

Chapter 2

Bree's POV

I'm frozen in my seat. This has got to be some sick joke. No way would my dad just tell me that he is combining his company with another company and only leaving it to me if I get married to some random guy, that I then have to share the company with!

"Dad...you understand that this is the most insane thing I have ever heard, right? I know you have to be joking with me."

He shakes his head.

"We want to protect the business empires that we built, as well as our kids, who we think could really benefit from each other."

I laugh. "Benefit from each other? Are you serious? I would work with the man if I absolutely must, but I cannot marry him! That is just insane."

I hear raised voices from across the room. I'm guessing that Cranston's hearing the same insane story that I am.

"Dad, are you for real right now?" I lean forward, my eyes locked on my dad's.

He takes a deep breathe and exhales loudly. "Yes. I am."

I pop back onto my seat and shake my head, throwing my hands up in the air. "This is ludicrous!"

"Be that as it may, we are meeting with lawyers later..." He leans back as the server comes over and puts our food in front of us, but I'm no longer hungry. "We are willing to negotiate some things with you, but I need you to keep an open mind, remember that I have always looked out for what was best for you."

I shake my head at him. I have no words.

He glances at his watch. "I'll give you some time to think about it. Meet me in the conference room 3 at 4:30." He gets up without touching his food and heads towards the elevator, joined almost at exactly the same time as Paul, who steps into the elevator quickly with him.

Cranston is following after him, bimbo clanking in her heels behind him. I watch as Cranston pounds the elevator door with his fist and turns around, running his hand through his hair, his eyes falling on me.

Crap.

I can't look away as I see him say something to the bimbo, whose shoulders sag as she clanks off to another elevator.

Now he's making his way towards me.

I look down at my food, feeling my heart pound against my chest.

This cannot be real.

"So, did your dad just tell you the same bullshit plan that my dad told me?"

Cranston ops down into my dad's empty chair, tossing his sunglasses onto the table, revealing his dark blue eyes.

"Um, well, if you are referring to the plan where he wants to merge our two companies, force us into marriage so we can run the company together, and basically ruin our lives, then yes, yes he did."

Cranston glowers at me for an instant before catching the server's eye and throwing a finger up.

"Whiskey please."

"I'll take pinot grigio, thanks!"

Cranston raises an eyebrow at me. I shrug. If ever there were a time to day drink, it's when your dad tries to marry you off to the city's biggest male slut.

I slap my palm onto the table. "This is ridiculous! It has to be a joke! Why join the companies again after so many years apart? Why tell us we have to get married? Who does that?"

Cranston shakes his head as the server brings our drinks and sets them in front of us, giving Cranston an extra friendly smile before she leaves. I roll my eyes. Cranston doesn't notice.

"I know why." Cranston takes a swig and looks at me. "It's because my dad doesn't think I can run the company on my own, he wants you to help me."

"That doesn't explain why my father would..."

"Your father thinks you are too uptight, he wants me to help you with that." Cranston points a finger at me while he holds the glass up.

"I'm not too uptight."

I stop as Cranston laughs.

I tap my fingers on the table and take a drink of my wine.

"Yup. Not uptight at all. Remember when we rented the yacht as kids?"

"Of course." I say a little testily.

"Do you?" Cranston says with his eyes wide. "Because from what I remember, you spent the entire trip in your cabin, studying French so that when we got to Paris two weeks later you could be competent enough to read the menus."

I put my elbow on the table and chew on my thumbnail.

Cranston raises another eyebrow at me. "Still doing that?"

I quickly pull my hand away, glaring at him.

He reaches across the table and grabs my bowl of lobster mac and cheese and starts to dig in. As I watch, my stomach growls.

"So, the way I see it, we can basically handle this two ways." Cranston waves his fork around as he talks before taking another huge bite. I watch in envy.

"One." He speaks with his mouth full before swallowing. "We call their bluff. We refuse to play along, and see how it plays out. We might lose control of the companies, but maybe not."

He shrugs and jerks his head at the server who hurries over.

He points at me with the end of his fork. "Can you get her another of this amazing meal?" He gives her a charming smile and she squeals, 'of course', and rushes off.

"Oh, thank you..."

He waves his hand dismissively.

"Two. We go along with it." He looks at me when he says this. My stomach ips.

"But... the plan is insane."

"Is it?" He smiles at me. "The way I see it, it's just a contract. We play by their rules, with our own rules."

"Wha- I'm confused." I shake my head as the server plops another lobster mac and cheese in front of me without looking at me and I pick up a fork and take a bite.

"We play along. We get married. We stay married a couple of months, get our first divorce out of the way, and come out with millions of dollars, and we can even split the companies up again."

I stare at him as he scrapes the last of the mac and cheese onto his fork and shoves it into his mouth.

"You are just as insane as they are."

He grins at me. "Maybe, but at least with my plan, we get to take over a billion-dollar company and come out as multi-millionaires. And if we don't play along, all your hard work that you've put in your entire life to run a company will have been wasted."

I bite my lip, my fork suspended above my bowl.

Cranston eyes my new bowl. "You going to eat that?"

I wrap my hand around it protectively and swat my fork at his straying hand.

"What about all your blonde bimbos?" I raise my eyebrows at him.

He grins again. "Like I said, we make up our own rules. Just because we are married, doesn't mean we need to live in the same house, we won't even need to sleep together." His eyes drift down to my cleavage. "I mean, unless you want to."

I blush.

"Get over yourself." I roll my eyes and nosh my mac and cheese.

He laughs. "Well, are you going to show up at 4:30?"

I look down at my watch, it's 3:00.

I drink the last of my wine glass.

Am I really considering this? I have never made such a big decision with such little time to think it over. It took me two years to find the right apartment, it takes me hours to decide what to wear when I go out, and now I am deciding who I am going to marry in less than a two hour time span?

Madness.

I make eye contact with Cranston, who seems to be able to tell that I'm still not sold.

"At least we know each other, and even like each other."

I laugh and make a face.

"Hey!" Cranston makes a hurt face. "You don't like me?"

I make a weeeell face and shake my hand.

"I like you." I look up at him, he shrugs at me. He's serious.

"Yes, but Cranston, it's not the same as marriage 'like'." Cranston shrugs again and lifts his empty glass of whiskey to the server who always seems to be hovering around us. He points at my wine glass as well and holds up 2 fingers.

"Maybe it's better that way. We go into it as friends and leave it as friends, instead of thinking we are in love and making a mess of things and having a sloppy divorce where everyone just tries to hurt each other as much as they can." He says this casually, but I know he's serious. All his dad's divorces were sloppy. I sometimes wonder if Cranston has commitment issues because he has seen how hard it is for people to actually stay committed and he refuses to even try.

"I guess I could go and hear them out more."

Cranston grins as the server puts both the wine glass and whiskey in front of him and smiles widely at him. "Anything else I can get you?" Her voice is low and suggestive.

But Cranston just shakes his head and leans over so he can see me, handing me my wine glass and holding his up to it.

"Cheers, ancé!"