

Chapter Six

Marcus stepped off the plane with a sigh. Retrieving a single suitcase from baggage claim he headed for the door as soon as he was through customs. As he stepped outside he wasn't surprised to see the limo waiting for him. The older man tipped his hat as Marcus approached.

"Good day to you Master Marcus. And welcome back."

"Thanks Abraham," Marcus handed off his suitcase to the other and watched as the long-standing butler and chauffeur loaded it into the trunk.

Abraham had served the Avery family for longer than Marcus could remember. Almost sixty the older man was nonetheless spry. He had watched over Marcus since he was an infant and, in fact, Marcus had more memories of his family's butler than he did his own father.

Mason Avery was an uptight and dedicated administrator but his health was not the best. He had been plagued by a weak heart and troubled breathing. Despite being cautioned to take it easy by his doctor Mason never listened and died rather suddenly from a heart attack before he was forty.

Marcus, only ten at the time, watched his family go through the mourning process with a detached air. It was difficult to say if he even noticed his father's absence as they hadn't spent more than an hour in each other's company. But if his father was aloof and detached his mother was the exact opposite.

Cybil Avery was an energetic and severe woman. Often over-bearing she ruled over Marcus's life like a god. She dictated everything from his meals to his friends. He was never allowed an idle moment with his entire day scheduled from the time he woke to the time he went back to bed.

Every part of his day was monitored and every person he came into contact with carefully vetted. Understandably he had no close friends. Those that stuck around for a second play date were there only because they were being forced by their parents hoping to earn a place on the Avery family's good side. But Marcus was not fool enough to believe those kids actually wanted to spend time with him.

The only person who truly wanted to spend time with him was his grandfather. The Avery patriarch, Miles, was a doting grandfather eager to enjoy his grandson's company. The hours Marcus spent with him were the only enjoyable ones he had to look forward to. It was the only time he was allowed to do what he wanted. They played whatever game he wished. Sometimes they even recruited the house staff so Marcus could enjoy a game of baseball or touch football in the vast yard.

Furthermore Miles was the only person Cybil couldn't argue with. So if his grandfather decided to come home early to take his grandson shopping it didn't matter what lesson he interrupted. Marcus was free to go. And Abraham was often his co-conspirator.

As hired help Abraham could not defy Marcus's mother like Miles but he bent the rules as often as he could, sneaking snacks and allowing Marcus some freedom whenever his mother was otherwise preoccupied. Without Abraham or his grandfather Marcus's childhood would have been nothing but despair.

"Master Marcus," Abraham held the door for him.

With a grimace Marcus slipped inside and relaxed in the empty backseat. Thank goodness his mother was nowhere to be seen. He had another couple hours of freedom left.

With a sigh he looked at his reflection in the window as Abraham closed the door: dark brown hair and eyes, a chiseled jaw softened by stubble, a sharp straight nose and full lips. He knew just how good looking he was even without the throng of admirers that always followed him since high school. It was safe to say he was every woman's dream and he was only too happy to entertain them.

As he grew older his mother was forced to loosen the tight reins she kept on him and he used every opportunity available to slip out of the noose she kept around him. This had led to several rather compromising situations and he was ready to admit he might have gone too far on numerous occasions. But despite his hindsight Marcus never hesitated to repeat his mistakes and even took them a step further. If women wanted to throw themselves at him who was he to deny them?

His friends claimed it was a rebel-complex borne out of a restrictive childhood. Marcus didn't particularly care as long as he had his fun. His partners didn't seem to care either considering how they hooked up to him. He never went out with the same woman twice but he was never lonely.

If asked he couldn't remember any of their names or faces. There was only one woman who haunted his dreams. Even now he could picture her clearly: a round heart-shaped face, a mane of black hair, deep brown eyes filled with passion, soft tan skin, a small birth mark on the nape of her neck, a voluptuous body soft yet firm that seemed to melt into his. He never got her name and they spent only one night together but he craved her like no one else before or since.

He had found her in his room after a party and naturally assumed she wanted what every woman wanted from him. She tried to protest at first but eventually caved to him like they all did. He found every one of her sensitive spots stirring her desires. When he first thrust himself inside her she was stiff as if she wasn't used to such acts and briefly he wondered if she was a virgin but in his intoxicated state he couldn't hold the fleeting thought. Whatever her experience she gave herself to him, moaning for more and he was only too happy to oblige.

Then when he woke up in the morning she was gone. If not for the crumpled sheets he would have thought it was all a dream. She had left nothing behind...or tried not to. The only mementos he found were a nearly empty bottle of wine and a jacket.

The jacket appeared to be part of a server's uniform. It certainly wasn't one their staff wore. That night had been a celebration for his birthday and he recalled they used a catering service though he didn't know which one. Perhaps she was part of the catering staff? Why then had she been in his room?

Then there was the wine bottle. He remembered her kiss tasted sweet and as much wine as she had drunk it was safe to assume she was more than a little drunk that night. Did she drink for some liquid courage before attempting to seduce him? Or was she drinking for another reason? In which case, was she in his room by accident like she tried to claim?

He recalled she tried to protest his advances at first so maybe she really hadn't wanted to sleep with him despite how their night turned out. Perhaps she was looking to blow off some steam like he usually did, in which case any man would do.

Marcus didn't know why but the thought of her with anyone else irritated him. He didn't want anyone to touch her. That kind of possessiveness was a first for him. No matter how many times he tried to tell himself that they had nothing to do with each other and she was just one of many women it never seemed to stick.

Why was she the only woman who stirred him? Was it because she had slipped away? Why did he lie awake every night longing to hold her? Why did not knowing her name drive him crazy?

And just where was she now?