrew nodded. Joseph shook his head, but let Andrew continue.

“She told me she was sorry, but she didn’t make any sense,” he took another breath and pulled his leg up on the bed, pulling it in with his hand.

It was a motion Joseph had seen him do a thousand times.

“She wanted to tell me then, she even said Cami was alive, but then she tried to...make me think it was just her memories,” Andrew said, shaking his own head, “and I believed her. God, I’m a fool.”

“No, you’re not,” Joseph said, firmly. “Andrew, how could you have known? Why would you have thought anything?”

“I know.” He looked away.

Joseph put his hand on Andrew’s arm. Andrew turned back to him.

“It wasn’t your fault, Andrew. None of this is your fault,” he said, firmly looking into Andrew’s eyes. “You hear me?”

Andrew nodded.

“So they took her away to a treatment center?” Andrew nodded again. “What was wrong with her?”

“Well, she didn’t remember things and...you know how she used to get upset when Mom used to knit?”

Joseph nodded in remembrance.

“She used to cry a lot, Dad,” he said. He had never told anyone this about Camille.

“About what, Andrew?”

“She hated going home. She was scared not to. She never said that her parents did anything, but I always got the feeling that,” he leaned in a bit as he continued, “she was frightened of her mother.”

“Why did you think that?” Joseph asked watching Andrew as he spoke.

Andrew looked down for a moment and back to his father.

“I don’t know. She used to grab onto my arm really tight when I would bring her home and then she would just linger at the door. I told her she should go inside so her parents wouldn’t be upset if she was late, but she never listened. She just stood there waiting for something. I would kiss her goodnight. Then kiss her again,” he shook his head at the memory.

“I don’t know, it’s like...”

“She didn’t want you to leave.”

“Yea, but it was more,” he said, breathing through the last statement.

“Did you ever ask her?”

“Lots of times, but she didn’t act like any of it ever happened. She just said she liked me being around,” he shrugged his shoulders.

“And that you made you feel good?”

“Yea. It did.”

He moved slightly on the bed.

“I don’t know, Dad, maybe I am going crazy.”

“Nope. No such luck,” he said smiling at him.

Andrew’s eyes went distant again as Joseph watched him get lost.

“Andrew,” he said, taking his hand, “we are going to get through this. I promise you.”

Andrew nodded, but a tear fell from his eye as he looked at his father.

“Why didn’t she tell me?” He said, looking up at Joseph. “She could have told me anything.”

“Because she was afraid. Because she didn’t know what to do. Because, Andrew,” he waited until Andrew looked up at him, “she was only eighteen years old. She was just a young girl and the world can very frightening to the young. You know that.”

Andrew nodded.

“I could have helped her, but I didn’t know what to ask,” Andrew started. Joseph stopped him.

“Andrew, you were the same age. How can you expect anyone that age to understand?”

“I should have tried harder.”

“Stop it. Listen to me, I know what you are feeling, but this is not going to help Camille,” he said, causing Andrew to look at him quickly. “Isn’t that what you want to do?”

Andrew looked away for a moment.

“Yes.”

“Then it’s time we get you ready to do that.”

“Dad,” Andrew said as he stopped his father from standing up, “I don’t know if I can...”

“Right now, I am only concerned with my son. For once, Andrew, take care of yourself...first.”

Joseph smiled at him and placed a hand on his shoulder. Andrew nodded.

It was December 24th, Christmas Eve. Andrew was sitting in a hotel room in New York City. His father and him had come a few days ago based on the assumption that the West Coast Donut chain of *Krispy Kreme* coffee was better than the East Coast’s *Dunkin Donuts* coffee. Joseph had set the hypothesis forth a few days earlier when they were sitting in his living room in California, which was only a day after he had arrived. It might have sounded ridiculous to anyone else who weren’t Joseph and Andrew Whiete at the moment, however to them, it made perfect sense. For Joseph it was a light-hearted way to get his son away from the chaos of the last several weeks and for Andrew it was a bit of normalcy, which he desperately needed.

Since then, a whirlwind had happened. At least it felt like that to the twenty-eight year old about to turn twenty-nine, tomorrow morning.

His father had never seen New York City, not even when he lived in Vermont. He wasn't much of a city type of guy, or so Andrew had thought, but he took to it rather quickly. They had dined, went ice-skating at Rockefeller Center, saw the *Christmas Spectacular* at Radio City Music Hall and shopped. This included taking all the cards at the Angel Tree at *The Gap* and buying gifts for the needy children listed there. Andrew taught his father about good service and his *Centurion Credit Card*, or commonly known as the *Black Card*. His father hadn't understood that the *Black Card* has its own privileges. There's the ones they advertise and then the ones they don't, but everyone who is in the circle knows them, including Andrew Whiete.

Complimentary drinks, tickets, hotel rooms, companion airline tickets, luxury car rentals, the best of everything. *If you had it, you deserved it.* Or so the saying goes. His father was fascinated with it and Andrew had to admit, it was fun showing him; more fun than he had in a long time.

Now, they were both exhausted and his father had gone to bed a little while ago, leaving him with his own thoughts. He picked up his cell phone on the table in the sitting room of the hotel and dialed Cat's number. That was where Cami was supposed to be staying. *It was Christmas Eve, he thought.*

“Hello?” Cat said.

“Cat, it’s me. Is she there?” Andrew said, quickly.

There was a pause.

“Cat? It’s important.”

“I’m sorry, Andrew. She went back home.”

“What?”

“She wanted to be with Mom and Dad,” Cat said, a bit hesitating.

“Come on...Cat,” he said, annoyed. “What happened?”

“She thought you hated her. She was a wreck. She didn’t know what to do, so I called Mom and Dad. They came and got her,” she said, quickly. “That’s it. Sorry. I’ve got to go.”

The phone hung up in his ear.

Leave it to Cat to help, he said to himself, disgusted. He dialed the number, shocked he had remembered it, but once a year, he did send a card to the Moores on the anniversary of Cami’s death. He was certain they had thrown all those away since they knew she wasn’t dead. He tried to listen to his father and not feel foolish, but the memories of trying to keep everyone sane during the funeral just flooded him. *How could they? How could Catherine? What kind of people were they?*

By the time, the phone picked up on the other side he was ready for a fight.

“Hello?” Cami said, stopping all thoughts Andrew had.

“Camille,” he said, almost in a whisper.

“Andrew,” she replied, her voice held a breathless quality to it.

“I... wanted to talk to you,” he said, slowly.

“Yes,” he heard the hope in her voice and somewhere deep inside he smiled.

“Listen, princess, I want you to listen... with your heart, do you understand?” It was something he had said many times when they were together.

“Yes, Andrew,” she replied, just as she always did.

“No matter what happens, the fights, the yelling, or even the things we say to each other. Know this,” he paused briefly. “I love you, Camille. I have always loved you. That will never change. Never.” He paused again. He could hear her breathing slowly on the phone.

“Everything will be all right, princess,” he said, softly. She took in a breath.

“Merry Christmas.”

“Merry Christmas, Andrew,” she replied, “and Happy Birthday.”

“Thanks.”

He hung up and all the anger he had felt, the sadness he had endured, the hope he had lost was gone. Completely gone and what replaced it felt wonderful.

Quickly he dialed another number and waited for the person on the other end to pick up.

“David, I need you to do me a big favor.”

Camille opened the door at her parent’s house and the sight before her eyes astonished, surprised, and shocked her all at the same time. She couldn’t speak. She could barely breath. Her hands flew to her mouth and somehow she managed a gasp. Then she heard a scream. It came from ahead of her.

“Oh my god, Cami,” Cat said, running up to the porch. She had come over for Christmas day to spend with her family, or more accurately, her sister.

“It’s from Andrew, isn’t it?” Cat said almost in a whisper.

Cami still couldn’t speak as they both looked down at the perfectly wrapped large present there. It was wrapped in Princess wrapping paper with a large pink bow on it and no card.

“Well, don’t just stand there. Open it,” Cat said excitedly.

“It’s what he did the Christmas before I left,” she said, breathless.

“I know. I know,” Cat said, hugging her sister. Cami was too numb to feel it.

“He’s wonderful.” Cat’s eyes lit up as she said it. Cami looked over at her for a long moment.

“Cat, you knew long before they told me, right?” Cami asked, suspicious covered her pretty green eyes.

It was an expression that Cat wasn’t used to seeing, but then again, ever since Cami showed up at her

place almost two weeks ago, she hadn't been acting normal. At least not the Cami that Cat knew before.

"What are you talking about? Open the present," she said, laughing a bit.

"All that time you told me he was fine. That he didn't get upset. That he had dates and women and he had moved on," Cami said, sadly. "You didn't even know him, did you?"

"So I didn't know what he did for a living? He was secretive."

"You never talked to Alexander?" Cami accused.

"Of course I did, but he wouldn't say and I just..."

"You just didn't think about it," Cami answered. "You never think."

"Look, I had to act like you were dead, Cami, what choice did I have?" She turned away from her sister.

"We all have choices, Cat," Cami said.

"Well," Cat turned back, "you weren't here. You didn't know how bad it was. How much..."

"You wanted him..." Cami interjected.

"Yes." She stammered.

"He wouldn't even look at me that way. All he thought of me as was your little sister. God, I hated you," she said, turning away again.

"Cat..." Cami said moving to her and holding her arms, facing her. Cat looked up. Cami's eyes held tears and compassion.

“I’m sorry,” Cami said, softly. “It must have been hard. I wish I had been here. You don’t know how much I wish I had.” Tears fell down her cheeks.

“But you’re better now, Cami. Mom and Dad said so.” Cat said, through her tears.

“Oh Cat...” she hugged her sister tightly.

After a moment, she released the hug and looked at her.

“Let’s open the present, ok?” Cami said, smiling. Cami’s green eyes sparkled in the morning light. That was the sister Cat knew.

“Yea,” Cat said, smiling back at her.

They both dug in and tore apart the paper, laughing. Underneath a large amount of wrapping paper was a Barbie Princess Dream House, complete with an elevator and two dolls. One with red hair named *Chelsea* and the other with Cat’s brown hair named *Elise*.

“He got me one...” Cat said, shocked and thrilled.

“Of course he did. He would never forget about you,” Cami said, sweetly and hugged her sister one more time.

“What’s going to happen now, Cami?”

“I don’t know, but I do know that as long as I have you...and we have the Barbie Princess Dream House...” she smiled, Cat smiled back, “we might be just fine.”

Cat laughed a bit and then her eyes lowered.

“Don’t get sad on me today. It’s Christmas,” Cami said, smiling and handing her the doll, “and you know how much I love Christmas.”

Cat nodded and went inside. Cami stood on the porch for a moment, deep in thought. Then she bent down and picked up the red-haired doll holding it to her.

“Thank you,” she whispered, hoping in her heart he had heard her.

“Tell me the way to a woman’s heart is not through a Barbie Princess Dream House,” David said on the phone to Andrew.

Andrew laughed as he walked inside his house. His father was close behind with one of the new luggage pieces they had bought at *Tiffany’s* in New York City. They had left several days ago with no luggage.

“No, I don’t think so, David,” he replied. “But I guess it depends on the woman.”

“Did she like it?” David asked. Excitement was in his voice, which surprised Andrew.

David didn’t seem too fond of the fact that he had to get the present and wrap it and drop it off. Although, Andrew was certain he got some salesgirl to wrap it for him. Not to mention that he hadn’t said much at all about Camille and what he thought of everything.

“I don’t know. I just got back,” Andrew said. “We’re walking in now.”

“You sound better.”

“I feel better,” Andrew put down his luggage and took the two bags from his father, most of them filled with gifts for friends.

His mother’s family were all gone, the last brother died five years ago. His Uncle Eugene, but everyone called him ‘Bobby’ from his middle name, Robert. Although there were some distant relatives on his father’s side that lived too far away, they never gave gifts. They did exchange Christmas Cards when he was younger but he didn’t know if his father still did that.

More gifts were inside one of his own bags for Cami, for Cat, five for David and three for Alexander.

He had planned on attending a Christmas Dinner with Alexander, David and few other friends at the *Regal*, but he missed that. David said he went with Alexander and no one died, so that was a step in the right direction, he thought.

The biggest thing Andrew was thinking about all the way home today was Camille. It didn’t occur to him that he had a date tomorrow night until Alexander called.

His father and he had been enjoying a dinner at his house, after they picked up supplies and returned with them, when the phone call came.

“Hi,” he said. His voice was back to its normal pleasantness.

“Hi,” Alexander replied, more gloom on the other line. “How was the trip?”

“You sound awful. What happened now?” Andrew said, trying not to sound disappointed.

He had been doing well these past few days. He didn't want it spoiled, not yet.

"I didn't cancel Marisa Grenning," he said and paused.

"I see," Andrew replied, a clear business tone went back into his voice. "Fine."

"I know you were supposed to meet with her, but with everything going on..."

"I understand, Alex. Email me the details," he said.

"Andrew I can try to...it's just she's so picky and she only likes you..." Alexander stammered.

"It's not a problem. Thank you," he hung up the phone and turned to his father.

"Everything ok, Andrew?" Joseph asked, eating the remainder of his dinner.

"Yea, it's fine, Dad," Andrew said and sat down, picking up the napkin he had put down on the table a few minutes earlier. He placed it in his lap and picked up the wine glass in front of him, taking a sip.

He let out a sigh he didn't notice. Joseph did.

"What happened? I know that face," Joseph said. "And I hate it when you say it's fine. I always think the world is about to cave in."

"We are in California," Andrew said, giving him a quick smile. Joseph wasn't amused.

"Is this about that business Alexander and you have?" His father asked. Andrew looked over at him.

“Yes, I know about it, Andrew. Alexander left a business card at my house once.” Andrew watched his father. “I called it to find out what it was.”

“Are you upset?” Andrew asked, feeling ten years old again.

“Upset? It’s your life, Andrew,” he said, causing Andrew to sigh again.

“I hate it when you do that, Dad. I didn’t ask for permission. I asked if you were upset,” Andrew stood up, taking his glass with him to the living room. Joseph followed.

Andrew sat down on the sofa. Joseph sat next to him.

“Look, it’s none of business how you make your money,” Joseph said.

“You’ve done well. This is a nice house you’ve designed and built, Andrew. You seem to be doing well with finances...”

“But...” Andrew said, turning to him. “I know there’s a ‘but’ in that sentence, Dad.”

“Actually I just don’t understand how it works. I mean I know it’s legitimate and all. Well, I know it can be.”

“Dad!” Andrew stood up.

Joseph laughed. Andrew looked shocked at him.

“I was joking, Andrew. I know all about your *Midnight Services*. I’m just a little confused on the actual procedure. I mean it is safe, right?” Andrew looked at

him. "Safe, Andrew. No crazy women who run you down with a car or something."

Andrew smiled, "I drive usually, Dad."

Joseph shook his head in the same manner that his son did, often.

"Go ahead, make fun of me," Joseph said.

"I'm not making fun of you, Dad, it's just...what's to understand? They want an escort and I take them out for the evening. Sometimes it's for a longer period of time. Either way I get paid...well. I might add," Andrew sat down.

"So how much is it to be escorted by my son?" Joseph said, looking at him.

Andrew looked down.

"Don't be embarrassed. I'm sure it's not enough," Joseph smiled and went to take a sip of wine.

"Five thousand dollars for two hours," Andrew said, causing Joseph to cough on the wine.

"Dad, are you all right?"

"Five thousand dollars..." Joseph said, unbelieving, "and you just escort them on a date?"

"Just a date at a public place with many other people around," Andrew explained.

"Are they crazy?"

"Probably, but not in the clinical sense," Andrew replied.

"They should be," Joseph said, shocked.

"Your son isn't worth five thousand dollars?" Andrew said, joking.

“Not if they really knew him,” Joseph mocked back.

“Hey -- I’m crushed, Dad,” Andrew chided. After a moment, he turned back to his father. “It’s crazy, isn’t it?”

“Yes.” He thought for a moment and then asked, “how much more do you get for trips away?”

Andrew looked down, sheepishly, not really wanting to tell his father.

“Oh, come on, I all ready know about the five thousand, how much more could it be?” Joseph said.

“Fifteen thousand to one hundred and twenty-five thousand...”

“One hundred and twenty-five thousand?” Joseph said hiding nothing in his voice.

“That was a special circumstance. One time thing,” Andrew said quickly.

“What did you have to do that would require one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars?”

Andrew stood up and walked to the fireplace, poking the fire. It was really just a distraction. The fire was blazing away.

“Go to Beer Creek, Iowa,” Andrew said with his back to his father.

There was a long pause while Joseph thought about it.

“Yep, that’s about right...” Andrew looked back at him, confused. “I would ask a lot to go to Beer Creek, Iowa.” Andrew tried not to smile.

Joseph just laughed.

Cami stood looking at her father, Thomas Moore, for a few moments before saying what she wanted to say during this entire conversation between them.

“Honey, you have to understand. Andrew is not good for you. We have been through this before,” Thomas said, holding his daughter’s hands as he spoke.

“I know you would like it to be different. So would I. But we have to do what the doctor says. He knows best, honey.”

“Your father is correct, Cami,” Diane Moore said, walking into the living room. “We simply can’t take any chances....”

“This time,” Cami said, quickly.

“You are ungrateful,” Diane said, cutting her eyes at her daughter. “Do you have any idea what we all had to sacrifice for you?”

“Diane...” Thomas began.

“For me? For me, Momma?” She stood up and started to walk away.

Her mother grabbed her arm, hard. Cami grimaced at the pain that shot through her arm.

“You listen here, you spoiled little girl,” Diane started.

Cami looked towards her father. His eyes were lowered as he always did when her mother spoke to her this way.

“If you think for one moment after everything we have gone through that you are going to go away with that boy. You are sorely mistaken. He is no good. No good for you and certainly no good for anyone else. You should have never seen him again. Leave...it...be.”

Diane finished and let go of her arm, walking out of the room.

“Thomas, come now,” she said in the hallway. “She needs time to think.”

Thomas got up and went towards the door.

“Daddy,” Cami said as he passed, “don’t let her do this again.”

“You’ll be fine, honey,” he leaned over and kissed her on the forehead, lingering there for a moment. Then stepped out of the room, closing the door behind him.

Cami heard the lock go into place and walked to her bed, flinging herself on it, crying.

Something she had been all too used to in her childhood.

Are you ok? Are you ok? Are you hurt?

The words came back to her like it was yesterday. She knew he said them, because he had told her that he was there that day. She knew it was his voice, because she heard it again in high school. She heard him and she knew.

Cami sat up on her bed quickly and tried to think. *Remember...* she said inside her mind. *Remember...* but nothing came, as usual. All she heard were the words:

Are you ok? Are you ok? Are you hurt?

She pounded on her pillow and cried again.

12

At the Ball

“*I*’ll be there, Marisa. On time,”

Andrew said as pleasantly as he could muster.

His father left the next morning and he had been preparing since then for this *date*. It was to be his last. He had told Alexander that he was quitting.

Alexander didn’t take the news too well. He fell into his living room chair and stayed for the better part of the morning trying to explain it would be difficult to cancel all of his *dates* so fast, but Andrew was determined.

Eventually, Alexander gave up, knowing he wouldn’t win. He had seen it too often while they were growing up. He left a few hours ago.

Since then, Andrew had been on errands all around the city, including manicure, facial, buying a new suit, anything to keep his mind focused. He didn't want to think about tonight. He just wanted it over. Then he could get on with his life. *Just one more date*, he kept telling himself.

"That would be fine," he concluded the conversation and hung up his phone.

"Done," he said to himself.

By six-thirty, he was ready. He looked at himself in the mirror in the dining room on his way out the door, something he rarely did.

"Not bad," he said to himself and then caught his eye on the Grandfather Clock that read: 6:15 PM.

He debated fixing it and then shook his head.

"Go ahead, keep your own time, I'm not worrying about it anymore," he said as he walked out the door. A small victory won.

He pulled up to Marisa Grenning's beachfront home two minutes before seven o'clock, their predetermined time. Stepping out of his Porsche, he noticed she had gotten new flowers planted since he had seen her in September. These flowers weren't any better, but it didn't surprise him. He walked up the grand stone steps of the Greek Revival House with its structured column design and wide steps.

“Hello, Jenkins,” Andrew said pleasantly, greeting Marisa’s butler and if truth be told, caretaker for her.

The older gentlemen dressed in full butler regalia, nodded at him.

“Good evening, Mr. Whiete. It is good to see you again,” Jenkins said, letting him pass through the doors.

The foyer of white marble and green swirling designs at the corners shined from everywhere. The sweeping ‘Gone with the Wind’ style staircase without the red carpet outlining the steps towered up in front of him. In a traditional Greek revival the staircases should come from two angles meeting in the center, but Marisa didn’t care. She just wanted the full staircase, nice and large for her entrance, which she made every time he had come. *It would be the same tonight*, he thought.

“May I get you something to drink, perhaps, Mr. Whiete?” Jenkins offered.

It didn’t matter how many times he had refused such an offer to Jenkins, he always asked - *the epitome of service*.

“No, thank you, Jenkins. I am fine,” Andrew replied. Jenkins smiled briefly.

“Very good, sir. Miss Grenning will be arriving shortly,” he added and off he went through the sliding doors to the sitting area and, Andrew presumed the kitchen. Jenkins could often be found there.

“Darling,” Marisa said, as if on cue from the top of the staircase.

Dressed in a low-cut white sparkling evening gown tailored and suited to her shape, which even Andrew had to admit was very nice for a forty-six year old woman. Her brownish hair had been dyed redder for the season he was certain and was swept up, while tendrils outlined her face.

As she walked down the grand staircase, Andrew knew she had worn blue contacts. Normally her eyes were brown. Her makeup was dark and emphasized outlining her good features. Although with the blue contacts, her eyes were more unreal than even a moment earlier.

“Oh, I’m so grateful you didn’t wear a tuxedo, darling,” she said as she finished her walk and approached him, remaining on the first step as to be a bit higher than him. She always liked that.

“I am glad, Marisa,” he said with charm and elegance. What she expected of him.

Andrew reached out and took her hand, kissing it. She turned away as if to blush, but Andrew knew Marisa Grenning never blushed.

“I love this outfit, darling. It fits you well,” she said, smiling, showing her perfect white teeth amidst her reddest of red lipsticks.

He smiled at her compliment and held her hand while she walked down the last step.

“You are beautiful tonight,” Andrew whispered near her ear.

She turned away again, but laughed a bit.

“Oh, you do flatter me,” she said.

Marisa’s voice wasn’t high pitched or low toned, but flat and even with a bit of emphasis with a slight break, placed on certain words, such as ‘flatter’.

“Darling, we must go,” she said, quickly.

“Please get Jenkins to bring me my gold shawl, wouldn’t you, Andrew dearest?”

“Right away, Marisa,” he broke away to retrieve Jenkins and her gold shawl.

Andrew dearest. That was the one phrase that caused him to grind his teeth. He always despised it from the first moment she first used it, nearly one year ago.

Within a few moments he had Jenkins and the shawl. He gently placed it about her. She placed her hand over his as he did so, kissing into the air towards him with appreciation.

He smiled and thought of how many reasons he should not be doing this. How many reasons he should have refused this *date*. How many ways he could put her out of her misery.

In this business, Andrew had found women who are annoying, frustrating, even assaulting, but Marisa Grenning – she beat all of them out. Her small gestures of ‘kindness’ and ‘sweetness’ were absolutely what motivated him (and Alexander) to charge her well over the regular rate for his services. She never did anything out and out to break the contract and yet, somehow managed to make him feel like she did. After their first *date*, he told Alexander to raise the rate next time. He

did. Marisa paid it. This continued on through this *date*, being their fourth.

And final. Andrew said to himself. *Thank God.*

He held his arm for her to take, she did so quickly and placed her other hand on his arm, squeezing a bit in the process. Then she smiled up at him. He smiled back. Out they went.

“Have a wonderful time, Miss,” Jenkins said from the door.

Marisa turned slightly, waving goodbye and continued walking with Andrew.

“Oh, I just adore this car, Andrew,” she said as he opened the door and he held her hand to slide inside. “It is pure fun.”

He leaned down to her, “I am so glad,” he said, softly. She smiled and gave another air kiss towards her.

He gently reached down and picked up the bottom of her dress, placing it inside the car. She laughed.

“You always remember that, darling,” she said, emphasizing ‘remember’.

He smiled and closed the door.

“Oh, go faster, darling,” she said as soon as they hit the road.

“We don’t want to be in jail for the party, Marisa,” Andrew said, calmly throwing her a smile.

“Oh, I don’t know. Stuck in jail with you all night?” She said, dreamily, smiling over at him. “What a thought.”

He concentrated on driving as she endlessly talked about people she liked, disliked, events she had attended recently and how awful it was that he wasn't always available for her.

"Oh, I know, Andrew dearest, you can't *always* be available for little 'ol me," she said, looking at a small lipstick mirror and applying more red than was ever humanly needed. At least by Andrew's account.

"Just sometimes, it would nice to have you all to myself," she said. "But you are busy, busy, busy, I know, darling."

The one good thing about Marisa was she never discussed their arrangements. She never mentioned a single word about his line of work at all. She liked the illusion to be complete. She completely behaved as if they were *dating*, as if they were in a relationship and that he went simply to work when he wasn't with her. That part was good and bad. Andrew felt she might have become too clinging, but she proved him wrong. She simply liked the illusion. Usually that was fine with him. Even helpful, sometimes, but tonight, he just wasn't into creating illusions, and certainly not one of dating Marisa Grenning.

"Do you know, darling, I just got back from a trip to Paris," she began when she was done with her lipstick.

"How nice."

"Well, yes and no. The perfumer that sold my beautiful *RoseWood* has gone out of business. Can you

believe it? Now, I must go into the hideous tourist area of the city to buy it.”

“Why not go to La Grandeur in Monmartre?”

Andrew asked, politely.

She looked at him and smiled.

“You are a lifesaver, darling!” She exclaimed. “I can’t believe I didn’t think of that? My goodness, my head has completely become useless around you.”

Andrew stopped the car outside their destination, *The Gardens* in Atherton.

“Shall we, Marisa?” Andrew said after he handed the key to the parking attendant and offered his arm.

“Yes, I am starving,” she rambled, taking his arm. “These days I swear I will become a horse, I certainly eat like one. Can you notice, darling?”

She stopped walking and stood facing Andrew.

“Not at all,” Andrew said pleasantly.

“Oh, *thank* you, darling,” she said, smiling as they continued walking under the awning towards the two doormen opening the doors for them.

She stopped after she arrived inside and turned to Andrew in a panic.

“I forgot...” she started to say.

He leaned down a bit, “I will take care of it, Marisa.”

She smiled up at him sweetly. He walked her to the lobby area where a bar was available. Walking up to

the bartender, he pulled out a hundred dollar bill and laid it down on the bar before him.

“Please give Miss Grenning anything she would like,” he said.

The bartender covered the bill with the glass he was washing and slipped it into his hand, smiling and nodding at Andrew.

“As you wish, sir.”

Marisa had been looking at the Christmas Decorations still displayed in the large lobby with her back to Andrew and the bar. He walked up behind her.

“I will be right back,” he said. “Please have something to drink while you’re waiting.”

She looked up and smiled, giving another air kiss. He smiled back and walked away.

“A martini, dry,” he heard her say to the bartender as he walked away.

Andrew walked up to the entrance of the hall to a young woman who was checking people in. He waited patiently for her to be done with the couple before him and then smiled...one of his best smiles. She smiled back.

“I was wondering if you could help me,” he said softly, leaning down a bit to her as he spoke.

“Yes, of course, sir,” she turned slightly away, actually blushing.

“My friend seems to have forgotten her invitation,” his voice was low and certainly affecting the woman before him... greatly.

She dropped the clipboard she was holding.

“I’ll get that,” he said, leaning down and retrieving it for her.

“What...is her name, sir?” She stammered.

“Miss Marisa Grenning,” Andrew answered.

The girl looked down her list.

“Here you are, Marisa Grenning plus guest,” she said, smiling at him. “You must be the guest.”

He smiled back at her.

“I would presume so.”

“Well, I would be happy to give you Miss Grenning’s table number and seating arrangement.”

“I am sorry for the problem,” Andrew said.

“Not a problem at all,” the woman said, still smiling. “Oh,” she said after a moment, “you are both at Table 4 it is to your left the first table in front.”

“I will retrieve Miss Grenning and we will be back.” He paused and then looked at her. “What is your name, please?”

“Sarah,” she said.

“Well, Sarah, you have been most helpful. Thank you. And Miss Grenning thanks you as well.”

“Not a problem, sir. That is what I am here for.”

He smiled and walked back to Marisa.

Marisa did not acknowledge Sarah as they passed her on their way into the banquet hall. Even when she said ‘enjoy your evening, Miss Grenning.’

Andrew turned back to her as Marisa went slightly ahead and winked at her. She smiled.

“Oh my goodness, they have outdone themselves this year, darling,” Marisa said as they entered inside.

The theme was obviously *The Islands* as everything was decorated with a Caribbean flavor. Andrew assumed the food would be the same.

Great, he thought. Marisa will hate that.

A few minutes later they were seated at their table. They were late as everyone else at the table were already present and seated.

“Hello, Andrew,” a woman to Andrew’s right said as he pushed in the chair for Marisa.

“Good evening, Miss Carson,” Andrew replied.

“Please call me Lynn,” she said, smiling up at him as he sat down next to her.

“It is good to see you again.”

“And you,” Lynn said, giving him a once over with her eyes.

“Lynn,” Marisa said, leaning over to her.

“Behave.”

Andrew caught in the middle of the exchange, simply laid his napkin on his lap and tried to ignore it.

“Marisa, sweetheart, how have you been?”

“I have been fine, except for this weather. It’s horrible. Too cold for California.”

“Well, it is December, Marisa, love,” said a man across the table from Andrew.

“Andrew, I have a question for you?”

Andrew looked over at him. He didn’t much like Paul Nelson, an heir to his father’s old money.

“How many blondes does it take to drain a water pipe?”

“Paul, stop it,” his wife, Helen said, hitting him on the arm. “Hello, Andrew, Marisa, it’s good to see you.”

“You too, Helen,” Marisa said.

“How is your leg?” Andrew asked after a moment.

“Oh,” Helen turned to Andrew, “you are so kind to remember. I’m fine now.”

“Back to her usual nagging self,” Paul chimed in with.

She threw him a sideways glance and then turned back to Andrew and smiled.

“Thank you for asking,” she said.

“Well, who have we here?” Marisa said, turning to the couple seating next to Paul and Helen.

Andrew knew exactly who they were: Alison Dupree and her escort for the evening, Jason Redmond, or formerly, Jason Richens. Jason had worked with *Midnight* for two weeks and decided after his first *date* to change his name. Jason had recognized Andrew as they approached the table, but so far he was discreet. Andrew only knew Jason from his picture and some ridiculous story that Alexander told him about him losing his *date* once. Andrew just hoped his discretion would continue. Company policy.

“Hello, I am Alison Dupree. This is Jason Redmond,” Alison said, causing Andrew to choke on his water he was drinking.

He glanced quickly to Jason, who was staring at him now. *No one used last names. Don't you dare say mine*, Andrew wanted to say, but remained quiet. He put down the glass and smiled at Alison.

“Good evening, Miss Dupree,” Andrew said. “It is a pleasure to meet you.” Andrew smiled her way. She acknowledged and smiled back.

“Mr. Redmond.” He said, nodding towards Jason.

“Oh, call me Jason, everyone does,” he said, smiling at Andrew.

“May I introduce Miss Marisa Grenning?” Andrew said to Alison.

“Oh, Miss Grenning, it is a pleasure,” Alison said reaching out her hand. Marisa did not take it.

“I'm certain, dear,” she said. “Mr. Redmond, I must ask. Where did you get that suit?”

Jason smiled at Marisa first before answering her question.

“It's an Allen design under the Keely label from England,” he said.

Andrew was about to throw the water in his face as he continued. *It was a Keely design under the Allen label*. Lucky for Jason, Andrew thought as he glanced at the table, no one cared what he said. *Not so fortunate for Miss Dupree*.

“I do not know if you know this, Miss Grenning...may I call you Marisa?” Jason said.

“Forward, Miss Dupree,” Marisa said turning to Alison, “how interesting.”

Alison Dupree did not look pleased.

“I did not mean to offend, Miss Grenning, please accept my apology,” Jason said quickly.

“It matters not to me, Mr. Redmond. You may call me Marisa if you like. That is what everyone calls me,” she laughed.

Andrew saw Alison calm down.

“Andrew dearest,” she said, ignoring Jason and turning back to him. “Could you please find me a waiter with a martini?”

Andrew stood up.

“Oh, Andrew is it?” Jason said, quickly. Andrew looked over at him.

“Could you get me another club soda with ice?” He said, nonchalantly. “Alison, would you like something?”

“I’m fine, Jason,” she said.

Andrew turned slightly as a waiter passed him. He quickly caught his attention.

“I am so sorry, Miss Grenning,” the waiter said as he approached the table, sheepishly.

“We are all dying of thirst,” Marisa said, smiling. “Please tell me you can walk faster than you got here.”

“Yes, of course, Miss Grenning,” the man said.
“What may I bring you?”

“Well, first you may ask my dear friend Miss Dupree,” she indicated to Alison, “what she would like and then you may talk with Andrew,” she touched his arm, “about my drink. Thank you.”

Marisa turned back to Lynn on the other side of Andrew.

“Have you ever seen such service?”

“Just terrible, Marisa,” Lynn said, smiling towards Andrew. He put his head down slightly. “Why it’s outrageous today,” she added.

“I agree, dear,” Marisa concluded and turned away to talk to Helen and Paul at the table.

“I don’t know how you do it, Andrew,” Lynn leaned over to him. “I would kill her.”

Andrew just smiled politely at her.

She straightened back up and said the next part a bit louder, “you, my friend, are a pure gentlemen.” She looked towards Alison.

“Don’t you think so, Miss Dupree?”

Alison looked up sharply from Jason talking to her.

“I’m sorry.” Alison stammered. “What Miss Carson?”

Andrew ordered Marisa’s martini from the waiter and a ginger ale for himself. He should have ordered a drink, he thought.

“Oh, nothing. I was just saying, isn’t Andrew such a gentlemen?” Lynn smiled over at Andrew.

“Yes,” Miss Dupree agreed.

“Well, all of you can’t have him,” Marisa said, suddenly, causing Alison, Paul and Helen to look at her. Lynn just smiled bending her head slightly.

“Andrew, you stay with me,” she tapped his arm. “These vultures will destroy you.”

Andrew smiled at her.

“I’m certain Andrew can handle himself,” Lynn said smiling at her. She turned to Andrew smiling up at him. “Can’t you, Andrew?”

“I am ignoring you,” Marisa said turning away from Lynn. “Sweetie,” she said addressing Alison.

Alison Dupree looked lost and out of place all of a sudden. Andrew almost felt sorry for her. These women were truly putting her on edge.

“Would you and Jason there be so kind as to switch seats with Andrew and myself?” Marisa asked starting to stand. Andrew stood up, pulling out Marisa’s chair quickly.

Without an answer or a choice, Alison Dupree and Jason moved to their seats, placing Jason next to Lynn Carson and Alison next to himself.

Andrew wasn’t unhappy with the arrangement, Lynn Carson always liked to annoy Marisa anyway she could. He was often the way she did. Not that she didn’t have another intentions with him, the first night he had met her she propositioned him several times.

They all sat back down. Marisa immediately turned to Helen on her left and began a conversation, while Lynn began a conversation with Jason.

“So what do you do for work, Mr...” Alison started.

“Andrew is fine,” he said, smiling quickly at her.

“Andrew.” She smiled pleasantly. “Alison.”

“Mostly investments, Alison,” Andrew answered.

“Oh, really, my father is very much an investor,” she said, smiling a bit and uncertain at the same time.

“May I ask who your father is, Alison?”

“I’m sorry. Richard Dupree. He owns Iceman, Inc.,” she said. “They make...”

“I’ve heard of them,” Andrew said and smiled once more in hopes of calming her nerves a bit if anything.

“Oh,” she said. Then leaned over to him a bit. “I don’t come to these things normally.”

“You’re not missing anything,” Andrew said. She smiled and put her head down, shyly.

“You look like a pro,” she said to Andrew with her head down.

“Thank you. That is nice compliment.” Andrew said. She smiled up at him.

The waiter stopped and handed a Martini to him, he handed it to Marisa. The waiter placed down his ginger ale.

She turned and smiled at him.

“Thank you, darling,” she said sweetly, giving him an air kiss. He smiled.

“What are you drinking, Andrew?” Alison asked, carefully.

“Just ginger ale,” he said, casually.

“Oh, good choice,” she said, thinking. “But I don’t think I could get through this night without a drink.” She glanced over at Jason involved in a lively conversation with Lynn.

Alison looked at Andrew, tried to smile and then put her eyes down.

“Jason,” Andrew said, causing Lynn and Jason to look over at him. “Take a walk with me. Let’s see if we can’t find these ladies some flowers for this table.”

Marisa looked up at him and touched his arm.

“You are beautiful, darling. It is such a dreary mess, here,” Marisa said smiling up at him. He smiled back.

Alison looked up at him, surprised.

“I’ll be right back,” Jason said to Alison, reaching down and taking her hand, kissing it and making quite an event out of it.

Alison pulled her hand away and looked down quickly.

Andrew and Jason walked away towards the flowers in the back of the room decorating a table. When Andrew didn’t stop at the table and kept walking, Jason called out, “hey, where are you going, Andrew?” He followed him out the entrance doors and into the lobby.

Andrew looked around quickly and went into the men's washing room directly across from them.

"I don't need to..." Andrew looked at him. Jason didn't speak.

Andrew looked around at the area to make certain they were alone. He walked back to Jason.

"I feel like it's some secret meeting," Jason said, smiling.

"It is." Andrew stated.

He had Jason's full attention.

"Alison Dupree is your date," Andrew started.

"I know that."

Andrew looked away for a moment, trying to be calm.

"So stop flirting with Miss Carson," he said.

"I'm not..."

"Yes, Jason, you are. And Miss Dupree has noticed."

"It's just..." Jason began. Andrew stepped closer to him.

"I don't care what you do at other events, but here, talk to your date. She needs someone to talk to," Andrew said. "She seems like a nice woman."

"She's boring, Andrew," Jason said looking away.

Andrew refrained himself from saying what he really wanted to.

“I cannot entertain your date all night. I have my own,” Andrew said, hoping Jason would understand and do his job.

“She likes you,” Jason was flippant.

Andrew moved one step closer, Jason looked at him directly.

“Jason pay attention to your date or you are going to regret this,” Andrew said very darkly.

Jason took a moment before speaking.

“Ok,” he finally said.

“Thank you.”

Andrew went over to the sink and washed his hands. Jason followed him and did the same. When he dried his hands on the cloth towel provided. Jason reached over to take it and do the same, but Andrew took the towel out of his hand. He pointed to the sign on the wall to his right.

It said: Towels are provided for your courtesy. Please one per guest. Place in receptacle provided below.

Andrew threw his towel in the bin and walked out.

The night did not get better. Jason paid closer attention to Alison Dupree, but she was attached to Andrew, asking him all sorts of questions about investing and companies. She was a smart woman if not a bit shy. Jason’s brazen behaviors, loud laugh, and ability to tell jokes were making her feel uncomfortable.

Unfortunately, she probably wouldn’t tell Alexander that when he spoke with her later this week to

inquire about the date with Jason. That was fortunate for Jason.

Marisa enjoyed herself tremendously, as usual, and snubbed as many people as she could to Andrew, whenever she could. It was simply in her nature, Andrew had decided a while back.

They danced and she offered him to dance with Alison, once. He did. Then gave her back to Jason, who danced with Lynn Carson at least once that he saw.

By the time, he had dropped off Marisa and walked into his house, it was well past eleven and he was exhausted.

His cell phone rang. Silently he began to wonder if there were cameras in his house that told the caller he had just walked in.

“Yes,” he said a bit tired, taking off his tie and unbuttoning a few buttons on his shirt.

He started to climb the stairs to the bedroom. He stopped on the fifth step as he listened to the caller.

“I’ll be right there,” he said and walked back out the door.

Villainy

Andrew walked quickly into the

hospital's emergency room.

He knew where he was going, Cat told him she was in Ward C. He knew what that meant. *Mentally disturbed patients.*

"Andrew," Cat said as he approached her.

She looked terrible. He could tell she had been crying. Her make-up was smeared on her face.

"Where is she, sweetie?" he said soothingly.

Whatever he felt about Cat's deception of Cami's death, he couldn't deal with that right now. She had called him. *If she hadn't...* he stopped the next thought.

"No one can see her," Cat said trying to look away.

"Mom and Dad just dropped her off and talked with her doctor," she looked up at him.

"I didn't know what to do. She was screaming and telling them to let her go and....she..." Out of instinct, Andrew pulled her into him. She fell against his embrace.

"It will be all right," he said, softly to her.

The moment passed. Andrew gently pulled her away from him, holding her arms and looking at her.

“Tell me everything you can,” he prodded her. She nodded.

He looked over at the waiting room seats and moved her to them, sitting her down. He sat down next to her.

“I went over to see her earlier tonight,” Cat said. Her eyes wouldn’t stay focused as she spoke.

“I wanted to tell her that I wasn’t upset with her. I said some things on Christmas...about you,” she was talking faster. Her eyes were shifting back and forth.

“I’m sure Cami understood, Cat,” Andrew said, cutting her off. “She could never be mad at you.” He knew all too well how much that was true.

Even when they were younger and all the messes that Cat got herself involved in, Cami always took her side protecting her from punishment.

Cat looked down for a moment and stopped speaking lost in her own thoughts. Andrew tried to be patient, but he needed to know.

“Cat...”

When she looked back up at him he could tell she was hurting from the memory. After another long moment, she continued.

“Mom said I couldn’t see her. She was resting. I told her I saw her light on and...” She looked down again.

“And what, Catherine?” Andrew said impatiently.

“I remember when she was little,” she said, carefully, not looking at him again, “she would go into fits. Mom and Dad would lock her in her room until she calmed down.”

Andrew looked at her for a long moment considering the possibility of the Moores locking up their daughter. Somehow it was starting to make more sense.

“But they stopped doing that when you came around,” she said, quickly.

Andrew wanted to ask her more about the subject, but he had to find out what happened tonight. That was far more important at this moment.

“And you think they did the same thing now?” he asked.

Cat nodded.

“When I walked outside,” she looked up at him. Her voice took on an eerie quiet. Andrew had to lean in to hear.

“She was at the window and I could see her. I knew...I don’t know how, but I knew, Andrew...something wasn’t right.”

She looked away, defeated.

“I should have done something,” she said sadly. “I should have...”

“You did, Cat,” he interjected. Slowly, he picked up her chin to look at him. She tried to smile, but couldn’t.

“Mom and Dad went upstairs. I could see them from the driveway. They went into Cami’s room. Then

they started talking, then Mom was yelling,” she began to talk faster but quietly, “Cami was saying something and then Mom just grabbed her and started shaking her. It was awful.”

Her eyes fell away.

“What happened then?” He asked, carefully.

His anger was boiling, but he kept it at bay. He wasn’t certain how long he would be able to. His thoughts went to all those nights he had left her at that house. Looking at Cat now, he completely understood the guilt she felt. *He did, too.*

“So I went back inside the house,” she continued. He looked back at her.

“I could hear Cami screaming and...” She looked away. Andrew saw the tears. He reached out and touched her face softly. She turned back. Her eyes looked lost and searching for comfort.

“It will be all right, Cat,” he tried as best he could to help, but he wasn’t certain that was true.

“I knew something bad was going to happen, Andrew.” She sat up a bit straighter and leaned towards him.

There was a look of fear that crossed her eyes as she spoke. Andrew continued to hold her hand and urged her on.

“It was like the night before she left.”

There was a heavy silence that moved in the air. The ringing of phones, moving about of people, nurses, and doctors in the area was silent to them. Each looked at

the other for answers, confirmations, anything that would help understand something that could not ever be understood. Finally, Cat broke the silence.

“She always listens to Mom and Dad. I don’t know why. I don’t.” She laughed a bit. Andrew put his head down, briefly, smiling.

“That’s true,” he said, looking back at her.

“I hid around the corner of the house as they came outside. Mom was saying that she wasn’t well and needed to go back to the hospital and Dad was trying to calm her down, but Cami was saying they couldn’t make her go. Not this time, she said. Then she just started calling...” she paused and looked up at Andrew, “for you.”

He put his head down and let out a breath he wasn’t aware he had been holding. When he looked back at Cat he knew there was only one thing to do. *He had to get her out.*

“Thank you, Cat, for calling me,” he said.

Andrew hugged her one more time and stood up.

“I didn’t know who else to call,” she smiled weakly at him. “She always said you could take care of things.”

He smiled quickly and reached down absently moving a piece of hair away from Cat’s face.

“You did the right thing,” he told her. “Now you should go home and get some rest. I’ll call you,” Andrew said.

“No,” she stood up quickly. “I’m staying here. I wasn’t there for my sister before.” She paused. “This my second chance. I’m not blowing it, Andrew.”

Andrew smiled genuinely at her.

“Cami would like that.”

“What are you going to do?” Cat asked as she followed his stare to the nurse’s station.

After a moment he turned back to face her. Her eyes took on a determination that Cat had never seen.

“I’m going to get her back.”

He smiled one more time and kissed her on the cheek.

“You stay here,” he said. Cat nodded. “I’m serious, Catherine.”

“Ok,” she answered.

He turned and walked towards that nurse’s station. Cat kept her eyes on him, waiting. A few well-placed smiles and quick maneuvers got him the information. A phone call to a Doctor Hyman that owed Andrew a favor for a good stock investment last year gave him the rest. He was in.

“I want to see her,” Cat said when Andrew told her.

“I know and you will, but not right now. She’s not supposed to have visitors,” he said.

“Then how did you...” Cat started.

“I have a few friends,” he answered not explaining any further.

Cat smiled. “Good friends.”

Andrew took her aside back to the waiting area and looking down at her.

“Listen, this may not work...” he started.

“You can do anything, Andrew,” Cat said, shaking her head. “She said so.”

He looked at her comfortingly.

“Stay here...Kitty Cat,” he smiled. She nodded.

Andrew walked down the hall with a nurse’s aide leading the way.

When they approached Ward C, the girl had to hit a buzzer to get inside. He had to sign a sheet before they would let him through. Once through, there were two more doors with buzzers that allowed entrance into the hallway of rooms that was his destination. At the fourth room on the right, the girl stopped.

“Here we are,” the girl said. She turned to him.

“She’s been restrained,” she said.

“Why?” Andrew asked.

“If she is cooperative we can take those off. Are you comfortable with that?”

“Yes, please.”

The girl looked at him for a moment and then nodded. “They gave her something to calm her down,” she shook her head, “but she’s a fighter that one.”

Andrew smiled to himself. *Yes, she is.*

When the aide opened the door the sight before him disturbed him in a way that he had never imagined. Cami was lying on a table, held down with straps on her arms and legs. She was fighting them, but he could tell

she was getting weak. Her face was covered with tears. The panicked expression on that face got worse as Cami saw the girl approach.

“No,” she said, barely a whisper. “Please.”

“Now, Miss Moore, you need to calm down. No one is going to hurt you,” she said, trying to be comforting, but Cami closed her eyes against her.

He couldn’t stand it any longer. He rushed to her side, leaning over the table.

“Princess,” he said. Her eyes opened quickly. “My sweet, sweet princess,” Andrew moved some hair back from her face as he caressed her cheek.

Her green eyes were tired as she looked at him. Those eyes were locked on his.

“Okay, Miss Moore. That was good,” the aide said. “If I take these off, will you behave?”

Cami nodded without moving her eyes from Andrew’s.

“Good.” The aide removed the straps.

“Now, I want you...” The aide stopped speaking when Cami sat up and instantly went into Andrew’s arms.

“I guess it will be all right,” she said, smiling a bit towards Andrew.

“Now when you need to leave. This is the button to push,” she said directly to Andrew this time. He nodded not looking at her.

With that, she exited, closing the heavy door behind her.

“Andrew...” she said against him.

“I’m here, princess,” she held him tight, but he just softly rocking her back and forth in his arms. Something he had done a thousand times when they were together.

“I’m not going to leave you again.”

She pulled back a bit. She smiled at him. Her eyes were full of tears, but her smile was a happy one. For a moment she looked just like the little fourteen-year-old girl he remembered.

“You rescued me,” she said. He smiled quickly and put his head down a bit. She leaned into him.

“I knew you were a prince,” she whispered in his ear.

The hope in her voice nearly brought him to tears, but he had to be strong. *For her.*

“I need some help,” he said softly, “from my princess this time.”

“Anything,” she replied, smiling.

He took a breath. The grip she held on him was loosening a bit as she continued to smile at him lost in his eyes somewhere. He had seen the expression when they were younger. He never knew what to do when she looked at him like that. Finally, he spoke. He had to get some information. He didn’t know how long he had before...

“What happened, Cami?” He said, causing her to change her expression to confusion.

Her grip tightened on his arm. He tried not to feel it, but it was a death grip that he hadn't been used to in ten years.

"Princess," he urged, "I can't help you if I don't understand."

Her eyes glassed over again with fresh tears. The pain was unbearable as he watched her slip away. Her eyes left his, but her grip on his arm did not stop.

"I'm not a princess," she said, suddenly.

She had never said that before. He thought.

Maybe it was the drugs.

"Of course you are. You're my princess, remember?" Andrew said, quickly. He smiled, but he was worried and he wasn't certain he hid that from her.

"No I'm not," she was lost somewhere outside of their reality. Her listless expression told him everything was not going to be all right. Not now.

"I'm a pretend princess," she said, sadly. "Real princesses live in castles and don't go to hospitals." Tears fell down her cheeks.

"Even princesses get hurt sometimes," he said trying to calm her.

"No," she shook her head. "No...just pretend ones."

She looked away with some anger. It might have frightened someone other than the man standing in front of her. The words might have been different, but he had heard them all before. Defeat, regret, frustration, lost hope. At eighteen, he would hold her until she went back

to her regular self, but those days were over and he wasn't eighteen anymore. Hopelessness in women was something he had gotten all too used to. Women paid him now to stop theirs.

"Cami, stop this," he said, causing her to look at him suddenly. "I can get you out of here."

He looked at her knowing his words weren't getting through. She drifted further away from him.

"Don't you want to leave, baby?" He asked in a last effort for her to trust him.

"And go where?" She said, absently.

"Come home with me." She shook her head.

"Only the princess can go with the prince," she said lost again.

He leaned in towards her, "I built you a castle, Princess," he whispered. "Just for you."

The mournful sad eyes that had greeted him a moment before lit up and she smiled up at him. Reaching out with her hand she touching his face, softly. He smiled. The look on her face gave him hope that he desperately needed.

"It doesn't have to be like this," he said softly as she continued to caress his face causing a slight tingle down his spine.

"It never had to be."

The words just came out, but he was the one lost now somewhere between her caresses and his desire.

“You don’t understand?” She said her voice returning to normal. She took her hand away quickly causing him to be shot back into their reality.

“What don’t I understand? Tell me,” his voice was still soothing and calm.

“They won’t let me go,” she said, whispering. “They’ll never let me go.”

He could tell she was tired. Her eyes closed briefly. She lied back down on the table. He helped her. Suddenly, without warning, her eyes opened again. She held onto his arm, tightly.

“Andrew...” she said, weakly.

He leaned into her to hear.

“You said you loved me.”

“I do love you, Camille. I love you with all my heart,” he answered back, trying to understand this new change.

“Promise me, you won’t forget.”

He was confused. *Forget what?* He thought quickly.

“I’ll never forget to love you,” he finally said smiling a bit at her.

“No,” she said, suddenly, clutching his arm tighter and pulling herself up.

“That you won’t *forget...*”

She looked deeply into his eyes for a long moment. The intensity of her stare frightened him. Then slowly, she closed her eyes and let go of her hold on him. She lied back down.

“I can’t...remember,” she said. He knew she was about to fall asleep.

“Cami...” he urged.

She didn’t open her eyes, but she smiled.

“I love your voice, Andrew,” she said as if in a dream, “it makes me feel safe.”

She drifted off to sleep. All Andrew could do was watch her helplessly.

His mind was spinning as he walked back to Cat. Too many thoughts, too many emotions were making his head hurt.

I shouldn’t have left her. Not here. Not in the hospital room a week ago. His thoughts were colliding and turning and twisting inside him. I should have stayed with her no matter what. This wouldn’t have happened. She would be safe. She would be with me.

Of course, the reality he knew all too well from those years with her in high school. If Cami didn’t want to be saved, he couldn’t save her. And too often, that was the case.

Why didn’t she tell me? Why doesn’t she trust me?

“How is she?” Cat said running up to him. “Is she all right? Did they...”

“She’s sleeping,” Andrew said, sighing. He was tired and defeated. “They gave her something to calm her down and she wasn’t thinking clearly.”

“What did she say, Andrew?” Cat looked at him, waiting. There was something in her eyes that made him question, but *what?* He let it go. He was too tired to think anymore tonight.

He didn’t know why, but his eyes went to the clock behind Cat’s head. It read: 12:10 AM.

Past midnight. He thought and almost laughed from the absurdity of it all.

Magic gone.

He turned back to Cat and shook his head.

“There’s nothing more to do tonight. You need to go home and I need to think,” he said, grabbing her coat off the chair behind her.

He put it on her and walked towards the doors to the hospital, she held his arm, not tightly like her sister, just enough to make him stop walking. He turned back to face her.

“You don’t think she’ll be all right, do you?” Cat said. There was fear was in her voice.

He looked at her for a moment and thought about all the things he could say to comfort her. Tell her she was going to fine. That everything was going to be fine, but it didn’t. It would be lying. And he never lied.

“Let’s get you home,” he finally said, taking her hand.

Together, they walked out of the hospital. Each lost in their thoughts. Neither wanting to say anything.

When Andrew finally got into his bed and lied down, only one thought was with him. It wasn’t what he

thought it would be, but it was there and it was more ridiculous than anything he had thought before.

If only I had a glass slipper.

“I just want to know where Camille Moore is,” Andrew said, frustrated. He had been at the hospital earlier that morning and still he had no information about Cami.

Somewhere between when Cat and he left the hospital and these few hours later Cami seemed to have disappeared into thin air. It shouldn’t have surprise him, but he had enough.

“I don’t know what to tell you,” the nurse said, frustrated as well. “She was moved a few hours ago. If you’re not a relative, I can’t...”

“Give me any information,” he said, finishing her sentence. “I know.”

“Thank you,” he said, a bit sarcastically, but it wasn’t completely impolite.

He pulled his cell phone and dialed Cat’s number again. Hoping she would answer this time. He had been calling since he woke up. He walked outside the hospital as the answering machine picked up.

Hi, you’ve reached Cat. Left a message and thanks for calling. Beep.

“Cat...” he said, firmly into the phone, “where are you? Your sister has been moved and I can’t get any information without a family member. Please call my cell phone when you get this message.”

He hung up and put the phone back in his pocket. He debated calling Alexander back. He had left three messages since this morning. Nothing about what the problem was, but then again, Alex never did. He loved to create mystery...*and frustration*, Andrew thought.

He looked back at the nurse's station inside the hospital and resigned himself to the fact that without Cat he wasn't getting any information about Cami right now. He decided to call Alexander, if just to keep him busy.

"Midnight Services," Alex's receptionist, Ann, said. "How can we help you tonight?"

She was newer with the agency, about six months, Andrew thought.

"Hi, Ann, it's..."

"Andrew," Ann said, brightly. "How are you?"

Ann's cheery voice was somewhat pleasant to Andrew this morning.

"I'm fine," he said, his pat answer. "Is Alex there?"

"Yes, he is, Andrew. He's been waiting for your phone call." She said and then added, "hold on. Have a nice day, Andrew."

"Thanks," he answered, absently.

A mere second it felt to Andrew, Alex was on the phone.

"Where are you? I've been trying to contact you since this morning," he said. Andrew could clearly hear the panic in his voice.

“Alex, it is this morning,” Andrew answered. “And as of this morning I don’t officially work for *Midnight Services*.”

“I know,” Alex said and Andrew knew this wasn’t going to be that easy, “but I got a phone call from Alison Dupree. She left a message on our machine.”

Andrew took a breath and waited.

“I just wanted to let you know that I did not know about Miss Dupree until the day of. She was hesitating over using us and then called out of the blue and said she needed someone for last night. If I had known, I would have told you that Jason would be there.”

“What is problem, Alex?” Andrew asked, wanting him to get to the point.

“Alison seemed to like you a lot,” Alex said, “unfortunately, she did not like Jason. She was so displeased with his behavior that she would like to have another *date* to make up for it.”

Andrew listened carefully and concluded all ready what Alex was about to say.

“With me, I presume.” Andrew said, sighing.

“I told her that you are no longer with the company and even if it were possible...”

“Alexander, you didn’t,” Andrew’s voice was noticeably frustrated.

“I told her you were in a different price range. She said she would pay the difference, but that I owed her for Jason’s unprofessional behavior.” There was a pause.

Then he added, “she wouldn’t go into specifics about Jason. She said I should speak with you. What happened?”

Andrew took another breath and knew this was going to be a problem.

“Well,” Andrew started, “I can’t disagree with her. Jason was unprofessional. He flirted with other women at our table.”

“You were seated at the same table?” Alex interrupted.

“Yes,” Andrew said, exasperated

“Oh god, Andrew, I’m sorry, I didn’t know.”

“I had a quick talk with him privately and asked him to pay attention to his *date*. He did for awhile, but...Alexander,” he said, quickly, “I have never told you how to run this business, but...fire him. He is unprofessional, rude, too talkative and... annoying,” Andrew took a breath and continued, “and if I was Alison Dupree I would have called you, too, and I would have demanded my money back.”

“Lucky for me, she just wanted you,” Alex said and quickly realized, “I didn’t mean...”

“Alex, I have too many things to deal with right now then to worry about you putting me on some auction block. I do not work for you anymore or Alison Dupree, so I’m going to make this easy for you. This is my advice.

“You’re giving me advice?” Alex said, surprised.
“You never give advice.”

Andrew, frustrated and annoyed with the entire conversation, sighed and spoke very clearly into the phone.

“Call Miss Dupree back and tell her you are extremely sorry for what transpired last night. Assure her that she will be paid back in full.”

“In full?” Alex said in disbelief.

“Yes, Alex, in full. Then explain that I am no longer an employee of the company, however you spoke with me and I recommended that she call,” he paused, “Alex write this down.”

“Yea,” there was a wait on the phone until he heard Alex say, “ok, go ahead.”

“Have her call Marisa Grenning in an hour,” he heard Alex take a breath in, “and tell her that I am certain she will be more than pleased with Miss Grenning’s solution to the problem,” Andrew finished. “You have that?”

“Yea, but what is Marisa going to do about this?”

“I will call her. I will fix it,” Andrew said annoyed, “Goodbye, Alexander.”

Andrew hung up the phone before Alex answered. He shook his head and dialed Marisa’s number. Within two rings, Jenkins answered.

“Good morning, Jenkins, it’s Andrew,” he said politely.

“Sir, it is good to hear from you. I will retrieve Miss Grenning. Please do wait,” Jenkins said graciously.

“Thank you.”

“Darling, what a pleasant surprise,” Marisa said, cheerfully. “I did not expect to hear from you.”

No kidding, Andrew thought. I cannot believe I am about to do this.

“Marisa, I need your help,” Andrew said, pleasantly. “You’re the only one who could possibly help me.”

There was a pause on the other end of the phone and then, “of course, darling. You know I would do anything for you, *Andrew dearest.*”

Marisa’s voice was excited and thrilled. Andrew knew she would be. He moved in for the kill.

“Perhaps we could meet, Marisa?” He said in his most pleasantly soft voice.

“Yes, yes, come right over. I am beyond curious and intrigued, darling.”

They said their goodbyes and Andrew looked once more at the nurse’s station. He sighed, checked his phone for messages, there were none, and headed back to his car. The thoughts of Cami being restrained somewhere almost sent him back, but he wasn’t going to get anywhere yelling at nurses. Frustration had turned to anger by the time he reached his car. Regardless of his feelings about Alexander, Marisa Grenning or Alison Dupree he was about to fix all their problems. If only he could get someone to fix his. He’d be all set.

He pulled out of the parking garage and onto the street. Another thought crossed his mind as he dialed

Cat's number again. Answering machine. He hung up and threw the phone in the passenger's seat.

Where were all the dragons when you really needed them? He felt he could use a good battle right about now.

Cami got out of the car in a daze. Since early this morning she had been moved from the room she was in at the hospital to a patient room on the floor above and then just twenty minutes ago her parents picked her up and brought her home.

"Honey, you need rest now," her father said as he ushered her inside the house.

Her mother wasn't too far behind. Out of the side door of the car exited her sister, Cat.

"I'll take her up, Dad," Cat said, cheerfully.

"Good idea," her mother replied. There was annoyance in her voice. Which was usual for Diane Moore.

Cat ran up to where Cami and their father were standing on the porch and took her sister's arm gently.

"Everything's going to be ok now, Cam," Cat said.

Cami looked over at her sister and nodded. They weren't any sweet smiles that her sister usually gave her or words of comfort. Cami's eyes looked sad and tired.

"Don't worry," Cat encouraged as they walked up to her bedroom slowly.

Cat knew the drugs her sister were on made her unresponsive and slower. Her sister had told her once when she first went to that treatment center they made her feel like she was walking on clouds. Cat had thought at the time her sister would like that. She didn't think that anymore. She was starting to understand why Cami wanted to be saved all those years ago.

'Someday, Cat,' Cami used to say when they were younger, *'a prince is going to come and take us away.'*

'Why, Cami?' Cat would ask. She was only seven at the time. Cami was nine.

'Because that's what princes do. They save Princesses.' Her sister would say and Cat believed her.

A few years later when Andrew Whiete first came to her house, Cat didn't think her sister's prince had arrived all of a sudden. She had stopped believing in fairytales by the time she was ten. Cat, 15 at the time, did believe, though, that Andrew was the cutest boy she had ever seen. He was tall, handsome, fun, exciting and...much to Cat's disappointment and frustration completely in love with her sister.

The thought of them kissing and Andrew taking Cami to all the places Cat wanted to go with him made her so mad sometimes that she would go into Cami's room and break things just to make herself feel better. Once, she had even broken a jewelry box that her father had gotten Cami as a present. He was always giving her presents, for nothing, just because she was the most

wonderful daughter, he would say. At those moments, Cat hated her father, too. *Why did Cami get everything?* She would ask her mother and always it would be the same answer:

‘Because she does what she is told.’

Cat tried several times to be good and see if things would change, but they didn’t. So, she reasoned, why be good. It was stupid, if you weren’t going to get anything for it.

The strange thing, though, was how her sister didn’t seem to care that she broke her things. The only time Cat could recall that her sister got upset about it was when she destroyed the locket Andrew had given her for Christmas that year.

He had left it on the porch just like the Barbie Princess Dream House. The locket was smaller, but wrapped in gold paper that shined and glittered in the morning Christmas sun. It had a shiny red bow on the box and no card, but Cami said she knew it was from him.

Cat couldn’t even remember what made her mad to want to destroy the locket, but whatever it was, it caused her to go into Cami’s room, rip the locket off her mirror and stomp on it. Her sister came back a few minutes after she had left with Andrew that night, because she had forgotten to wear the locket and that’s when she discovered Cat still in her room, destroying it. The look on her sister’s face was terrifying to Cat. She would never forget it.

She wasn't mad. She didn't yell. She just looked at Cat for a long moment. It was sad and haunting in a way that frightened Cat right to her very bones. Then her sister knelt down and picked up the pieces of the broken locket. She placed them carefully inside her purse and walked out. Her sister never said another word about it, but Cat never broke anything of hers again.

"Cami..." Cat finally spoke again inside her room. She had closed the door and sat her sister on her bed.

"Here," she said, handing Cami her cell phone, "call him."

Cami looked down at the phone, confused.

"Call him. He can help you," she urged again, but Cami's eyes wandered away and she lied down, curling up into a ball.

"Cami," Cat said, trying to make her understand. "Mom and Dad are going to send you away again."

She had heard her parents discussing the possibility with Dr. Wainwright this morning while Cami was still in the hospital.

"Don't you get it? You are going..."

"Catherine," her mother called from downstairs.

"Yea, Mom, I'll be right there," Cat called back.

"Your sister needs her rest," her mother said in her annoyed voice.

Cat let out a breath, "for god's sake, Cami, I can't do everything."

She put the phone back in her pocket and shook her head at her sister.

“You are such a pain sometimes,” Cat said, exasperated and then leaned in closer to Cami as she said her next words.

“There is only so much I can do. I got him to the hospital. Why didn’t you leave with him?” She turned away, annoyed. Her voice took on her mother’s familiar one when she spoke next.

“Do you have an idea how much trouble I could get in for that? Mom and Dad would kill me if they knew I called him. You know, you don’t deserve him,” she turned back to her sister. “I could give him so much more.” She paused, sitting up on the bed with her back to Cami.

“At least I would be coherent.”

After a moment, she stood and started to walk to the door.

“Fine,” she said standing at the door. “I’ve done everything I can.”

She moved back to the bed, anger in her voice.

“When you showed up at my place and you said you left and you wanted to get your life back,” she leaned over her sister, “I should have known you wouldn’t. You can’t do anything on your own. It’s pathetic.” She looked at Cami for a long moment as a tear fell down her cheek.

“I guess all princesses can do is cry,” Cami said, mockingly.

She opened the door, shook her head one more time and left the room.

14

The Glass Slipper

“*She* was checked out by her parents this morning, Andrew,”

Dr. Len Hyman said as Andrew stood in his office downtown.

“Thanks, Len,” Andrew replied and started to walk out.

“Did you know that there are files under her name at Child & Family Services,” he said to Andrew. Andrew turned back to him.

“I started thinking after the doctor at the hospital explained her condition to me. So I have a friend that works with assaulted children.” Andrew stepped in closer. “The records are sealed, though. She had to have been a minor at the time,” he explained.

“Do you know when?” Andrew asked, moving another step in.

He took a long breath, “yes,” he said looking away for a moment, “but I shouldn’t tell you.”

Andrew could tell he was uncomfortable.

“That’s fine, Len, I understand. You’ve been more than helpful,” Andrew said, smiling quickly at him. “Thank you.”

He started for the door.

“Ok, ok” Len said quickly coming around the desk holding a piece of paper in his hand. “Here,” he held out the paper for Andrew to take it.

He took it looking down quickly.

“You didn’t get this from me, Andrew. I have nothing to do with this.”

“Not a problem, Len,” Andrew said slipping the piece of paper in his pocket.

“And hey, Andrew,” Andrew turned back to him. “Burn that paper when you’re done.”

Andrew smiled at him.

“Got it. Thank you again,” Len nodded as Andrew turned to the door.

“I hope everything works out,” Len said sincerely going back to his desk.

“You’re one of the good guys, Andrew,” he said, smiling at him.

Andrew nodded and walked out the door.

Cat paced in the living room of her parent’s house until she couldn’t take it anymore.

“Can I go?” She said to her mother who was sitting comfortably on the couch.

Her father had been silent since her mother was questioning her about ten minutes ago.

“No, Catherine. I want an answer,” her mother said, calmly.

“I told you. I don’t know how Andrew found out,” she said, more sarcastically than she had intended.

“Then I guess we wait until your memory comes back,” her mother replied, “let us hope it is not as long as your sister’s.”

“What do you want from me, Mom? He’s smart. He figures things out,” Cat said annoyed.

“Just tell your mother if you called him,” her father finally said.

“What is the big deal? Who cares? So he knows she’s sick. Maybe that will make him come to his senses and leave her,” Cat continued, “then everyone will be happy.”

“That would be wonderful, but somehow” her mother said, calculatingly, “I don’t believe Andrew Whiete gives up easily.”

She glanced for a moment over at Thomas. He avoided her eyes.

“Well, you make it all so mysterious, Mom,” Cat suddenly said, causing her mother to look to her. “I mean, everything’s so shrouded in mystery. That’s what makes him curious. What’s wrong with her, anyway? And don’t tell me its nerves, Mom. No one believes that.”

“Your sister is not well, Catherine. She hasn’t been for a long time, you know that,” she stated simply, “and you know,” her mother’s eyes darkened, “Andrew is not good for her. Look what happened last time we let her see him.”

“Oh my god, Mom, what do you have against Andrew?” Cat said, shaking her head. “It’s ridiculous. She wasn’t crying as much when he was around and...” she hesitated, “she loves him, Mom. You can deny it all you want. I wish it wasn’t true either, but it is, and god help him, he loves her.”

“Catherine, you simply do not understand your sister’s condition. She will latch onto anyone that she believes is in her delusional world,” her mother said, causing her father to look over at her.

“I don’t know about that, Diane,” Thomas said.

“Thomas, let me handle this,” Diane said firmly to him. “You are certainly not one to handle a problem as complex as Camille’s. Are you?” He looked away.

“Catherine,” she turned her attentions back on her youngest daughter, “lying is going to just make you guilty and eventually you won’t know what the truth really is.”

Cat laughed, clear and strong.

“God, what am I five?” Cat said, annoyed. “I did not call Andrew. I would never call him. I don’t want them to see each other,” she said slowly, but with resolution. “If he knew, he found out on his own. Now...can I go?”

“Maybe you should remain here until your sister is better,” her mother said.

Cat looked at her father again, he was fidgeting with his fingers.

“No,” Cat said, simply. “I’m not crazy. Besides I don’t think Cami wants me here.”

“Of course, your sister wants you here, Catherine. What a cruel thing to say,” Diana shook her head at the absurdity of it.

“Mom, maybe you don’t get it,” Cat said. Her mother looked back at her, quickly. Her eyes darkened again, waiting.

“Ever since Cami ‘died’,” she put up her fingers to show the quote sign, “I have been trying to get him to move on with his life. You know, find someone else, settle down, maybe get married. I don’t know, just not be all pining after her.” She walked to the other side of the room, pacing back and forth again as she continued.

“And you know what, I thought he had. He was going on dates, he was making money,” she paused, “a lot of money. Anyway,” she started pacing again.

“Stop that!” Diane said, loudly. Cat stopped moving and looked at her.

“Anyway,” Cat said softer, “it wasn’t real. It was all an illusion to make me think that. To make everyone think that,” she said, hurt and anger was in her voice. “Do you know what those dates were?” She asked, but didn’t wait for an answer.

“A sham, a lie. He is an escort, Mom. That’s right Alexander runs an escort service. That’s his job. You gotta love it,” she said, sarcastically. “And I’m certain he isn’t cheap.”

Cat looked at her mother for a long moment, trying to judge her expression. She didn’t look upset or shocked or even surprised at this revelation.

“Well, it doesn’t surprise me, I’ll say that,” Diane Moore replied and shrugged it off.

“Nice,” Cat said in an annoyed laugh. “Have a nice life.”

She walked out of the living room and slammed the front door as she left.

Screw them, Cat said to herself as she took off her in car.

Good luck, Cam, but I don’t think the idea of ‘someday my prince will come’ is going to work this time. He all ready came and nothing changed. Not to mention your perfect prince can be sold to the highest bidder, dear sister. And I’m guessing a princess just hasn’t got the funds in her royal bank account.

Andrew arrived at the Moores’ place after leaving Len’s. He knew it was a useless endeavor to go, but he had to try.

Stepping up to that porch like he had done so many times when he was younger was surreal now. Taking him back to a time and place he wasn’t certain he

wanted to go. He had been just a kid. Things have changed since then. A lot of things.

He knocked and half-expected them to see him on the porch and just not answer the door, but he heard shuffling about. A moment later, it opened.

“Andrew,” Thomas Moore said. His voice was controlled, the same one Andrew remembered.

“Hello, Mr. Moore,” Andrew replied. His voice was definitely not as controlled.

“I suppose you are here to see Camille,” Thomas said. “Well, come in.”

Andrew could have been knocked over by a feather at that moment. *He was actually invited in.* The shock of it kept with him as he followed Thomas through the hallway into the living room. Sitting there on the couch was Diane Moore, who looked up and smiled towards him. It was a curt smile, but it was a smile. He felt like he was in the Twilight Zone and he didn't know what was going to happen.

“Hello, Andrew,” she said, politely, “it is nice of you to stop by...for Camille's sake, I mean.”

“Hello, Mrs. Moore,” was all Andrew could say.

“Well, have a seat, Andrew,” Diane piped in with, smiling again at him. “Camille is resting, but we thought it might be nice for us to talk. After all a lot of things have happened in the past few weeks. Would you not agree?”

“Yes,” Andrew said, numbed by the entire experience.

“Please, sit down,” she urged.

He sat down slowly on a loveseat while Thomas sat in a chair to his left and Diane remained seated on the main couch.

“I am certain you have questions about what occurred,” Diane said, smiling again. “We hope you understand, Andrew, we did not want this, but they was no other way at the time.”

Andrew slowly was coming out of his daze and realizing they wanted to talk about their deception of Cami’s death.

“Why was that, Mrs. Moore?” Andrew asked, ready for the fight, if there was to be one.

“Camille was very sick and she is still not well. We had hoped,” she looked over at her husband. He had his eyes down, “that the stay in the hospital for the past ten years would have helped her. Poor thing.”

Andrew was the calculating one this time as he watched Mrs. Moore carefully.

“You have to understand. We never wanted to lie to you, Andrew. It was the last thing we wanted. You were so kind to take care of everything and I am certain it was a rather large shock to find Camille alive,” Diane said, looking sympathetically towards him now.

“Yes, as a matter of fact, the biggest one of my life,” Andrew replied, uncertain of where this was all going, but remained very cautious, just in case.

“I can only imagine,” she replied, “it must have been horrifying.”

“I’m over that now, but thank you.”

“Well, we are both very glad you stopped by. We wanted to let you know that Camille will be going back to the treatment center and we are hoping for a quick recovery,” she said, sweetly. “Of course, you never know with her condition and all.”

Andrew watched Thomas Moore stand up and walk to the other side of the room when Diane said ‘condition’. A moment later, Andrew turned back to her mother.

“I understand that you are trying to help her, Mrs. Moore, but I don’t think Camille would like to go back,” Andrew said, carefully, using his most diplomatic voice.

“It has been a difficult decision, Andrew, you understand, but it is what is best for her,” she replied and stood up as if to end the conversation right there. Andrew wasn’t done.

“I’m sorry to...prolong this agony, Mrs. Moore, however, I wonder - could I speak with Camille?” He said, standing up. “I’ll only need a few moments.”

“I don’t think that’s such a good idea. It has been a long day for her all ready. She is resting now. Comfortably.”

Diane started to walk out, expecting Andrew to follow her.

“I really must insist,” he said, a quiet annoyance in his voice.

“No, no, she is too tired to see anyone today.”

Thomas looked around the room nervously and walked out to the kitchen. Both Diane and Andrew watched him and turned back to face one other.

“I am sorry, Andrew. It just isn’t a good time. Her father is very upset, as you can imagine,” her kind voice was getting on his nerves.

“That is a shame,” he said losing all sense of kindness in his own voice, “but I want to see Camille, Mrs. Moore.” He leaned in a bit to her to emphasize his point.

“That is simply not possible, as I have all ready said. You have been more than generous, Andrew. And we appreciate your concern for her health. I will be certain to tell her you dropped by.”

With that, she began to walk out of the room. When he didn’t follow, she looked back at him.

“Andrew...” she said, waiting.

Andrew moved to the center of the living room and looked up at the ceiling.

“Camille!” He yelled as loud as he could.

Thomas entered from the kitchen, quickly. Diane moved towards him just as fast.

“Andrew, what are you doing? You stop that at once!” Diane scolded as if to a child.

“Camille!” He yelled again.

This time, Diane took his arm.

“Stop it!” She yelled at him. “She doesn’t need you. Leave her alone!”

“Camille!” He yelled again this time louder.

“This is all your fault,” she said. Andrew expected to see her mother staring at him when he looked down, but she was glaring at Thomas.

“I didn’t do this,” Thomas retorted. “You’re the one who insisted that she...”

“Oh, shut up, Thomas! Go call the police,” she said, firmly.

“Camille!”

“Stop this! She is resting,” Diane said.

This time, Andrew looked down directly at her, causing her to back away a step.

“How can she sleep through us yelling! What did you do to her?!” Andrew’s eyes were dark and wild.

“The doctor had to give her something to calm her down and help her rest, that is all.”

Diane’s voice no longer sweet or pleasant any longer. It was filled with anger and annoyance.

“You let her go, right now,” Andrew said threateningly to Diane.

“I would watch yourself, Andrew,” Diane cautioned. “Think about this before you do anything you will regret.”

“Like what? Protect her?! Help her!”

“The police are on their way,” Thomas announced entering back into the living room.

“We will get a restraining order, Andrew,” Diane cautioned again.

Andrew stopped yelling and looked at Thomas for a moment.

“What did you do to her?” He asked him.

Thomas backed away.

“I was there.” Andrew said darkly, “I brought her to that hospital. She was bleeding.”

“I have no idea what you are speaking...” Diana interjected, but Andrew turned on her.

“When we first met, Mrs. Moore...at the hospital. I was fourteen, Cami was...”

“She had hit her head,” Diane said quickly.

Andrew laughed. “Her head?”

“It was a long time ago, Andrew. You were a kid. You don’t remember correctly.”

He turned coldly on her.

“Oh, no,” he said, half-laughing, “I remember. And that is what scares you. You had to kill her to make me not tell. Well,” he said looking from Thomas to Diane, “it didn’t work. And she’s not dead. Is she, Mrs. Moore?”

“Andrew, you don’t understand...” Diane tried again.

“No, I do. I finally do.” He turned back to Thomas. “Tell the police I left. They can find me to ask me any questions at 8 Levin Way. It’s the large looking castle at the end of the private road.” He turned back to Diane, “but you all ready knew that, didn’t you, Mrs. Moore?”

He stayed focused on her for a few more moments. Each silently staring the other down.

“Camille!” He yelled again to the ceiling. “No matter what, princess! Remember!”

He smiled at Diane and ran out of the house.

Upstairs in her small bedroom, Cami’s eyes opened.

“Remember,” she said, softly. “Remember.”

The days dragged on. It had been Thursday when Andrew had taken Marisa Greening on a *date* for the last time. Friday, he had spoken with Diane and Thomas Moore. Now it was Sunday. He had tried to call Cat but she wasn’t answering, and no amount of messages from him seemed to make her.

He had all sorts of ideas to help Camille, but none of them seem to be able to do what he wanted – *get her out of that house*. He even contemplated barging and taking her, but he knew he would just have a police matter to deal with then from the Moores. He knew they would do as they said that day, put a restraining order against him. It wasn’t beyond them. They had faked their daughter’s death and kept it a secret for ten years. There was nothing that they weren’t capable of.

He had been able to surmise from the dates he was given by Dr. Hyman that the all the cases opened by Child & Family Services under Camille Moore were when she ages 7, 9, 12, and 14. He knew about the fourteen-year-

old incident, but the others were a mystery. Getting any of that information was impossible, so he figured the best avenue would be to get to Cat, then to Cami. There had to be a way. He also knew from the fact that her parents had signed her in to the hospital and back out again that she was under the guardianship of them and didn't have her own legal rights. This would prove to be a big obstacle in trying to help her, he knew.

Andrew sat in his kitchen, drinking his fourth cup of coffee this morning, and still thinking over the entire situation. Meanwhile, his beloved was most likely at the 'treatment center' wherever that was. He wished now he had gotten more information from Cat or Cami about it. *Maybe then...*

The phone rang in his house. He got up and walked to it quickly. There was still so hope that Cat would call, or perhaps even Cami, if she could have a moment of peace from the drugs that was. He wasn't giving up on the possibility.

"Hello?" He said into the receiver.

"Andrew," his father said on the other end. "I just spoke with David."

"David?" Andrew questioned. He had just seen him yesterday when he had informed David of what was happening, but he left not long after, quickly and without explanation.

"He came up last night," Joseph said. There was a pause on his end. "We have been talking about the situation."

Andrew didn't say anything. He was shocked that David would go to his father, and more over, that they would be discussing him.

"I'll let him explain to you," Joseph said into the receiver. There was silence on the phone for a moment.

"Andrew," David said on the line.

"David, what are you doing at my father's house?"

"It's a long story, but we've got an idea. We have a meeting set up with a lawyer for tomorrow about it," David said.

"A lawyer?" Andrew wasn't pleased.

What good would a lawyer do? He thought. Camille needed to get out of there now.

"David, what am I supposed to do...sue the Moores?" Andrew said, half-joking.

"Yes," David answered back, simply.

There was a pause on Andrew's side this time. It lasted a few moments.

"Andrew?" David said inquiring if his friend was still on the line. "It will work," he added.

"I can't do that," Andrew finally said.

"Yes, you can, and you will," David announced causing Andrew to be speechless. David was known by many to say such things, but Andrew never had it directed at him before.

"Excuse me?" Andrew said, truly surprised.

"Andrew, I would have talked to you about it, but you're a...do-gooder. You wouldn't have even

listened to the concept,” David explained. “I know you don’t want to cause more strife between the Moores and you, but....”

“What am I suing for?” Andrew interjected, causing David to stop speaking for a moment.

“Fraud,” was the answer he received on the other end.

“What? David...”

“Listen,” David said quickly, “we can explain it all after we talk to the lawyer.”

“Wait a minute, David, this is...” Andrew began, but David cut his words off again.

“It will work and maybe you can find some answers, too.”

“David,” Andrew said, firmly, “I’m coming there.” He hung up the phone before David could speak again.

Two hours later, Andrew was standing at his father’s kitchen table in Hillsdale. A table he knew all too well from all the times he had spent eating at it throughout the years of his youth.

David was standing across from him, while his father was sitting in-between them. There were books and papers strung out all over the table.

“It’s simple,” David said trying to explain their plan to Andrew for the past few minutes.

“You sue the Moores for Fraud in a Civil Action to recover your funds for the...” there was a slight pause, “funeral.” Andrew looked away for a moment. His father watched him closely.

“They will claim they had medical reasons for the deception. You then can request a court order to have the file under Child & Family Services unsealed to investigate into their failure to report a crime.”

“How does that work? I don’t have any evidence to a crime, David?” Andrew said, finally sitting down.

“Yes you do,” Joseph said suddenly, speaking for the first time in the conversation. David and Andrew looked over to him.

“You were a witness to it, Andrew. When you brought Cami to the hospital that day you saw the blood on her dress. It could not have come from the head wound, you know that,” he concluded, looking directly at his son.

“You only need to provide an affidavit testimony to what you saw that day,” David added. “They have to listen. It’s the law.”

“And if they don’t?” Andrew said, defeated on all accounts.

David leaned down and placed his hands on the table across from Andrew.

“Andrew, we need your help to do this. You are the only one who witnessed the event. You are the one with the information. You have to be the one to sue. It was your money,” David continued, “I know how difficult

this is going to be for you, even for Cami, but you said she was in danger at that house.”

Andrew looked up at him, considering his words.

“She is,” he said, firmly.

“Then let’s get her out of it,” his father said, nodding towards Andrew.

The next day, Andrew, his father and David walked into the office of Alan Myers, attorney at law in San Francisco.

He was a short man, standing only 5’5”. His brown hair and glasses made him seem even smaller. He wore a simple suit that worked for greeting clients of this nature. His voice, though, held command and knowledge as he spoke to the three men seating across from him on a couch.

“I understand,” Alan said after Andrew explained the situation of Camille Moore, her ‘death’ and her ‘rebirth.’

Alan looked at Andrew as he concluded. He paused for a moment, much shorter than it felt to the three other men in the room.

“You have definite case for fraud for Mr. Whiete.” Alan shifted in his seat a bit leaning forward. “Let me just get a few facts straight.”

He looked through his notes in front of him that he had been writing since Andrew had begun speaking.

“The idea of paying for the funeral was yours, correct, Mr. Whiete?” Andrew nodded his head. “And the Moores did not at any time offer any help in defraying the costs?”

“No.” Joseph looked over at his son, Andrew stay focused on Alan.

“At the time that this occurred you had been convinced that Miss Camille Moore, the deceased, would not have been given a funeral or a burial, is that correct?” Alan asked.

“Yes,” Andrew answered.

“All right. As to her,” he paused, thinking “returning from the dead, so to speak, you had no prior knowledge that she was alive?”

“No,” Andrew answered.

His quick small answers caused David to shift in his seat. David knew all too well how hard all of this would be for the man he called his friend, seated next to him. Andrew looked towards his father for a moment. The expression on his son’s face worried Joseph. He reached over and placed his hand on Andrew’s arm, comfortingly. Andrew’s eyes turned back to Alan.

“Good, that’s good.” Alan said, looking up at Andrew. “I mean for the case, of course, Mr. Whiete.”

Andrew absently nodded at him.

“I will need all of the paperwork, receipts from the funeral, anything you have that is a record of what payments you made...when you made them.”

As Alan spoke, David pulled out a folder from a briefcase and stood up, dropping it in front of Alan. He looked up at David and then focused back to the stack of papers before him.

“Very good,” he said, more to himself. He pulled the folder closer to him, opening it.

After a few moments of reading its contents, he looked up at Andrew.

“This is very good,” he said and smiled. “One more question, Mr. Whiete.”

Andrew waited.

“Are you willing to finish this once it’s begun? I must tell you, these matters can become complicated for everyone involved, emotionally as well as legally.”

Andrew looked at Alan directly.

“I want her out of that house and to receive the help she needs,” he said firmly. “Money is no object, Mr. Myers,” Andrew added.

Alan Myers smiled briefly and nodded towards him.

That was exactly what he wanted to hear.

“All right. I will file the paperwork with the court and we will get started. We will need to have your sworn testimony on the events that occurred with Camille Moore. I could have my secretary...” he started.

“Everything is there,” David said. “Andrew already provided a statement to the events.”

Alan looked down at the folder and pulled out the piece of paper referred to by David. He looked it over quickly.

“Excellent. Thank you,” he said to Andrew.

“Mr. Myers,” Joseph said, causing Alan to look his way. “What can we expect from the Moores’ attorney?”

“Well,” Alan said, looking from Andrew to Joseph while he spoke.

“Most likely a counter suit against Mr. Whiete. Which is why, Mr. Whiete,” he said, turning directly to Andrew, “you have to be upfront and honest with me. I will object to any questions about your character, of course, however you have to expect they will try to discredit you in any way they can.” There was an exchange between David and Andrew that wasn’t lost on Alan Myers.

“Is there anything that you have not told me that could become a problem? Anything at all, you can think of?”

Andrew sighed briefly.

“I went to see Camille and the Moores and I...” Andrew broke off for a moment, “there was a fight. I wouldn’t leave their house when they asked. They threatened a restraining order against me to not see their daughter,” Andrew stated.

“I see...” Alan looked away. He turned back to Andrew. “Did you or the Moores physically attack each other?”

“No,” Andrew said, quickly.

“So no one was physically hurt during this argument?”

“Correct.”

“Good,” Alan replied and nodded, looking down at the paperwork.

“About my character, Mr. Myers,” Andrew interjected quickly. Alan focused back on him. “I should tell you for the past seven years I have worked for an escort service.”

“It is legitimate,” David chimed in with, quickly. Andrew looked back at him.

“Are the Moores aware of this, Mr. Whiete?”

“I do not know, but Camille knows. I am uncertain if her sister does,” Andrew said.

“We will find out I am sure,” Alan said.

“However, this is not about your character, Mr. Whiete, remember that, no matter how much they try to make it so.”

“My son is a good man,” Joseph said, suddenly causing everyone to look at him. “He paid for that funeral out of the goodness of his heart and that was all. He never would have wanted things to go this far.”

Alan nodded at Joseph, “I understand.” Andrew smiled quickly at his father. Joseph squeezed his arm briefly and let go.

Andrew felt much better leaving Alan Myers office than when they had entered it. As they got into the car for the trip back to Joseph's house, they were silent. Andrew looked out the window from the passenger seat, while his father drove. The thoughts running through his mind were not of the court case or judgments... *I will make you safe again, Princess.* He said to himself.

Safe...and happy.

"I'm glad you did this, Andrew. I know it's not what you wanted, but if it can help Cami..." David started as they turned towards the highway.

"I hope so, David," Andrew said, distantly.

Joseph looked over at his son, briefly.

"Andrew, this is the best thing you could have done," he finally said, looking towards him.

Andrew didn't respond.

15

A Moment Suspended



*he next few weeks went by slowly
for Andrew.*

Each moment was just another one without his beloved. They had lost so many already, ten years worth, and now here they were, separated again.

Alan Myers proved to be quick and efficient with the filing of the paperwork. The Moores were served yesterday according to Alan. Andrew hoped that was all that would be needed. He didn't express this hope to David or his father, but secretly he did wish for the threat of the lawsuit to be enough for the Moores to come to their senses. He truly wasn't after their money. He only wanted to protect his princess. He just didn't see any other way.

A creeping feeling deep down somewhere inside me kept coming to the surface when he thought of Thomas and Diane Moore. He knew they were not going to give up control over Camille. He knew it as clearly as he knew how much he still loved her.

Deception, lies, and hurt didn't diminish the feeling for him, and he knew now it never would. *He was completely in love with Camille Moore. Always had been, always will be. What else was a Prince to do?*

"Andrew," Cat's voice was heard behind him before he saw her.

He was stepping out of his car in his driveway, having just come back from running a few errands. Not the ones he had been used to for the past ten years, such as manicures and dry cleaning pick-ups. These were of a more average nature, normal even, he could say. It was a

simple trip to the grocery store, the post office and the bank. Now, in his hands, he held a bag from the store filled with some bread, food, and milk -- the simple necessities.

“Catherine,” he said with a bit of disdain in his voice as he turned to face her.

“You know, this car is great, Andrew,” she remarked, smiling at him.

He could tell she was trying to be casual, but he wasn’t interested in casual conversations any longer. He had lived through too many to count on too many dates he would rather soon forget.

“What is it, now?” He said, not hiding his annoyance at her.

He had tried for the past weeks to call her and find out if Camille was all right, but she hadn’t returned a single phone call. When he had visited her apartment she no longer lived there, apparently she moved back home. If he didn’t have a sinking feeling before she arrived in his driveway about her lack of loyalty to her sister, he had it now.

“I know you don’t want to talk to me after what happened?” She started following Andrew to his door as he unlocked it and went inside.

He didn’t invite her in, but he left the door open. She walked through, closing it behind him and following him to the kitchen. He placed the bag of groceries down on the counter and turned to her. A look of annoyance and frustration crossed his handsome face. It had been

almost a month since they had seen each other and looking into that face caused Cat to turn away slightly.

“You look good,” she said, quietly. There was surprise in her voice she hadn’t intended.

Andrew ignored the comment, turning back to the bag of groceries. He proceeded to put them away, uninterested in her compliments or conversation.

“Listen, Cat, I’m very busy,” he said with his back to her.

Cat watched him as he dug inside the bag for a few items. The muscles on his back and shoulders were evident. She didn’t turn away.

“I can tell,” she finally said, moving to the counter next to him.

Immediately, he walked away carrying the milk in his hand and placing it in the refrigerator. When he turned back, Cat was inches from him. He stopped moving and looked down at her. The expression on his face wasn’t pleasant and he released a sigh.

“I think I can help you...with Cami,” she said quickly.

“Great,” he answered and smiled at her. “I wish you would have come sooner, though, I already filed the papers with the court against your parents.” He shrugged his shoulders with innocence, letting the smile die on his lips. He leaned down to her ear, “but you knew that, Kitty-Cat, didn’t you?” Sarcasm was evident in every word.

He hung there for just a moment then moved around her swiftly, back to the bag of groceries. She stood still and took a breath she hadn't realized she had been holding. The sound of his voice so close to her, the feel of his warm breath on her neck as he spoke. She tried desperately to focus on her reason for coming here, but the presence of him was always too strong for her.

"Tell me, Catherine," he said, not looking at her, but instead picking up some more groceries. Catherine found her senses and turned to face him. He finally rested his eyes on hers. Her face showed she wasn't happy with his tone. He didn't care.

"Do you do all the dirty work for your parents, or just the parts regarding your sister?"

"How dare you accuse me..." she started, her senses completely restored to her. She moved towards him with anger in her brown eyes.

Andrew stood his ground. Nothing she could do or say was going to change his opinion of her any longer. Once, she was something to be protected, taken care of. When she was young, he had felt so sorry for her. Losing her sister, her security. She had been so lost at the funeral, so completely in need of help and support and love. Things he gave easily and without judgment throughout the years. Time after time he came running when she called. He tried as best as he could to give her the time to heal, but it had all been a lie, and she knew exactly what she was doing.

Those days were over. There was no reason to feel compassion for this vixen that stood in front of him. It had all been a lie, a ploy to get him into her delusional world where she could pretend he was hers. The thought made him sick to his stomach.

“Truth hurts, darling,” he said, sarcastically, smiling at her, one of his trademark smiles. The woman standing across from him didn’t miss a beat.

“You think you’re so perfect, don’t you?” She said, cutting her eyes at him.

“No, I don’t” he looked directly into those dark eyes. “I know my mistakes. Do you?”

She held his gaze for a moment before backing down and turning away.

“Why can’t you see reason, Andrew?” She finally said, moving back to the table and away from those gorgeous green eyes of his.

“Reason? There’s reason in your household?” Andrew laughed a bit at his joke.

“My parents have lost it, but that’s nothing new. They are always doing stupid things when it comes to Cami. But then again, it’s not as if she’s so smart.” The words poured out before she could stop them.

“Really?” Andrew urged her on. If there was anything he was good at was letting people dig themselves their own hole. Cami was about to pick up a shovel and he had no intention of stopping her this time.

“You don’t get it, Andrew, you never did,” she said as the anger built in her voice with the passing moments.

“While you and Cami were in high school, my parents were trying to come up with ways of getting rid of you. There was no talking to Cami about it, she was completely in love with you, everything you did was perfect, right, true...and *you* were so damn persistent,” disgust was in her voice as she continued.

“Always coming over to pick her up, always being there for her when things went bad at home. Always helping her. They couldn’t stand it,” Cat walked a bit away from the table as she spoke, starting to pace, but she stopped at one of the benches.

“They?” Andrew said, leaning against the counter, waiting.

“Fine,” she said, louder. “I couldn’t stand it. I hated her because of you,” she confessed. “It wasn’t fair. She got everything and I...” Cat stopped speaking looking away.

Andrew moved in. She could smell his cologne. She loved that smell. He didn’t speak.

“I loved you,” she finally said, defeated. “I always did. You were so...” she turned away from him completely, “wonderful.”

She sat down at the bench, unwilling to look up at him. He remained silent as she reasoned in her head.

“I knew you loved her. I knew how happy you made her. I should have been happy for her,” her voice

was softer now. Andrew could hear the pain there. “I wanted to be. I just couldn’t. It wasn’t fair.” Her eyes were elsewhere.

“She always got everything. Daddy loved her better than me. He never gave me presents for being the best daughter. I know it was wrong to break her things when she went out with you.” She sighed, “I should never have broken that locket.”

“You broke that locket?” Andrew questioned after a moment. Cat nodded.

“I don’t know why. I just didn’t want her to have it. I wanted you to give me a present like that. I wanted you to look at me the way you looked at her. I wanted you to love me,” she sighed again. “You only saw me as her little sister. You made me so angry.” She looked up briefly at him. “It just wasn’t fair.” Her head lowered. “It wasn’t fair.”

Andrew’s voice was softer when he spoke, “Cat...” She looked up at him. Her eyes looked sad and tired. “You knew that we would never be.”

Cat looked away.

“I told you that, Catherine, many times,” the compassion that Cat had been so used to over the years from Andrew wasn’t in that soft voice any longer. “You were angry with your sister, because I loved her. That wasn’t fair to her.”

“I know,” was all she could say.

“But you can still make a change, Cat,” this time she looked up at him. “Help me to help her. You said

you wanted a second chance, was that all a lie, too?" Andrew asked. His eyes focused on her. A long moment passed between them.

Andrew wanted her to say yes. He knew she could see that. Her eyes stayed on focused on his, but they were darker than he had ever seen them, and he saw something in those eyes. Something that made him reconsider asking for her help.

Cat wanted to say yes, to open up his heart to her again. She knew he would, if only she could bring herself to simply help him, but the thought of it repulsed her in a way she had never felt. She would not help him get back to Cami. *He had her, he lost her, he still wanted her.* Through it all, the funeral, the pain, the hurt, the tears, he still wanted *her. Not me, her.*

"I can't," she resigned, and stood up quickly. "You don't understand my parents. If they even knew I was here, they would..." she trailed off and began moving back through the living room to the door. *They would send me away,* she thought to herself and considered for a moment if they really would. She couldn't exactly be certain and that was enough to walk away.

Andrew quickly followed her. He reached out and grabbed her arm before she opened the front door. *Damn him,* she thought, *let me be. I can't think when you touch me.* She screamed in her head.

"No, Cat, it's time to come clean," he said, firmly. She stared at him and then averted her eyes. "Whatever you did, I want to know...now."

His eyes flashed with anger and she knew it was over. All the hoping, wishing, praying for him to be hers was gone. He didn't want her, never did and she had been a fool to think she could have him all these years. She had let her sister be taken away, lied to her, lied to everyone, just to have the dream of this man before her in her life. *What have I done?* She thought to herself.

"It didn't work," she finally said, defeated. He let go of her arm and she let it slump to her side. She leaned against the door.

"What didn't work?" Andrew asked, moving in a step. She looked up at him, shaking her head.

"She said it would be all right, that you would rescue her, that you would always rescue her. Because that's what Princes did," Cat laughed a bit looking away for a moment. When she turned back to him, she knew she wasn't hiding anything anymore from him. He would see the pain she felt. *Good, she thought, see it all. You bastard.*

"She believes in all of it, Andrew. And..." her eyes darkened and hardened against his, "you will, won't you? You will rescue her, somehow, because that is exactly what princes do."

The hate and anger in her voice was strong to Andrew's ears. He remained silent, unmoving. She shook her head once more and opened the door, walking outside. She stopped on the first step and turned back to face him.

“Mom and Dad are filing a counter suit against you for endangering Cami and Mom said you will never see her again,” Cat said and turned away, putting up her hand. “I don’t care anymore. I hope all of you kill each other, because if I have to live one more day with Mom, Dad, Cami or...*you*, I will go insane.”

“Cat, she is your sister,” he said, firmly back to her, finding his voice again.

“Like I care, Andrew,” she said back to him showing all of her frustration and hatred. “If I did, I wouldn’t have lied and cheated and stolen and done all those things you hate me for.” She looked directly at him. “I wanted you. That was all.” She turned away. “God knows why.”

She started to walk away, “you got your battle, Prince,” she added, sarcastically going to her car and getting inside.

Andrew watched her car disappear for a long moment before slowly shutting the front door behind him.

For the first time since he had known Catherine Ellen Moore, he agreed with her.

Several days later Andrew was standing in Alan Myers office discussing the details of the Moores counter suit. David and his father had wanted to come, but he had refused. *If the Moores wanted a battle, it would be his and his alone.*

“They have created quite a case against you, Andrew,” Alan said, taking on a casual tone, “but it’s all circumstantial. They claim more things than they could possibly prove and they are refusing to let their daughter testify due to medical reasons, so I’d say they’ve put you in a good position.”

“How’s that?” Andrew asked, standing up. He had been restless since he had arrived at Alan’s office.

“Well,” Alan started. There was slight pleasure in his voice that he was trying to contain, “they have stated that you’ve endangered Miss Moore by accelerating her medical condition by your actions with her both ten years ago and more recently, when you went to see her in the hospital,” Andrew looked at him, quickly. “You signed in,” Alan said answering his question.

Andrew looked away.

“You see, if they use her medical condition, they will have to reveal to the court what condition that is and how specifically you accelerated it.”

Andrew looked at him, carefully.

“And they can’t do that,” Alan said, simply. “Not without opening the files for the court and, thus in, handing them over to us. If they refuse, they cannot use their own defense for their suit against you and it will be thrown out,” Alan finished, sitting back. “It’s really wasn’t very smart on their behalf, but it will work in our favor.”

“And Camille?” Andrew asked, carefully. “What will happen to her in all of this?”

“She is still under the guardianship of her parents. We can’t change that. However, if those files are opened and there is anything to indicate endangerment on their side, the judge will have no choice than to request a psych evaluation of her condition, depending of course, she has one at all.”

“And then she can be removed from that household?” Andrew interjected, sitting back down.

“Well,” Alan moved forward in his chair, “let us see what happens at the hearing. Their lawyer doesn’t want this to go to court anymore than we do, so that is good. However, the hearing may be a bit rough for you to hear. You have to understand they will present their case to the judge, just as we will.”

“I understand,” Andrew said, leaning back on the couch. “And they will bring up my employment with Midnight Services.”

“Yes, but I will object. Your employment was only during the years when Miss Moore was supposedly ‘dead’ and it will not have a bearing on either case.”

“I want Cami to get the help she needs. That is the most important thing,” Andrew stated. Alan nodded.

“And that is exactly what I will be telling the judge tomorrow. Don’t worry, Andrew, you have a case, they don’t.”

Andrew looked away and stood up again, causing Alan to rise also. He walked next to him.

“Andrew, I know this is difficult, but the judge will not be able to rule any other way than in your favor. They have committed fraud and their defense is weak at best.”

Andrew turned to Alan and nodded absently.

“I should go. I have some things to do,” Andrew walked to the door and turned back to Alan. “Thank you for the information.”

“I’ll see you tomorrow. Have a good night, Andrew,” Alan called, but Andrew had already left the office.

That night was the worst Andrew had experienced since Cami’s ‘death’. He tossed and turned, unable to get sleep. Finally at 5:30 AM he gave up all together on sleeping and got up, changed into sweatpants and walked outside, bare-chested. He thought about running, maybe it would take his mind off of the hearing scheduled for 10:00 AM that morning. Or take his mind off of Camille and what was happening to her at this moment, but he decided against it. Instead, he walked down to the basement of his house where he had weights and several exercise machines set up. He had been there just yesterday, but it felt like a lot longer.

He grabbed one of the white towels that was folded up on a wire rack in the corner as he walked in and looked around for a moment before he decided on the pull up bar located in the center of the large room.

He recalled the time when David first saw the room, bringing back the memory as he jumped up and

grabbed the bar far over his head and pulled his chin over the bar, easily.

“This is insane,” David had said as he tried all the machines and even jumped onto the bar Andrew now continued doing pull-ups on. After only three, David had jumped off. Content he had exercised. Andrew had laughed at him, knowing full well, David kept himself in shape.

As to how exactly he did that, Andrew learned later that when motivated he could exercise, but he was one of those individuals that was extremely competitive and needed others to keep his motivations. Naturally, David worked out at a gym filled with people who could be persuaded to enter into competition with him.

Andrew, although competitive in other areas of his life, didn't ever find the need for that kind of motivation in exercise. Truth be told, he liked to exercise. It was usually calming to him. He liked the quiet and the alone time, especially considering he was so often not alone in his work, or his life.

He breathed in as he pulled up again on the bar, making an even twenty. He could feel his arm and abs muscles tighten. He used to count to himself, but his body now told him when he was done. Sometimes he pushed a few more, sometimes he didn't. This morning, he pushed.

One more... two more... three more.

He could feel the sweat on his forehead and feel his heart pounding. His arms were tired, his body being strained as he pulled up again on the bar.

Four more...five more...six more.

He should have stopped. The muscles all over his body screamed at him to stop, but he kept pulling.

Seven more...eight more...nine more.

Frustration, anger, and pain moved him forward as he pulled again, and again, and again.

Ten...eleven...twelve.

The telephone rang to his right. The break of his own breathing forced him out of the moment. He jumped down. Every muscle in his body came to his senses. He could feel their tiredness, their overwork. He reached down and wiped the sweat off his forehead and face with the towel, walking to the phone. His breathing wasn't back to normal yet, but it was steadily coming.

"Yea," he said, winded.

"Where were you?" David asked on the other end of the phone line.

"Just working out some things," Andrew answered.

"It's early," David said.

"Yes, it is. Why are you calling me then, David?" Andrew said, wiping his forehead again with the towel.

"I can't sleep. I'm worried about today. Are you certain I can't be there?"

"No, it's a closed hearing. Just Alan, the Moores, their lawyer and me," Andrew answered. The third time he had explained this to his friend.

“It’s not fair,” David said, bringing Andrew back to the conversation with Cat.

“No, it’s not. That’s life,” Andrew answered casually.

“Call me as soon as…” David started.

“I will,” Andrew replied and hung up the phone.

Within a few minutes Andrew was upstairs and in the shower. The hot water felt good against his muscles as they slowly relaxed. Thoughts formed in his mind of a time long ago.

“Andrew, there are many things I don’t understand in this world,” Cami had said, lying on Andrew’s chest and staring up into the stars.

“What is it, Princess, that you don’t understand?” He said, softly.

“Why parents have to make all the choices?”

He had laughed and caused her to look at him. She smiled up at him.

“I love your laugh,” she said, sweetly. “It is so alive.”

“I love you, Camille,” Andrew said pulling her up to him. “I love you very much.”

He kissed her, sweet and inviting at first, but the hungry they often felt for each other consumed them. They made love outside under the stars beneath all the possibilities that came with youth.

There was something about that night that changed Andrew. Something he could never understand, but it was the most perfect moment he had ever had. He knew that. He pulled himself back to the present. Quickly, dried himself off, and pulled the towel around his waist, folding it under at the side, casually as he walked out into his bedroom.

There was a slight gasp heard to his left. When he looked up, he saw *her*. She was standing in a beam of morning light as it streamed through part of the curtains to his right.

“I didn’t mean to...” Cami said, softly, her emerald eyes shining. “Alexander let me in.” She paused. Andrew stared. “I wanted to talk to you.”

Slowly, Andrew regained his composure. Her beautiful face once again took him off-guard. *She always looked so beautiful in the sunlight*, he thought.

“You are beautiful,” he finally said, smiling towards her. That smile was reserved for her. She turned away slightly, but he knew she hid her own smile.

“You always do,” he continued, his voice soft and inviting. “The most beautiful girl I’ve ever seen.”

“Andrew...” she said, softly moving towards him a few steps. She took each one carefully.

“I am always carried away by your beauty, Camille,” he said, breathlessly, causing her to stop moving and to turn away again, shyly.

Andrew moved in closer to her until they met face to face. He reached down with his arms and pulled

her quickly into him. The motion, swift and graceful, left her breathless. She was trying to avoid his eyes, but instead looked up directly into them. He knew what they were telling her. He wanted them to tell her everything he was feeling.

“I have missed you so much, princess,” he said, softly, sighing through the words.

As he leaned down some of his still wet hair left droplets on her, causing her to shiver from the cold. He pulled her tighter to him. The water that clung to his bare chest didn't feel cold though against the light dress she wore. She didn't waver her gaze from his eyes. Nor did he.

“Andrew...you are...” her words were cut off by his mouth descending upon hers.

They kissed for what seemed like an eternity to him. The touch, the feel of it all hit his senses full force. Desire wrapped around his heart and engulfed him in flames he knew would not be ceased until she was *his* again. He deepened the kiss. She opened her mouth to him. Slowly he played and teased, building the passion between them. Finally he moved to her neck. He heard her take a breath in as he lined her neck with warm kisses. His hand moved on her back, reflex taking over. He knew this Camille. This was *his princess*.

He began to unzip the dress as he continued the kisses back to her lips. Once there, he pulled her in with his other hand, pressing her against his chest and feeling the warmth of her body on him. After a moment, he

moved back slight allowing the dress to fall to the ground easily. He felt her hands on him, moving to the towel around his waist. She pulled slightly. It fell.

They stood there against each other, completely lost in love. Effortlessly he picked her up and brought her to his bed. He leaned down over her, gently caressing her face. She closed her eyes, arching her head back. He smiled at her response to him as he leaned down to her neck inviting him into her.

The moments passed slowly as they rediscovered each other and everything they had lost. The words they each spoke were of love-- sweet, simple and true. Nothing before that moment or what would come after, were uttered. They were lost in their world. And neither one wanted it to end.

15

The Dark Woods

“*Princess,*”

Andrew said, softly.

He held her in his arms while she curled up on his chest. Both had been lying there not moving, nor speaking for close to an hour. Her eyes were closed, but he knew she wasn't asleep. She smiled against him.

“Yes, Andrew,” she said, just as softly.

“Were we this good in high school?” He asked softly, smiling.

She turned slightly to look up at him. Her eyes were bright and shining. Her beautiful red curls outlining her face. She smiled up at him so inviting that Andrew felt an urge to make love to her again. Instead he pulled her into him a bit tighter.

“No,” she said. “You’ve changed.”

The expression of surprise and delight that danced in her green eyes made him laugh. She pulled herself up a bit wrapping the sheet around her and looked directly into his eyes.

“What?” Now her expression looked worried.

“Thank you,” he said, caressing her cheek slightly. She closed her eyes against his touch for a moment.

“I never knew you could...” she trailed off, looking away.

He smiled again and sat up, leaning over, kissing her sweetly.

“Thank you again,” he said. She smiled at him. He looked at her for a long moment, causing her to become embarrassed. She pulled the sheet tighter around her.

“Don’t,” he said, softly, tugging slightly at the sheet. “You are beautiful.”

She looked down and away from his penetrating eyes. When he leaned down to kiss her again, she moved her head slightly away. He stopped.

“Please stop,” she said, barely above a whisper. “It will only make everything more complicated.”

The words stopped him as he sat back up and looked down at her.

“What are you talking about, Cami?” He said, his voice serious now.

“It can’t stay like this, Andrew,” her eyes lost their brilliant shine.

“Of course it can. We can have anything you want, princess,” he said, soothingly, trying to stay in the moment. He wasn’t ready to face the world yet.

“Anything.” His words took on a faraway dreamy tone that caused Cami to look at him. “Tell me what you want, and I will get it for you. Anything, princess.”

She paused a long moment while he waited, anticipating. When she did speak her words they weren’t what he had expected to hear.

“Let me go,” she said, softly, reaching out to touch his face. She caressed his cheek and smiled at him. “It’s time, Andrew. We have to let go,” she continued to send his body into desire with her sweet touches while her words screamed inside his head.

“It was a dream and it can’t be real,” she took on a distant tone as she spoke words he didn’t want to hear. “Let me go, my prince.”

She continued to caress his face, causing chills to go down his spine, but he steeled against them for the first time in his life. He reached out and grabbed her hand,

stopping her from touching him further. He held it firmly in his own.

“No,” he said. She looked at him confused. “You came to me, Camille and every time I get close, you want out. No. Not this time,” he put her hand down and stood up from the bed.

He walked to the closet, pulling a robe from inside and put it on. When he looked back at her, his eyes were firm and unmoving.

“Andrew, don’t you see it can’t be,” she began. “We can’t be. There are too many things that…”

“There is nothing we can’t overcome,” he interrupted. “You told me that.”

“I was young. I was afraid,” she continued with her excuses, but he wasn’t listening.

“You came to me, Camille,” he said, interrupting her again. “Don’t give me up so easily, my love.”

“There is no use. I can’t win. They won’t let me,” she sighed and looked away.

Andrew moved back to the bed, holding her by her arms. She tried to avoid looking at him.

“Look at me, Cami,” he said. She didn’t. “Look at me,” he urged.

Finally, she turned her eyes back to him.

“You walked away once. Maybe you didn’t understand what I felt for you. What you mean to me. What we mean to each other. Maybe you were young. Maybe I was, too.” She had looked away again. “But look at me. I am not a kid anymore, Cami, and neither are

you.” He pulled her closer to him. “Look at me,” he demanded. She turned her eyes towards his. He knew she didn’t want to.

“I will never leave you in pain. And princess, you are in pain,” he said, softer.

“I will be fine,” she answered trying to avoid his intense stare.

“No, no, my love, you won’t be,” he let go of her arms and she slumped against the pillows a bit.

“Please stop this fight with my parents. You don’t know them. They will destroy you. I don’t want anything bad to happen,” she said, pleading with him.

He stood up and shook his head against her.

“I’m sorry,” he said, turning to face her. “I really am, princess, but I can’t help you if I do as you say. And,” he moved back to the bed, she backed up a bit, “Cami, I love you too much to stop helping you.”

“If you love me...” he placed two fingers over her mouth to stop her next words.

“Don’t say that, Cami, you’ll regret it,” he said, firmly. “This isn’t your fault. None of it is, but it can’t remain like this. I won’t allow it. Not while I can try and stop it.” He removed his fingers and stood up again walking to the bureau.

“Andrew, if you don’t do this, we can be together. Not all the time, but I can convince them that I’m over you and they will calm down. I won’t have to go back to the institute. We can still see each other once in a while,” she finished waiting. “Just let this go.”

When Andrew turned around, he held a small piece of paper in his hand. He handed it to her.

“Take it,” he said. She reached out and took it from his hand. There was a phone number written on it.

“What is this?”

“We won’t be able to see each other until this is done. That is how you can reach me. We can talk, but that’s it,” he said, walking away to the other side of the room. “You should go home. They will be looking for you.”

“Andrew, I don’t want to...” she started and then he heard her get up from the bed, quickly. She had wrapped the sheet around her as she stood next to him. “Maybe we could go away. Just run away.”

He looked down at her expectant eyes and wished for a moment, he were eighteen again when he could believe in all the possibilities of life. But he was twenty-nine and too jaded, too adult to continue this conversation.

“There is no running away this time, princess,” he said, softly.

“But you could...” she began, panic setting in her voice.

“No, Camille, I can’t,” he turned completely to her. “And neither can you.” He softly put his hand on her arm. “Sweetie, do you remember what happened?”

The look in her eyes frightened him. She was scared now; afraid of something he couldn’t fight. Something he couldn’t even see.

Cami paused for a long moment. Andrew knew she was thinking.

“Cami?” He finally asked, causing her to look directly at him. Although Andrew could tell she was looking past him somehow.

“I don’t know...” she said, softly. He leaned in to hear her.

“You told me to remember for you, Princess,” he said, softly. “I will. I promise you. I will.” She smiled up at him and kissed him sweetly on the lips.

“You are a real prince, Andrew,” she whispered to him.

He smiled at her.

“It is only because of you, Princess,” he answered back.

She smiled and turned away. She picked up her clothing and went towards the bathroom. As she passed Andrew, she stopped and looked at him for a moment.

“You were correct, Andrew,” she said. He questioned her with his eyes. “We are not children anymore.”

She smiled and walked away closing the bathroom door. He looked down and smiled to himself.

Within moments, it seemed to Andrew sitting in the bedroom. She was dressed and walked out of his life again. He had walked her to the door and closed it behind her, telling her once again that he loved her and to remember that. No matter what happens. She had nodded and sadly turned away.

“Where have you been?” Alan Myers said as Andrew approached the courthouse. It was 9:57 AM. They were due in the judge’s chambers in three minutes.

“I had some things to take care of,” was all Andrew said as he passed Alan and continued into the courthouse. Alan shook his head and followed.

Judge Renna Gates was a middle-aged woman with light skin and black hair and eyes. She wasn’t particularly elegant, but rather had a stern look about her. No nonsense style Andrew had seen before in his clients. She wasn’t about to let anything slip by her, least of all from this group before her. Andrew could tell she was already sizing each of them up. On his left was Alan and across from him were seated Attorney Reginald Tucker, Thomas Moore, Diane Moore, Catherine Moore, and Camille Moore. Camille had been placed directly opposite him.

“I will not stand for any outbursts or disrespectful behavior during this hearing,” Judge Gates stated in a no-nonsense voice. “This will be based on the facts of this case and any emotional outbursts will not be tolerated.” She turned from the Moores to Andrew. “Is that completely understood by all parties?”

“Yes, your honor,” a chorus of voices said. Camille looked terrified to even be there and for a moment Andrew wanted to end this torture for her, but he

held his ground. He knew now the only way to help her was staring in front of him.

“Mr. Meyers, please proceed with your client’s statement,” Judge Gates said.

Alan went right to work not leaving out a single thing that was listed on Andrew’s statement, including the prices and expenses of the ‘mock’ funeral. Cami remained silent during the entire proceeding looking only at Myers, the Judge and an occasional glance towards her prince.

“In conclusion, Mr. Whiete is claiming ‘willful deception and fraud against Thomas and Diane Moore in amount of \$11, 321.00.’”

Alan finished and looked towards the judge.

“Mr. Tucker, you may proceed,” Judge Gates said again in her no-nonsense voice.

“First of all, I would like to state on behalf of my client’s that Mr. Whiete has harassed them and their daughter, Camille ever since her return.”

“Andrew never would do that,” Camille suddenly said looking towards her parents. “He would never.”

“Miss Moore, please refrain yourself or I will have you removed from these proceedings,” Judge Gates said swiftly to Cami.

“Your honor,” Cami continued, “I mean no disrespect to this court or to you. I simply feel the statement is untrue.”

“I understand the delicacy of this case, Miss Moore and in particular your interests in it, but we must hear all arguments to continue.” Judge Gates leaned towards Cami a bit. “We shall hear from you, Miss Moore.”

“Thank you,” she said.

“Please Mr. Tucker continue.”

The hearing lasted three hours during which Judge Gates had to contend with heated lawyers, heated clients and heated family members. At least once everyone had some opinion to say, even Andrew. When the matter of Camille’s incident at fourteen was brought up, Mrs. Moore stood up and outright attacked Andrew. In his defense, he stated calmly what his intentions were for bringing up the matter and how it pertained to the case. A fact Judge Gates listened to. Even during the exchange it was Catherine who caused the most disruption.

“Please, Miss Moore, I am telling you to refrain from speaking,” Judge Gates pleaded, but Catherine had enough.

“He,” pointing to Andrew, “would do anything to get her back. He’s a prince, you know,” she spat sarcastically at Andrew. “A perfect prince. As a matter of fact, he even lives it through his job. Of course, it’s only for one night and for a price, but hey, what’s a prince to do in today’s world?”

“Miss Moore that will be enough! You will be escorted out of these proceedings at once,” Judge Gates said and out Catherine went to sulk in the waiting room.

“My client does not have to...” Alan started, but the Judge cut him off.

“I am aware, Mr. Myers. Let us get back to the matter at hand, shall we?”

“Your honor,” Tucker looked at Andrew for a moment and then to the Judge. Alan leaned over and whispered in Andrew’s ear.

“Here we go, be ready,” he said.

“Mr. Whiete’s profession is a matter of discussion,” Tucker said, calmly.

“It has no bearing on this case, your honor. My client has been nothing but forthcoming in these proceedings and where he works or what he does for a living does not play a role in the fraud committed upon him when he was only eighteen,” Alan countered.

“It speaks to motive, your honor, of Mr. Whiete,” Tucker said.

“You’re going to have to do better than that, Mr. Tucker,” Judge Gates said looking towards him.

“Mr. Whiete currently works and has worked for an escort service for the past seven years. His monetary compensation has been extremely high as indicated by these financial statements obtained through the service,” Tucker continued and handed out financial statements for the past seven years on Andrew’s income.

“I would like to reference the statement in 2005 in which a client not listed by name to protect privacy paid one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars for a business trip,” Tucker looked at the Judge.

“These are for services that my client provides. The price is irrelevant, your honor,” Alan stated. “Yes, Mr. Whiete had worked for an escort service, however he has left that business.”

“Recently,” Tucker said.

“If you do not have a point, Mr. Tucker, I will stop this right now,” Judge Gates declared.

“Mr. Whiete is deceptive and a liar. We know for a fact that the compensation received on many of his so-called ‘services’ were involving sexual relations with the clients.”

Alan looked towards Andrew for a moment, but he just shook his head.

“That is ridiculous, your honor. My client has never engaged in illegal activities and I see no proof of their accusation,” Alan said.

“He has a point, Mr. Tucker,” Judge Gates agreed.

“We have proof, your honor,” Tucker said. Camille looked over at Andrew. He caught her eye. The look told him she didn’t doubt him. That was all he needed.

“Your honor, where is all of this going,” Alan said. “My client is being harassed.”

“Mr. Tucker,” Judge Gates said. “Present your proof or move on.”

“I have a sworn statement by Jennifer Conner,” Tucker began. This time Andrew looked sharply up at him.

“Jennifer,” he said, softly.

“She states that Mr. Whiete and her have been engaged in sexual activities for the past four years and that he has on occasion given her money,” Tucker said.

“Your honor, this is completely out of line. Even if these statements were true, my client was giving money to another person not the other way around,” Alan said.

“Mr. Tucker is that all you have?” Judge Gates said.

“It is clear that Mr. Whiete could not possibly be an escort that is worth one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars, your honor. Let us be reasonable,” Tucker explained. “What was the client paying for?”

“Mr. Whiete, I must admit I am curious. Would you care to explain?” Judge Gates looked at Andrew.

“My client doesn’t have to...” Alan started, but Andrew touched his arm.

“It’s all right,” Andrew said. “The client wanted me to escort her for a weekend in Beer Creek, Iowa with her family.”

“And the price was one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars, Mr. Whiete? That must have been some weekend,” Judge Gates hid a smile. “Either way, Mr.

Whiete is not being accused here, your clients are, Mr. Tucker. I suggest you leave Mr. Whiete's employment out of this."

"What of Jennifer Conner?" Tucker said.

"It is irrelevant, Mr. Tucker since Mr. Whiete was the one who provided Miss Conner with funds. He committed no crime. If you have something more, say it so we can continue."

"Your honor, Mr. Whiete's ability to manipulate people into his will is relevant. He has preyed upon the Moores since he entered their life. He has caused Camille Moore's mental condition to worsen and..." Tucker was cut off by the Judge.

"How, Mr. Tucker?" She said.

"Because of Mr. Whiete's involvement with their daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Moore have had to go to great lengths to protect her. Even 'faking' her own death to release her from Mr. Whiete's 'spell,'" Tucker concluded.

"Your honor there is no evidence that Miss Moore's condition worsened after Mr. Whiete knew her," Alan stated.

"We have medical papers from her doctor that explain since Mr. Whiete entered Miss Moore's life when she was seventeen her mental state already fragile deteriorated further," Tucker pulled out some papers and handed them to the Judge.

"Your honor," Alan started.

“Hang on, Mr. Myers, you’ll get your chance,” the Judge looked over the papers and then placed them on the table.

“All right, I am going to clear something up right here and now,” Judge Gates began. “This hearing is to determine the case against the Moores, namely did they commit fraud against Mr. Whiete and thus resulted in paying funeral expenses for a person who they knowingly had not died.” She paused and looked at the Moores.

“Yes, you did.” She said. “Having said that and seeing these medical records clearly stating that the Moores were aware their daughter Camille Moore was not dead at the time of the funeral, I am ruling in favor of Mr. Whiete. Mr. and Mrs. Moore you did knowingly allow Mr. Whiete to pay for a funeral of which the deceased was not deceased. This is fraud on your behalf. Since Mr. Whiete was only eighteen years old at the time and emotional distraught over his girlfriend’s death I am awarding Mr. Whiete with \$25,000 to cover both the original funeral expenses and undue pain and suffering. That is my final judgment.” She took a breath.

“However, there is much about this case that disturbs me. In concern to the counter suit, I will take the matter under consideration and wish to meet again to discuss it and then I will rule on the counter suit against Mr. Whiete. In the meantime, I stress to you, Mr. Tucker and to the Moores that the facts presented are facts that pertain to the counter suit and not wishes of Mr. Whiete’s activities,

either legal or illegal. I will not have this case be about what you believe may have occurred. Am I understood?"

"Yes, your honor," Tucker replied. Mr. and Mrs. Moore nodded their heads.

"Good. Now, since the counter suit is in regards to Miss Moore's mental health, I am ordering a complete unsealing of her minor records as well as a psychological evaluation before we meet again," Judge Gates concluded.

Alan looked towards Andrew and threw him a quick smile. He nodded slightly.

"No, your honor," Camille said, pleading in her eyes. "I just want to go with Andrew." She looked over at Andrew. There were tears in her eyes that spoke to his heart. He wanted to reach out to her, but he stood his ground.

"Miss Moore, I understand that this is very difficult for you, however you are under the custody of your parents until this matter has been resolved. Do you understand?" Judge Gates said, sympathetically.

"Please, I came back to set things right between Andrew and myself. I don't want to cause problems, but he's the only one who can protect me," Cami said softly. The last part was almost in a whisper. The Judge looked at her, curiously.

"Are you in danger, Miss Moore?" She asked.

Camille looked at Andrew who nodded slightly to her to say yes.

“Camille, you are tired,” Mrs. Moore said, quickly. “Your honor, she is very sick.”

“That may be, but I would like an answer, Miss Moore. Do you feel you are in danger with your parents?” Judge Gates looked directly at Cami and Andrew knew the pressure was too much for her. His restraint during the hearing was loosening and he knew if he didn’t get out of there soon, he was going to lose it altogether.

“No,” Cami said. “I’m fine.”

“Miss Moore, this is a chance to speak,” Judge Gates said, willing her somehow to say the truth.

“Princess, please,” Andrew finally said, causing Mrs. Moore to stand up.

“That is enough. She is my daughter, Andrew. I will not stand for this,” Diane Moore said looking at Andrew the entire time. “You got your money now leave us be.”

“I didn’t want your money,” Andrew said, countering her and standing up also.

“All I’ve ever wanted is to help Camille. Help her get out of your house. To be happy. To feel safe. Why couldn’t you see that? Why won’t you let her be happy?” There was sadness in his voice that affected Camille. She started to cry.

“Now look what you have done!” Diane yelled. “Camille, come.”

“Mr. Whiete, Mrs. Moore, please sit down,” Judge Gates said, trying to calm the situation.

“Miss Moore,” she turned towards Cami again. Cami looked at her. “I am sorry, but I can’t release you from your parents custody unless you give me something that states you are in danger.” Judge Gates continued looking at her. “Are you in danger, Miss Moore?”

“She has already answered that,” Diane said. “You are trying to get her to say something against me, but she won’t. I’m her mother.”

Cami looked from the Judge to Andrew. He knew he had lost the battle today, but the war was not over.

“No, your honor, I am not,” she said her voice held no emotion in it, but her eyes held a sadness and longing that broke Andrew’s heart as he watched the painful exchange.

“Very well, Miss Moore, then I have no choice,” Judge Gates said, standing up. “I release you to the custody of your parents. You are to do as this court directs in regards to a psychological evaluation of your condition. Is that understood?”

Cami nodded her head.

Judge Gates looked at Cami once more before walking out of the room.

“How dare you try to take our daughter away,” Mrs. Moore threatened Andrew. Her eyes cutting into him, but he wasn’t looking at her, he was focused completely on his princess.

“Cami,” he said, softly, reaching out to her. Cami looked up at him with sad eyes and a lost

expression on her face. He wanted to take her out of here and hold her in his arms. Telling her everything was going to be all right, but the moment passed.

“Come Camille, I have had enough of this. You need rest,” Mrs. Moore announced and took her hand, pulling her up from the seat.

“Daddy,” Cami said, suddenly, causing everyone to look at her. Even the lawyers were anticipating her words.

Mr. Moore turned towards his daughter and smiled weakly.

No more was said as Cami followed her parents and their lawyer out of the room. As soon as the door closed, Andrew sighed releasing all the tension he had felt.

“I’m sorry, Andrew,” Alan said as he gathered up his files and put them back in his briefcase.

“I’m fine. I didn’t expect her to....” Andrew trailed off, looking away from Alan, deep in thought.

Alan placed a comforting hand on his shoulder.

“You are doing the best you can for her right now,” Alan replied. “We gotten the medical files released and that is what we wanted and the psych evaluation will help to know what we are dealing with in her condition.”

“Yes,” Andrew said, distantly. “Yes, what we are dealing with.”

Alan looked at him for a few more moments.

“Are you all right, Andrew?” He finally asked.

Andrew turned back to Alan, quickly and nodded his head. “Yes,” he smiled briefly, “yes, I’m fine. Thank you, Alan. You did a great job.”

“You’re welcome. Now, listen,” Alan began. “This next part is going to get harder. The Moores will fight and you have to be prepared for what they will do to you.”

Andrew turned completely to him, questioning in his eyes. *Was it possible to do more?* He thought. *They had faked her death, locked her up and keep her as a prisoner in her own house.*

“They will attack anything you have ever done and believe me this counter suit is all about revenge on you, Andrew. You have really angered them. I still haven’t figured out how, but I know they will tell us.” Alan concluded.

“They wanted control and Camille wanted freedom. I stood in their way,” Andrew explained simply.

“I don’t think it’s that easy, Andrew. Why go to such lengths? Parents don’t like boyfriends all the time, but even with her condition, whatever that is, you were no threat to her. You were a threat to them.” Alan said, thinking. “And I believe we should find out why. Don’t you?”

Andrew looked at Alan and then shifted his eyes to where the Moores had exited, thinking.

“I don’t know,” Camille yelled at the doctor before her. “I don’t know.” She said again, quieter.

“Come, Camille, please sit down,” the doctor said. He was a pleasant doctor with inquisitive brown eyes and a generous amount of brown hair on his head. He had a soothing tone to his voice that was peppered with knowledge and know-how. He wasn’t that young, but he wasn’t that old. Forty-five. And Cami had liked his name. Nicholas Quinton. He reminded her of a cross between a young St. Nick and a soap opera doctor with warmth, compassion and understanding.

“You don’t have to know, Camille,” Dr. Quinton said in his soothing tone. Cami nodded and sat down.

“I’m sorry, Dr. Quinton, I didn’t mean to yell,” she apologized.

“I’m glad you did, Camille. Emotions are neither good nor bad, but we all have them and sometimes they erupt like a volcano. We are powerless to stop them. It can be good to feel that sometimes,” he smiled reassuringly at her. She smiled back.

“I’m scared of them,” she suddenly said, causing Dr. Quinton to look up at her.

“Emotions can be frightening when we don’t understand them,” he said.

“Yes,” she answered.

“I’m curious, Camille, is it the emotion that scares you or the person expressing it?”

Camille thought about this question for a long moment and then looked back at him.

“I think it’s the person,” she said.

“A particular person or everyone.”

“I don’t like it when momma yells and Daddy never yells that scares me, too,” she said.

Dr. Quinton leaned in a bit towards her.

“Why is that, Camille?”

“Daddy is always quiet. Very quiet.” She said, moving off into a distant memory. “I never hear him.” Her voice took on a whispered tone. “I know it’s him, but I can’t hear him.”

Dr. Quinton paid close attention as she continued.

“He is in my room. I know he is there. I know he’s been there before.” She looked past Dr. Quinton and into a long-ago memory.

“Tell me what he does, Camille?” Dr. Quinton urged.

“He....” She paused for a moment. Her face in deep thought. “He does things,” she whispered. “Things he’s not supposed to.”

“What kind of things?” Dr. Quinton followed in a lower tone keeping the moment for her.

“Don’t say anything,” she whispered to Dr. Quinton, looking directly at him now, lost in a memory. “Shhhh...be quiet now.” Her voice took on a deeper tone remembering the moment. “Quiet now, sweetheart. Your mother wouldn’t understand. This is between you and

me. Because I love you, sweetie, I love you more than anything.”

Suddenly Camille backed up against the couch and gasped. She put her head down.

“What are you seeing, Camille?” Dr. Quinton moved to the couch. “It is not happening right now. Right now you are in my office.”

“Daddy, daddy, please,” she started pleading like a child. “No, please, don’t. It hurts, Daddy, it hurts.”

Cami moved her head away as if from a kiss and scrunched up her face. “No, please, don’t Daddy. I’ll be good. I will.”

Cami suddenly ‘woke up’. She was confused and her eyes darted back and forth trying to remember where she was. She slowly relaxed her body and slid back to the couch’s seat.

“Are you all right, Camille?” Dr. Quinton said, touching her arm, gently. “Who do you feel?”

“Strange, like I’m not here, but I am.” She started to cry. “I knew it. I had Daddy’s baby,” she suddenly said as the memories came back to her. “I couldn’t have it. Momma hated me. She hated the baby. She wanted to get rid of it.” She was talking quickly and Dr. Quinton struggled to keep up.

“How did your mother do that?” He asked.

“Right before school. She took it out of me. She said it was evil and she was getting rid of it.” Cami stood up quickly and walked about the room. “Oh god,” she

said, sliding to the floor. Dr. Quinton followed her and took her hand.

“It’s all right, Camille to remember. It’s safe now,” he said, soothingly.

“Andrew knows.”

“Your friend?”

“Yes, my prince,” she said. “He knows. Somehow he always knew.”

“How did he know Camille?”

“Andrew is very smart,” she said with a smile on her face. “Very smart. He took care of me when I was bleeding.” She slipped back into another memory.

“Are you ok? Are you ok? Are you hurt?”

“Who is saying that, Camille?” Dr. Quinton asked.

“It’s ok, I’m going to get help.” Camille continued speaking. “Don’t worry, everything is going to be ok.” Tears were streaming down her face.

“Is that what Andrew said to you?”

“Are you ok? Are you ok? Are you hurt?” She repeated.

“All right, Camille, I want you to come back to my office,” Dr. Quinton said, softly, urging her back out of the memory.

“I’m going to help. Don’t worry, everything is going to be ok.” Cami continued.

“Please, Camille, look at me,” Dr. Quinton tried unsuccessfully to get her off the floor. She inched away from him, not hard, but quickly.

“Don’t worry, everything is going to be ok.”
She repeated and put her hand out into thin air moving it up and down like somebody stroking hair.

“Camille, I want you to focus on my voice,” Dr. Quinton said, still urging her out of the moment.

She stopped her hand motion and suddenly looked to her right as if seeing something there. She smiled at it.

“You’re here,” she said, looking up. “You never left me. You didn’t leave.”

Camille suddenly breathed out and collapsed on the floor.

Dr. Quinton stood up and immediately went to her.

“Camille,” he said. “Camille, can you hear me?”

Slowly, Cami opened her eyes and tried to focus, but her head was filled with memories and things long since past.

“I remember,” she said in an excited hushed tone. “I remember...all of it.” She smiled, a happy excited smile. Dr. Quinton smiled back and touched her face gently.

“Yes, you did.”

Andrew woke up suddenly from an all ready tormented sleep. Ever since the hearing he hadn’t gotten any real sleep. He was worried about Cami. She was alone and unprotected and he wanted so desperately to be

with her. To hold her, to tell her he loved her, to protect her. To say everything would be ok. *But would it?*

The harsh reality of what was happening to Camille hit him all the time now. It had been months since the hearing, months without seeing her and months not knowing what to do. He had kept himself busy with many things, least of all the damned memories that never ceased to plague his sleep. He used to have memories of Cami and him together in high school. Picnics, dances, happy times, but now the memories were darker. The awful blood that stained her dress in-between her legs, the terrible shattered look she gave him. The hope that was in her eyes that he would solve everything for her, for his princess. The endless nights she cried in his arms and they waited until the dawn that seemed to erase the memories once again.

The worst of it all was the feeling that her being dead gave him for all those years. The sadness was overwhelming in the beginning, but it grew into a good feeling that she was no longer in pain. That she was happy and smiling in the sunlight, what she loved. He had to believe that all these years. He had never known the details but he believed he knew some of the circumstances. Maybe more than he wanted to know at the time. Her death caused that pain to be lifted from her. And, in essence from him as well. Of course, he never wanted to lose her. But in some small way, her dying kept her close to him more than she had been in life.

Now, it was all over. She wasn't dead. She wasn't happy. They weren't together. This pain was worse. He was losing her all over again and not to death where peace could come for her, to life where there seemed no peace at all. No comfort, no happiness. The thoughts angered him, saddened him and hurt him all at the same time.

He wandered aimlessly through his memories and feelings like a faraway prince trapped in a dark wood where the sun on the horizon didn't ever come.

Far below him, a distant sound of the clock's chimes reminded him...it was well past midnight.

16

The Court of Truth

“iss Moore is...”

Dr. Quinton started inside the Judge Gates court.

This time everyone was seated as a proper courtroom. Andrew and Alan Myers on the defense side. Mr. and Mrs. Moore and their attorney, Reginald Tucker remained seated in the plaintiff's seats. Camille and Catherine were behind them. Catherine holding her

sister's hand throughout the proceedings. It all made Andrew sick to his stomach. He looked back to Dr. Quinton on the stand.

“...suffering from a post traumatic stress disorder with occasional moments of lucid memory and some repressed memories. While treating her for the past two months I was able to accurately point to where the trauma occurred in her life. It was at a young age where a child is unable to understand emotions at the level of an adult. It is called in many development childhood theories the stage of Pre-Adolescence where a child is growing and maturing. Some children place a great amount of importance on their friends and tend to move away from just the family unit. Because of this, the child is able to open up possibilities of the world around them without the sheltering and protection of a parent say when they were an infant or toddler. This stage is important to the growth milestones of a child. At this point, Camille was unable to ‘spread out’ as it were and grow, but rather was keep even closer to the family unit through many causes. Strict rules and harsh punishments should those rules be broken.”

“You clearly stated,” Atty. Tucker began interrupting the doctor, “that she was not maturing as a normal ten year old. Therefore, is it safe to say that all of her development has changed? Perhaps she is not a mature adult at this point, either in her development?”

“No, no, not at all,” Dr. Quinton quickly added, “she is very adult in her wants and desires. She wants a

life outside of her family. She craves and understands love in a romantic sense as well as a family sense. She is very aware of her adult feelings.”

“However, Dr. Quinton you did state that Miss Moore is suffering from a condition that would make it impossible at this time to be outside of the home. Correct?”

“Yes,” Dr. Quinton said, “but I am not certain that her home is....”

“Thank you, Dr. Quinton, I have no further questions.

“Mr. Myers, your witness,” Judge Gates called. Alan stood up, still looking at his notes for a moment. He walked away from the table and towards Dr. Quinton.

“I will make this brief, Dr. Quinton, since you have been there for quite some time.”

Dr. Quinton nodded.

“What was the traumatic experience that Camille Moore told you about causing her symptoms?” Alan stayed focused on Dr. Quinton.

“Objection, your honor. This is not a case about Camille Moore.” Tucker countered quickly. “This case is about Mr. Whiete’s obsession with her and what led to the worsening of her condition.”

“I’m sorry, your honor,” Alan said, “but the court has not heard what led to the condition that Mr. Whiete is accused of worsening.”

“Overruled. I will allow the doctor to answer the question,” Judge Gates said.

“Your honor, I am afraid I cannot answer that question. I can talk about the condition and what symptoms Miss Moore is exhibiting, however I cannot state what experience caused this. Miss Moore would have to answer that. I can only tell the court that the experience caused much psychological and emotional damage to Miss Moore and thus began her onset of symptoms of PTSD.” Dr. Quinton concluded.

“Very well,” Alan conceded. “You have spoken with Miss Moore at length about her life, can you tell us in your opinion, what has Mr. Whiete’s involvement with her at the age of seventeen and eighteen done to Miss Moore’s condition?”

“Nothing. Except seem to calm the symptoms,” Dr. Quinton answered. “Mr. Whiete’s involvement in Miss Moore’s life from the very beginning at the age of fourteen has helped Miss Moore see herself as an independent person, perhaps not as you and I, but not dependent upon her family for all love and support. She saw outside of that unit and into a bigger world. Thus completing her development at a much later age, mind you, but completing it none the less.”

“So you do not feel that Mr. Whiete’s involvement with Miss Moore worsened her all ready pre-existing condition?”

“No,” Dr. Quinton stated. “On the contrary, he bettered it by allowing her freedom to make choices in her own life.”

“Thank you, Dr. Quinton. No further questions.”

The Moores table erupted in chatter.

“Quiet in the court,” Judge Gates said. “I will not have this and you know it, Mr. Tucker. Control your clients.”

“Your honor, I apologize,” Tucker said.

“Continue, Mr. Tucker,” Judge Gates said.

“We would like to call to the stand, Catherine Moore,” Tucker said. Catherine stood up, surprising her sister sitting next to her. She smiled at Cami and patted her hand.

Andrew suddenly got a sinking feeling as Catherine took the stand. The door opened in the back of the courtroom. David entered and looked towards Andrew. Nodding at him. Andrew nodded back. He felt better that David was here and silently thanked him.

“Can you state your name for the record, Miss Moore?” Tucker began.

“Catherine Ellen Moore,” she said, smiling towards the Judge.

“And you are Camille Anne Moore’s younger sister, correct?”

“Yes. By three years.”

General questions about Camille’s mood swings and behavior as a child led to more probing questions

about Andrew as a boyfriend. Here is why Catherine excelled, Andrew thought, *lying*.

“You see, he was handsome and exciting and just like a prince, you know.” Cat stated, looking over at Andrew. “Just like some perfect fairytale prince...but it wasn’t true. It was just a façade he created.”

“Objection, your honor,” Alan said, standing up. “How long are we to go on with these opinions of my client and here say without any facts to back it up.”

“Patience, Mr. Myers, you’ll have your turn,” Judge Gates said.

“So, Miss Moore, when did you first notice Mr. Whiete’s behavior towards your sister...” he paused and Alan looked over at him, warning, “change?”

“Well, he was always obsessing over her. He want walk her home from school. They were always together. You couldn’t separate them, actually. It was creepy.”

“How so, Miss Moore?”

“Andrew...I mean Mr. Whiete was really controlling. One time I wanted Cami to come with me to the library and he just said ‘no’ like it was the worst thing I had ever asked.”

“That’s not what you asked, Kat” Andrew said suddenly. His usually pleasant green eyes went dark. The statement hadn’t been loud, but the court heard it. Cami looked over at Andrew quickly. He didn’t look towards her.

“Mr. Whiete...”

“Sorry, your honor,” Alan said.

“Continue, Miss Moore,” Tucker replied.

Kat started in again and the pouring of lies forth from her mouth were enough to make Andrew sick again, if not for he then for her sister. Cami stopped looking towards Kat and looked down at her hands neatly folded in her lap. Andrew wished she hadn't been here. He could take it, after all, he was used to these type of lashing thrown at him by the Moore family, hadn't he endured enough in his youth, but Cami didn't have the stamina for it. Watching her made him want to end this mess right here and now, but he knew it wouldn't save Camille. It would only serve to keep her in that damn house.

Finally after what seemed hours Kat had stepped down from the stand. To Alan's credit, he did a thorough job cross examining and even caught Kat on a few of her own lies causing doubt in her testimony, they hoped, in Judge Gates mind. Fortunately, the trail ended for the day. That was good for Andrew and for Cami. The former was too angry to continue with this farce and the latter too tired and emotionally drained from everything that was said and implied.

“Your next witness, Mr. Tucker,” Judge Gates called the next day as the trail proceeded.

“We call forth Alexander Hart to the stand, your honor,” Tucker said, confidently and shot a look towards Andrew. Andrew didn't react back.

Alexander walked from the back of the court passing David and trying not to look at him as he walked towards the witness stand. He caught Andrew's eye though and apologized with his eyes. Andrew looked down keeping his emotions in perfect check. After all, the business he and Alexander had once had taught him that well.

After the initial questions about names and such were answered, Tucker wasn't no time getting into the reason for calling Alexander.

"Could you explain to the court what Midnight Services is, Mr. Hart?"

"A high class, elegant service that provides dates for people," Alexander said, carefully.

"Come, Mr. Hart. It is an escort service, is it not?"

"Yes," Alexander started, "an extremely legal one."

Andrew wanted to shake his head, but he remained still. If anyone was going to make this bad for him, it seemed his friend on that stand was the one to do it. *Just answer the questions, Alex*, Andrew thought, hoping to will the thought into Alexander's head. Andrew knew Alexander was nervous. He had been fidgeting ever since he sat down. Secretly, Andrew wished he didn't have to put Alexander through this. Of course, he really hadn't, had he? It was the Moores that subpoenaed him.

“And Mr. Whiete worked for this escort service for eight years, correct?”

“Yes. He was one of my best,” Alexander said, smiling a bit towards Andrew.

Sadly, Andrew knew that wasn't the right answer even if Alexander thought he was giving him a compliment. Andrew suddenly felt disgusted by all of this. Poor Camille just trying to live her life. Poor Alexander just trying to help. He even felt horrible for the Judge who had to sift through this nonsense and deep down he was tortured by Catherine who seemed to live in a fantasy world of her own making with no real prospects of living her own life. There was a part of him at that moment that even felt bad for Mr. and Mrs. Moore sitting there anticipating winning or dreading losing. *Didn't they know they had all ready lost? Didn't we all know we have lost?* Andrew thought to himself as he glanced towards his Princess. *She is lost and no one is trying to help her.* All his anger was directed at himself more than anyone else for that. He had promised her. He had told her everything would be all right. *I'm sorry, Princess. I was wrong. The storm is not over. I can't make it all right this time. I can only hold onto our love and hope that it will be enough.*

“Tell us, Mr. Hart, about a transaction that involved a client paying one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars for Mr. Whiete's services. Surely, you don't expect the court to believe it was for a simple date?”

“It was. A weekend date in which the client paid for exclusive rights to Andrew,” Alexander said. There was a confidence in his voice that waned towards the end. Andrew figured he heard what he had said and suddenly realized that’s not what he had wanted to say. Quickly he tried to fix his mistake.

“What I mean is the client was looking for Mr. Whiete to be her boyfriend for the weekend to introduce to her family as if they were in a relationship,” he quickly added. *Great, Andrew thought, that sounded worse.*

“I see,” Tucker said, smiling a bit. Confident that Alexander was going to give him exactly what he wanted.

“I want to go on the stand,” Andrew said, quietly turning to Alan. Alan looked at him, confused and then worried.

“No, I can’t allow you to do that, Andrew,” he replied back.

“They want the stories and the facts I need to give them that. I’m not proud of my life, but I’m not ashamed of it either,” Andrew said.

“Let’s just see, Andrew,” Alan turned away.

“Mr. Hart, could you please tell me what type of services Mr. Whiete would provide on one of these dates?”

“Objection, your honor,” interrupted Alan. “Was Mr. Hart on these dates with Mr. Whiete?”

Camille laughed a bit. Andrew smiled.

“Your honor, this speaks towards Mr. Whiete’s profession. His character,” Tucker said quickly. “Mr. Hart is the owner of Midnight Services, I would imagine he knows what the escort’s services are towards his clientele.”

Judge Gates thought for a moment and nodded.

“Overruled. You will answer the question, Mr. Hart,” she announced. Alan sat down.

“Well, it’s simple. The escort takes the client on the specific date at the specified time given by the client and escorts her or him to the date. The escort then proceeds as anyone would on a date. With better manners, of course, than most.” Alexander turned towards the Judge. “And Mr. Whiete is a perfect gentlemen. There have never been any complaints about him. He is the best at what he does.”

Alan sighed a bit, Andrew turned to him, leaning in.

“Don’t worry.”

“He’s killing you,” Alan said.

“It will be fine,” Andrew replied and sat back.

“And on these wonderful dates that Mr. Whiete provided his services would they include, for instance, going to the woman’s apartment or place of residence after the evening has ended, perhaps by the client’s request?”

“No, no, never. Our escorts are not allowed to be outside of a public place with their dates.” Alexander said quickly.

“What about picking up the client, surely they must be alone with them, then?”

“Well, yes, but...”

“So there are times when they are alone with the client?”

“It’s not like that though, they....” Alexander countered, but Tucker worked right in.

“Just answer the question, Mr. Hart, please?”

“Yes,” Alexander said, quietly.

“I’m sorry, could you speak up, Mr. Hart?”

“Yes,” he said louder, clearly annoyed. “Yes, they are alone with the client from time to time.”

“Thank you. And Mr. Whiete in particular, has clients that request full weekend dates as you stated before, so isn’t it possible that he and the client would be alone for extended periods of time on these dates?”

Alexander fidgeted again in his seat.

“Mr. Hart?” Tucker stood in front of him, waiting.

“Yes, it is.” Alexander said, defeated.

“Yes. So is it correct to say that during these dates you could not possibly know what has transpired between the client and Mr. Whiete?”

“No, we have specific rules for both the client and our escorts. We do not allow anything inappropriate or illegal,” Alexander said, quickly and air of complete confidence in his voice.

“When Mr. Whiete goes on these dates, for instance, the one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollar

one, does he have recording equipment on him? A microphone in his lapel, perhaps?" Tucker said, baiting Alexander.

Alexander laughed a bit, nervously and shook his head.

"No, of course not. No client would ever use us again if we taped the..." he stopped, realizing what Tucker had just done. "Listen," Alexander added, "Midnight Services is all about the fantasy, not reality. Nothing in appropriate happens on the dates. It's just a date, well..." Alexander turned towards the judge. It's a date like none other," he lingered there a moment and then turned back to Tucker, "but nothing more."

"Fantasy, you said? So Mr. Whiete provides the fantasy?" Tucker said, keeping Alexander in his mindset.

"Yes," Alexander's anger was apparent. "He's the best damn one."

"And that fantasy wouldn't include a client wanting, per say, to have sexual relations with Mr. Whiete?"

"Objection, your honor," Alan said, standing up quickly.

"That's ridiculous Andrew would never," Alexander yelled from the stand at the same time as Alan.

"Mr. Hart, sit down," Judge Gates said. Alexander took his seat.

"Mr. Myers..." The judge urged Alan to continue with his objection.

“This line of questioning is badgering to my client. Does Mr. Tucker have any proof of this accusation?” Alan said. “Whatever you believe of escort services, your honor, they are a legal business.”

“I am aware of that, Mr. Meyers,” Judge Gates said sternly and turned her focus on Tucker. “Mr. Tucker, present your proof of this or I will strike it from the record including this entire witnesses’ testimony.”

“Very well, your honor. If I may continue...” Tucker said, gallantly.

“Cautiously, Mr. Tucker.” Tucker nodded and turned back to face Alex.

“Mr. Hart you are the sole owner of Midnight Services, correct?”

“Yes,” Alex answered.

“And it is safe to say that your word is the final one when dealing with the escorts, would that be accurate?”

“Yes.” Everyone in the courtroom felt the tension from Alex. Andrew looked towards David for the first time that day. David looked back. His eyes said he didn’t like where this was going.

“Did you or did you not inform Andrew that his client a Marisa Greening requested a date with him for the night of March 22nd?” Tucker started.

“What? How did you get that information? Nobody gives out client’s names, they are privileged,” Alex said, indignantly.

“Just answer the question, Mr. Hart?”

“Yes, I did.” Alex huffed through the statement.

“And on this date with Ms. Greening there was another escort who attended the same party, is that correct?”

“Yes,” Alexander said, looking towards Andrew, suddenly. He was clearly worried about this line of questioning and Andrew saw it. The trouble was Andrew couldn’t figure out why.

“Jason Redmond was on another date set up by your escort service, correct?”

“Yes. So?” Alex said, more annoyed as these endless questions persisted.

“And Mr. Redmond informed you of a conversation between Mr. Whiete and himself at that party, is that correct?”

“I fired Mr. Redmond,” Alexander said abruptly.

“So are you saying that you’re not aware that Mr. Whiete and Mr. Redmond had a private conversation during this party and that Mr. Whiete informed Mr. Redmond that if he didn’t pay better attention to his date he would regret it?”

“What?” Alex said, looking at Andrew. Andrew sighed to himself.

“Objection, your honor,” Alan said, exhaustingly. “It is hearsay. Not to mention that Mr. Tucker still has no proof of his former accusation of my client. I request that this entire testimony be stricken from the record,” Alan concluded.

“Approach the bench,” Judge Gates said. Both attorneys moved to the Judge’s bench awaiting her words. She covered her microphone and began to speak to Tucker.

“Mr. Tucker, I suggest that if you have proof of Mr. Whiete’s illegal activities within this escort service you get to it and stop stalling.”

“Your honor, I assure you I am getting there. I want the court to be fully aware of what Mr. Whiete is capable of,” Tucker replied coolly.

“Your honor, this is a ploy to discredit my client with no proof of any wrongdoings. He worked for an escort service that he no longer works for. That is all. If Mr. Tucker has any more I haven’t heard it yet. Neither, I would guess, has the court. It is a deliberate attack, your honor,” Alan countered.

“You will get your chance, Mr. Myers to cross examine this witness. Until then, Mr. Tucker...get to the point or I will do as I said,” Judge Gates said.

“Yes, your honor,” Tucker continued. “Thank you, your honor.”

Alan walked back to his seat and sat down, clearly annoyed. Andrew didn’t question. Tucker turned confident again towards Alex.

“Mr. Hart, please answer the question?” Tucker replied.

“No, I was not aware of what Mr. Whiete said to Mr. Redmond,” Alex said, defeated. He looked back at

Andrew. “But I can understand why he said it. Jason was not paying attention to his client and...”

“That will be sufficient, Mr. Hart,” Tucker said.

“Are you aware that the client had taken a...liking to Mr. Whiete and Mr. Redmond clearly saw sexual advances towards his client that evening?”

“What?!” Alex and Andrew said together.

“That is not true,” Andrew replied, standing up, but Alan told him to sit down.

“Enough. One more outburst, Mr. Whiete and I will have you removed, is that understood?” Andrew nodded and remained in his seat. He tried to look away but Cami caught his eye. He was worried he would see doubt in those green eyes staring back at him, but all he saw was his princess. She smiled. He smiled back, briefly.

“Mr. Hart?” Tucker began. “Were you aware of this conversation?”

“No,” Alex said. “No, I wasn’t.” He looked towards Andrew again.

“So, Mr. Hart is it possible that many things have occurred on Mr. Whiete’s dates without your knowledge?” Tucker said, focusing Alex’s attention back.

Alex hung his head for a moment and realized exactly what Tucker was doing. After a moment, he looked up.

“I can tell you that Mr. Whiete is the most upstanding person I know and there is no way he ever did that with any client.” Alex stated.

“Again, Mr. Hart,” Tucker said, quickly not wanting Alex’s words to sink into the judge’s ears, “is it possible that many things have occurred on Mr. Whiete’s dates without your knowledge?”

“Yes,” was all Alex could say.

Tucker walked away a step and then turned back to Alex.

“Mr. Hart, do you believe that Mr. Whiete is a dangerous man?”

“No.”

“Have you ever seen him assault anyone?”

Tucker asked, carefully. “Take your time, Mr. Hart.”

Alex looked back at Andrew and shook his head. Andrew tried to comfort Alex with a look, but he knew how worried Alex was and no comfort was work at this point.

“Yes,” Alex finally said, his voice barely above a whisper.

“And can you tell the court on what occasion has this occurred?”

“When we were in college,” Alex began and built some confidence as he continued the story. “He assaulted a guy who was harassing a woman at a bar on campus.”

“What did this man do to deserve this treatment by Mr. Whiete?” Tucker questioned.

“Andrew asked him to leave the woman alone and the guy continued harassing her. He reached out and pulled her arm and Andrew punched him.” Alex said matter of fact like. “He broke his nose.”

“Mr. Whiete broke his nose?” Tucker said, an air of confidence and sarcasm took over his voice. “For simply reaching out and pulling? He received a broken nose?”

“Yes,” Alex answered. “She was scared of him.”

“Of Mr. Whiete?” Tucker quickly said. “Never mind, Mr. Hart. That is fine. No further questions.”

Alex sighed and was about to get up when the judge turned to him.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Hart, but you are not finished yet. Please be seated,” Judge Gates replied. Alex sat down and sighed again. “Mr. Myers, your witness.”

Alan stood up instantly and walked towards Alex, stopping only a few feet from him.

“Was the woman at the bar that night frightened of Mr. Whiete?” He quickly went into the questions.

“No, she wasn’t.” Alex answered, pleased he was allowed to say the truth.

“Who was she frightened of, Mr. Hart?”

“She was frightened of the guy who was harassing her?” Alex answered.

“Objection, your honor,” Tucker said from his chair. “How could Mr. Hart know who the woman was frightened of unless she told him.”

“She did.” Alex countered.

The judge looked towards Alex and then back at Tucker.

“Objection overruled, Mr. Tucker.”

“So Mr. Whiete in essence was stopping a man who was assaulting a woman whom he had never met?” Alan asked.

“Yes.”

“Does that sound dangerous to you, Mr. Hart?”

“No.”

“During Mr. Whiete’s time at your company, Midnight Services, has their ever been a complaint lodged against Mr. Whiete?” Alan continued.

“No.”

“Has their ever been an accusation brought forth of Mr. Whiete having sexual relations with any of his clients?”

“No.”

“Has there ever been a reprimand given for his conduct with his clients?”

“No.”

“Did Mr. Whiete ever assault any client or guest or other escorts at any time during his work with Midnight Services?”

“No.”

“Has he ever acted inappropriate with the clients, the guests, the escorts in your presence?”

“No.”

“Has he ever been accused of any inappropriate behavior or illegal activities while he was at Midnight Services?”

“No.”

“Was he reprimanded by yourself for any activities at all during his job at your company?”

“No.”

Alan paused briefly.

“Was he a good employee, Mr. Hart?”

“Yes.”

“Thank you, Mr. Hart.” Alan concluded.

“You may step down, Mr. Hart. Thank you,” Judge Gates replied. Alex stood up and walked out of the courtroom quickly as if running from a bullfight.

“Your next witness, Mr. Tucker,” Judge Gates said.

“I want to go up there, your honor,” Camille suddenly said, standing up and walking towards the small wooden gate.

“Camille,” Mrs. Moore said, reprimanding her.

“No, mother,” she said back. “It’s not fair. I want to speak. I have a right. This is about me and...my condition.”

“Miss Moore, I urge you to sit down,” Judge Gates replied. “Mr. Tucker...”

“Sorry your honor,” Tucker moved towards Cami trying to guide her back to her seat, but she pulled away.

“Stop it all of you!” She yelled. “You can’t keep doing this to Andrew!” she said, directly at her mother. “He didn’t do anything wrong!”

“Your honor,” Tucker said, quickly. “Please she is not well.”

“No, no you can’t lock me away forever!” Cami continued pulling away from her sister, mother and Tucker who were all trying to calm her down. Andrew had stood up as soon as she started yelling, but knew it was better for him to stay where he was.

“Your honor, clearly she is sick,” Tucker pleaded. “She needs...”

“Don’t” She said, firmly at Tucker pulling away completely, “tell me what I need. You don’t know.” She looked at her family. “None of you do.”

She ran into the court area directly in front of the judge. The judge leaned over to full her since her height of 4’ 11 ½” inches didn’t allow her to be seen completely.

“Andrew didn’t do anything, your honor, but love me. Take care of me. Protect me.” She looked, pleading in her eyes, at Judge Gates. “Please, don’t do this to him. He has suffered enough. He thought I was dead. He had to bury me.” She started to cry as her words stopped everyone in the courtroom from moving and hardly breathing.

“I can’t imagine what that was like for him. Can you?” She asked the judge. “Can any of you?” She turned to her family and out to the courtroom of the few people who were there.

“I should be punished,” she said turning back to the judge. “It’s my fault, all of it. I should have trusted him,” she turned to Andrew, tears falling down her cheeks. “I should have trusted my prince. I’m sorry, I’m so sorry, Andrew, if only I had known...” she continued to cry and it ripped through Andrew’s heart.

“It’s not your fault, princess, it never was,” Andrew said, moving towards her.

“Your honor, please,” Tucker called out.

“Leave my daughter alone!” Mrs. Moore yelled and ran towards Cami and Andrew as she slid to the ground in his arms.

The courtroom erupted as everyone seemed to be calling out. Alan and Tucker to the judge, while Mrs. Moore yelled at Andrew and Camille clung tight to him. Chaos ensued as Mrs. Moore yanked at Cami’s arm and Andrew yelled back at her, trying to protect Cami.

“Enough!” Judge Gates yelled from her bench. Everyone looked at her, except Andrew, he was making certain his princess was safe.

“I have had enough of this! Now sit down everyone!” The Judge continued. “This wild behavior will stop now. You are in a court of law. And order we will have.”

“Andrew, I won’t let you do this,” Camille said, softly.

“Mr. Tucker, Mr. Myers, please,” Judge Gates said. The two men began to walk towards their clients.

“It’s all right, princess. Please don’t worry,” Andrew soothed as he stroked her hair gently.

“Andrew, you need to sit now,” Alan said as he approached him.

“I can fix this,” Cami pleaded. “Please let me.”

“No, we can’t change these things. We can only let this play out and trust it is a court of truth, my love.” Andrew said, gently.

“Andrew,” she added quickly as he let go of her. He looked down, “*I believe in you.*”

He smiled, touching her face softly.

“I have also believed in you, Camille.”

Andrew walked back to his seat with Alan. Camille walked towards the courtroom seating, but paused before entering the pew with her sister.

“Come on, Cami,” Cat urged, putting her arm behind her back.

“No, Cat,” Cami said and turned to her sister. She paused and then walked to the other side, sitting in the same row as David.

Catherine’s expression was of shock and embarrassment, as she stood there alone. Slowly she walked to her seat and sat down behind her parents.

Everyone in the courtroom had watched Camille move to Andrew’s side, but it was only Andrew and his trusted knight, David that smiled towards her. That was all she needed.

“Your honor,” Tucker began. “These proceedings have been too much for Miss Moore. Her

parents would like to have her removed from the courtroom where she can rest.”

Judge Gates looked at Mr. Tucker, then to the Moores and finally her eyes rested on Camille.

“Miss Moore,” she began.

Camille stood up.

“Yes, your honor.”

“Would you like some rest?”

“No, your honor. I am fine. I am sorry for disrupting the court. I lost control of my emotions. I promise it won’t happen again,” she said, calmly and very mature.

“Very well, Miss Moore. I will hold you to that,” Judge Gates said.

“Thank you your honor,” Cami answered and sat down.

“Now, I will state here and now,” the judge said looking out to the courtroom, “that if another outburst occurs in this courtroom I will not stand for it. Mr. Tucker, Mr. Myers I expect that you control your clients or you will both be held in contempt of this court. Am I completely understood?”

“Yes, your honor,” stated Tucker.

“Yes, your honor,” followed Alan.

“Good. Now let us continue.” The Judge looked towards Tucker. “Mr. Tucker, your next witness, please.”

Tucker called forth Jason Redmond who through his cocky behavior and his flippant nature made his own testimony of Andrew’s supposed sexual relations with a

client as well as his accusations of Andrew threatening him in the bathroom at *The Gardens* completely useless. After Alan got through with him, he was fortunate if he remembered his own name with the amount of lies he was throwing around the court. After that fiasco, the judge called it a day.

The next few days it was more of the same. People Andrew had come in contact with that had something to gain from helping the Moores or who were just plain jealous appeared, but their testimonies proved as useless as Jason's in the end. It was mostly due to Alan's quick questions. Tucker proved himself a good attorney and was aptly good at side-stepping and pulling punches in the courtroom. The accusations may not have been true but it was entertaining to watch the dance, even Andrew mentioned it to David at one point. David didn't find it as amusing, but it was understandable. He was his knight, after all, charged with protecting the kingdom and the prince. The people on that stand were the prince's enemies.

Tucker and the Moores tried to help their situation finally by putting Mrs. Moore on the stand. Unfortunately for them, amidst her constant accusations and interruptions of her own lawyer her testimony annoyed the judge more than helped their case. When Alan began to ask questions, her true colors seemed to shine.

“Mrs. Moore you stated that Mr. Whiete is a dangerous man?” Alan started.

“Yes, he is. Extremely dangerous,” Mrs. Moore shot back looking over at Andrew something she did a lot during her testimony. An intimidation factor, Alan was certain she tried to use on him when he was younger, too. Alan assumed it didn’t work that well then either.

“Can you tell of an incident in which Mr. Whiete become dangerous or violent?” Alan questioned.

Mrs. Moore looked at Alan and then down. When she looked back up, Alan knew he had her.

“I know he is. A mother knows,” she said, turning to the judge.

“Could you answer the question, please Mrs. Moore?” Alan said.

“I know what you’re trying to do,” Diane Moore spat, “everyone believes him,” she threw her head towards Andrew, “but I know him for what he really is.”

Alan had no intention of stopping her exposition. She could shoot herself in the foot all she wanted. He had been waiting for it.

“Objection, your honor,” Tucker said, standing up and attempting to salvage his case.

“Yes, Mr. Tucker?” the judge asked.

“I feel that Mrs. Moore is tired,” Tucker finally stated. A pitiful excuse, Andrew thought, but figured he had to try something to keep his client from destroying any hope left.

“I believe she is just fine, Mr. Tucker,” Judge Gates continued. “Overruled please continue and Mrs. Moore just answer the questions, please.”

Diane nodded towards the Judge.

“Have you ever seen Mr. Whiete assault your daughter, Mrs. Moore?” Alan asked.

“I don’t have to see it,” she stated.

“Mrs. Moore,” Judge Gates was clearly upset at her non-answers, “answer the question with a yes or no, please.”

“He is trying to twist my words, your honor,” Diane replied. “Can’t you see what they are doing?” Referring to Andrew and Alan.

“It is his job to ask the questions, Mrs. Moore. It is yours to answer,” Judge Gates concluded.

“Mrs. Moore, have you ever seen Mr. Whiete assault or harm your daughter physically in any way?”

“No, but,” she started however Alan continued.

“Thank you.” He paused and then added, “you have spoken to Mr. Whiete’s emotional abuse to your daughter, Camille, at great length here today. Can you tell me how Mr. Whiete emotionally abused your daughter?”

Alan could feel Andrew’s eyes on him. Alan just waited.

“Yes,” Diane stated, “I can. Very easily. He constantly kept her with him never allowing her freedom, she could not think straight around him. She was completely lost without him.”

“Am I to assume, Mrs. Moore, that Miss Camille Moore had freedom before Mr. Whiete entered her life?” Alan said, carefully.

“Well, yes, of course, she did. We didn’t keep her locked up.” *Bingo*, Alan thought. He turned towards Andrew as he walked back to the desk. They locked eyes for a moment and he knew Andrew understood.

“According to Miss Moore’s medical files, you did just that,” Alan began. “I would like to put into evidence, Miss Camille Moore’s medical files, your honor.”

“Duly noted,” the judge replied.

“He can’t have those,” Diane began.

“On the contrary, Mrs. Moore, yes he can.”

“Miss Moore’s records states that she was locked in a room for three months with little food and water until she,” he looked down at the file, “calmed down.”

“She had fits, the doctor was aware of that,” Diane stated looking away.

“Did these fits cause several broken bones as well, Mrs. Moore?” Alan asked.

“She was accident prone. She fell a lot. That is all.” Diane started. “Camille was always very well taken care of.” She looked towards her husband briefly. “There is only so much that could be done with her,” she added. Alan heard it, but let it slide. He had more important matters to discuss.

“Well taken care of, Mrs. Moore? Is that what you said?”

“Yes. My husband and I were the sole providers of taking care of our daughter. As any good parents should be,” she said, confident with herself.

“Are you not aware, Mrs. Moore, that your daughter, that your fourteen year old daughter was bleeding inside a bathroom at school when Mr. Whiete found her? Where Mr. Whiete brought her to the hospital in a state of shock from your caring of her?” Alan raised his voice a bit at the end.

“That was different. Camille was fine. Andrew made that into a fiasco. She fell,” Diane stated, looking away from Alan.

“She fell?” Alan approached the witness. “Please Mrs. Moore could you read from the report that the attending physician wrote on the day of her arrival stating what her condition was?”

“She fell,” Diane said again. “And that was all.”

“Please, Mrs. Moore,” he handed her a piece of paper, “right here. Just this part,” he said pointing down at the paper.

Diane looked down for a long moment, reading. Then she looked up quickly. Darkness overtook her eyes and her voice was lower when she spoke.

“You think you’re so clever, don’t you?” Alan looked at her, but she was looked past him at Andrew sitting. “You think you know everything. Well you don’t. You don’t know how hard it was for me...” her voice took on a darker tone as she stared at Andrew, “for me to sit there and know about what he did to my

daughter. To know that my own husband preferred her,” she pointed at to Camille, “over me.” She flipped her head up higher and looked out to Camille with dark, cold eyes. “You did this. You enticed him with your young body. You seduced him.”

“Mrs. Moore,” Alan tried to calm her down, but she was lost somewhere in her own mind.

“I had to, sweetheart,” she said, her voice changing to a softer tone but with a disturbing edge to it. “I had no choice. No one could know what happened. I made it all better.” She spoke directly to Camille.

Cami was trying to look away, but she couldn't. David moved a little closer to her trying to comfort her. A tear fell down Cami's cheek. David took her hand and held it in his. Waiting to be called on to do anything to make her pain stop. He was compelled in a way he never had been before. There was something about her, something ever since they had met. Something he couldn't explain. *Maybe it was a princess thing*, he thought quickly. Either way, he couldn't leave her out here alone. Cami took his hand and squeezed it. That was all the answer he needed as he continued to watch this painful exchange between mother and daughter. Once, he glanced to Andrew, but he was focused on the crazed woman on the stand. He knew he was in the right place at the right time...to do the prince's bidding.

“Don't listen to her, Cami,” David said, softly. “Please, don't.” He pleaded and Cami, to his surprise, listened. She put down her head and leaned into him. He

cradled her in his arms keeping her safe from that witch's evil words.

"Everyone lies to you, Camille, everyone but me," she said, softly and started to stand up. "Listen to me, Camille."

"Your honor," Alan said, looking up at Judge Gates.

"Bailiff." The bailiff came forward, "remove this woman from the court, please."

Mrs. Moore was all ready walking to Camille, but Cami had her eyes closed and David was holding her to him not allowing her to see this horrible scene before her.

"Camille," Diane called and then her voice changed again, to another dark tone, it disturbed everyone in the courtroom, "Camille, you will listen to your mother!" She yelled. "I am your mother."

Cami clung tightly to David. He kept his hold strong and spoke to her, other words, soothing words that only she could hear.

"It's all right. The prince will be here soon, Cami, everything will be all right," he said trying to keep her as calm as was possible in this situation.

"You will...No!" Diane yelled as the Bailiff approached her to take her out of the courtroom. "No! You cannot do this." The bailiff took her arms and held them behind her back, she turned to Thomas, "do something, you weak man!" She screamed at him. "For once, do something." She paused as she passed him.

“You are good for nothing. Nothing, you hear me!” She spat in his face. “Camille!” She yelled as they dragged her out, “you will rot in hell for what you did!”

The doors closed and silence was in the court. Complete silence for the longest moment every one of them ever heard.

“Mr. Tucker, Mr. Myers, please in my chambers,” Judge Gates finally said and stood up.

“Are you all right, Andrew?” Alan inquired after the judge left.

“I’m more worried about Camille?”

“It will all be over soon, Andrew, I promise. They have no case.” Alan gathered up his folders.

“Yes, the case, Alan, but what about her life?” Andrew looked back at Camille, crying on David’s shoulder.

Alan put an arm on him.

“I can’t help you with that one, Andrew,” Alan leaned down, “but I think you’ll find there are choices this time.”

Andrew nodded slowly to him keeping focused on Cami. David caught his eye as Alan and Tucker left the courtroom.

Andrew mouthed the words “thank you,” to him. David nodded and smiled towards him.

Enchantment's End

“ndrew...

do you believe that there were ever happily ever afters?” Camille asked, curled up next to him on a beautiful patchwork quilt. The sun was beginning its descent in the sky and the leaves shimmered a bit from the glow.

“Yes, I do,” Andrew said, smiling down at her.

“You’re just saying that, my prince,” she teased.

“No, I’m not. I know there are,” he answered back. “There are many things I don’t know, Camille. I don’t know what tomorrow will bring, the rain or the sun, but I do know that happily ever afters happen everyday.”

“How, Andrew?” She said, looking up to meet his eyes. Her eyes sparkled and danced on the sun’s setting rays. He smiled once more.

Camille woke up suddenly breaking her out of her dream memory of days long past and back into the reality of her life. The upset with her mother at the trial should have solved everything. Her mother was placed in a hospital, much like the one she was in for ten years.

She was diagnosed with borderline personality disorder and depression to name a few. She also showed signs of severe episodes of mania all of which were familiar to Camille and Catherine. Thomas, her father went away after Cami refused to press charges against him for raping her when she was young. It didn't seem to really matter at the time. She wanted to get well. She kept hoping she would, but the nightmares and the memories never left her now. They seemed to engulf her more than ever. She continued to see her psychologist, Dr. Quinton. She decided she liked him and wanted to stay with his treatments. They were better days and worse days, but they were working it out. Catherine wasn't speaking to her anymore. Cami had tried to reconcile with her sister after the events of the courtroom, but Cat was stubborn and too guilt-ridden to listen anymore. Sadness overtook her a lot and Cami feared her sister had her own problems to deal with. By the way Cat was behaving though she had no intention of doing that no matter how much Cami pleaded with her. She always said she was fine and that Cami was the problem child not her.

As to Andrew, he had been nothing but supportive and caring, loving and helpful. She moved into his house as soon as the court released her from her parent's custody. It was a beautiful house, a castle just like he had told her it was all those days ago. He had built it for her and she knew it. Everything about it was magical, even the prince who lived in it. But she no longer felt worthy of being his princess. Too much had

changed, too much had been forgotten. She wondered if she could ever be the same again...if she could ever be his princess again. These thoughts consumed her more than the nightmares. And they scared her so much. What if all she had left to give him was this empty shell of a person...this lost girl trying to find a way home? He deserved more than that, she had told herself a thousand times. Of course, he countered all those arguments with how much he needed her, he loved her, how much she was the only thing that mattered in his life. *How could that be?*

“Are you all right, princess?” Andrew said, walking into the bedroom. He was up early, she thought. He was always up early.

“Yes, Andrew,” she replied in a distant tone. She turned away slightly, but he moved onto the bed, sitting down opposite her, pushing back a few strands of her hair. She let him.

“No, you’re not,” he said, causing her to look at him. “Oh, are you surprised that I know?” He said, smiling a bit. “I know more than you believe, Cami.”

“I don’t know what to do, Andrew?” Cami looked up at him, sadness in her eyes.

“Well, first, don’t be so sad, princess,” he said, smiling at her and scooping her up in his arms. “The battle isn’t over, my love, but we have the armor to fight it.” He laughed suddenly, causing Cami to forget why she was sad. She looked at him, curiously. He always made her curious these days. He’s like he forgot all about the

bad times and just picked up where they left off before she 'died'.

"Why do you say those things?" She asked. He smiled again, a bright beautiful smile that caused chills up Cami's spine.

"Because, they're fun," he said, laughing again and picking her up in his arms. He stood up, twirling her about, making her dizzy. His laughter rang through the room and despite herself Cami laughed, too.

Within moments, they were twirling and laughing until...they both fell onto the bed. Andrew was on his back, Cami over him. The silk robe he had been wearing opened and she could see his full bare chest beneath her. Another chill went up her spine at his muscles clearly defined on that chest.

She reached out, compelled to do so and started tracing small circles on it with her finger. He smiled at her as she concentrated.

"Love me, princess," he said, smiling. "Love me forever."

"Forever is a long time, my prince," she played. "What if another princess more beautiful than I comes along?"

He laughed. She looked up at him. He pulled her in around her waist close to him, causing her to concentrate on him alone.

"There is no princess more beautiful," he said, seductively. "Nor more alluring," he leaned up to kiss her, but she turned her head slightly.

“Do you still believe in happily ever afters, Andrew?” She asked, softly looking down and away from his eyes. He smiled to himself. Then turned her on her back, going over her in a move fit for a fairytale prince.

She looked up at him, a little afraid of the answer to her question. Slowly he nodded his head with a serious expression on his face. He leaned down slowly towards her. Cami anticipated his kiss, closing her eyes, but he moved past her lips and she could feel his warm breath near her ear.

“So do you, princess,” he said, softly. A warm sensation ran through her and she smiled to herself. “I will show you how they start.” He said, seductively.

She felt him kiss her ear and then her neck. She arched her back as he kissed her cheek and her forehead and her eyelid, her nose until finally he stopped at her mouth, but didn’t kiss her. After a moment, Cami opened her eyes to see him smiling at her.

“What now?” She questioned, almost annoyed at him, but deep down she hadn’t wanted him to stop.

“Do you think Happily Ever Afters come because it’s the story or because of the prince and princess?” He asked, his face let go of the smile and he turned on his side, propping his elbow up and resting his head in his hand, still looking at her. She turned slightly to him.

“What do you mean?”

“You know what I mean,” he said seriously.

She thought for a few more moments and then looked back at him.

“Because it’s the story,” Cami said, truthfully.

“Ah,” he said, putting up his finger towards her and rolling her back with him over her, “there my little princess, you are wrong.” He emphasized by lifting his eyebrows.

“How do you know?” She said, trying to be funny, but he didn’t change his expression. He leaned down closer to her.

“Happily ever afters only happen because the princess has died which awakens the prince who realizes the princess wasn’t dead but under an evil witch’s spell. The prince embarks on a journey with a trusted knight and fights off all the dragons, following the path through the dark woods to the evil witch’s lair where he remain true against villainy and lies to defeat the witch and race to the castle to save the fair princess before the magic ends,” he paused and smiled at her, playfully, “but the magic never ends. It’s always midnight and the evil spell is broken and they live...”

“Happily ever after,” Cami stated, smiling up at him.

“That’s Midnight, princess,” he said, softly. She watched him lean down. She closed her eyes as he kissed her deeply.

*S*omewhere between the kiss of true love

*and the magic of Midnight the princess ceased any
doubts about happily ever afters'*

...ever again.

The End