

Chapter Eleven

"Alexis your mom is here to pick you up," the teacher announced.

Alexis tilted her head and frowned. Why would her mother be there? She should be at work. It was Monday and three days since she met their father at the aquarium. They had been waiting for him to make his next move but so far he hadn't made an appearance. She was beginning to think they might have scared him off. But now her mother was here?

She didn't have a doctor's appointment and it was strange her mother would only ask for her. Her hair stood on end as another thought occurred to her. Biting her lip she said, "Okay. Can my brothers escort me since I left my cane at home?"

"Of course, sweetie. Go right ahead but boys come back quickly."

With nods her brothers stood helping her pack away her work. Alexis seldom brought her cane to school since her brothers were always close at hand. Thanks to that the teachers were also used to such requests. Alexis was familiar enough with the school layout she could easily find her way by

herself particularly without other students rushing around but there was no reason to tell the teachers that.

Theo carried her backpack as they led her out of the classroom and headed down the hall. She could feel their nervousness though she tried to remain calm.

"This is weird, right?" Theo asked.

"Do you have an appointment you forgot about?" Sean asked.

"No." Alexis shook her head. "It's probably our grandfather. He moved faster than I thought he would."

"It could be our father," Sean said.

"No. He would have asked for all three of us."

"So...what do we do?"

"Mom will be waiting at the office. We'll see if she's alone or if someone is with her. Then we'll decide."

They walked steadily but tried not to hurry. The last thing they wanted to do was attract unnecessary attention. Nearing the office they slowed and stopped before rounding the corner. Theo peaked beyond confirming their mother was

waiting with two men in suits. They weren't as burly as the man who had come into the diner but the way they stood suggested they had some training hinting they were guards of some sort.

"So...what do we do?" Theo asked after describing what he saw for his sister's benefit. In his mind he imagined various scenarios they could use to rescue their mother and escape pursuit.

"I'll go. Mom must be terrified," Alexis said.

"Then we'll go too." Sean said.

"Yeah." Theo seconded.

"No," Alexis shot them down. "Our grandfather doesn't know about you two yet."

"But..."

"You guys need to get to the computer room and infiltrate *Carlisle Enterprises*. Mom and I will probably need help getting out once we're there. We need to be prepared. We are entering the belly of the beast."

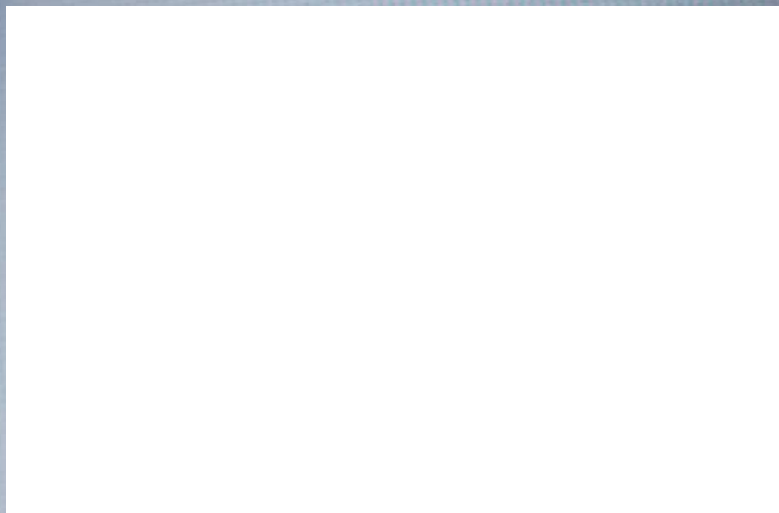
"Okay. Got it." Sean said immediately understanding her thoughts.

He could access the building's security easily enough and use the cameras to watch over them. Once he was in the system he could also control

various areas to distract pursuit.

"I don't know," Theo hesitated. He didn't like the thought of their mother and sister going alone.

"Don't worry. Our father's men are still watching us



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so he has to know what is going on. I don't think he'll just stand by and we can use them."

Theo chewed his lip. Honestly he wasn't sure if they should consider that a good thing or a bad one. Alexis and Sean might believe their father was worth giving a chance but he would not be so easily swayed.

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"Okay. We'll head to the computer room," Theo finally agreed. "I don't think any class will be using it so we won't have to worry about questions."

Sean agreed.

"Okay." Alexis gave each a comforting pat then she stepped out and headed for the office counting her steps.

She walked with her arm extended and fingers brushing the wall. To anyone casually watching she looked like she was a typical, playful, ten-year-old girl. Only those who knew her knew she was using the wall as her guide to avoid wandering off track.

Nearing the office she called, "Mom."

Lynn turned at her daughter's voice. She was surprised to see Alexis approach alone since the boys never left their sister unattended. She hurriedly closed the distance and pulled her into a firm hug.

"It'll be okay, mom," Alexis whispered before the men hemmed them in.

"Miss Carlisle, it's time to go."

Lynn's embrace tightened as she cringed. Ten years she hadn't even thought of the name. When

she heard it in the diner she had froze.

* * *

"Be right with you," Lynn said as she cleared a table without looking at the new arrivals.

"You'll be coming with us now, Miss Carlisle."

Lynn froze feeling herself go cold as she broke into a sweat that had nothing to do with the hours on her feet. Straightening she turned to see two men in business suits but their presence was far more frightening as was the guns tucked under their jackets.

"Your father has summoned you...and his granddaughter," the man said without explanation.

"Lynn honey, something wrong?" Gretchen asked coming out of the kitchen. "Can I help you gentlemen?"

"It's fine," Lynn hurriedly shook her head. "My father sent them for me. Just let me get my coat."

Lynn ducked into the kitchen removing her apron and grabbing her jacket. Gretchen eyed the men before stepping into the kitchen as Lynn made hasty preparations.

"You in trouble, sweetie?"

"The less you know the better," Lynn answered. "If I go with them they'll leave you alone."

"That isn't what I asked. Besides what could they do to me?"

"You don't want to know," Lynn said after a moment. "After we go, call Tracy and let her know what happened. It'll be fine. Promise."

* * *

Though she said she would be fine she wasn't really sure. She had no idea why her father would look for her after ten years. Lynn barely had time to write Tracy's number down. She wasn't sure if Tracy could help but she wanted someone to know what happened and where she had been taken.

Despite the unusual situation Alexis was poised even assuring her mother everything would be fine. They sat together in the back of the sedan holding hands. She remained quiet and listened to every word the men said though it wasn't much. It was just as well she couldn't see or she might have been tempted to see if the black SUV was following. Beside her, her mother nervously fidgeting not sure what was coming. Alexis wished she could comfort her mother but she

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couldn't risk alerting the men in the car.

To pass time she counted between turns guessing the length of the drive. It was exceedingly short and she could only guess when they crossed the Brooklyn Bridge. Naturally she knew where her grandfather's company was located so the direction of travel was no great surprise.

Eventually they came to a stop in a parking lot. Judging by the echo she knew they were underground but this too wasn't surprising. The men escorting them immediately got out and waited for them to exit not bothering to open their doors. Alexis snorted in disgust but it gave her the opportunity she was waiting for to speak with her mom.

Squeezing her hand Alexis said, "It'll be okay, mom. Sean and Theo aren't far. We'll be fine."

Not wanting to risk angering their guards Alexis exited and waited for her mother to join her. She knew her words had not alleviated her mother's concerns but she couldn't offer more now. It was a shame they kept their activities and preparations secret from her but they hadn't wanted her to worry.

Alexis leaned on her mother hoping their

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continued contact would bring her comfort even if her words didn't. The men said nothing escorting them to an elevator. The ride was both short and long. Alexis could only guess they were on an express elevator of sorts as it didn't stop on any of the lower floors and kept going to what she assumed was the executive floor. She doubted her grandfather wanted to advertise to his employees who he was entertaining.

As she expected stepping off the elevator it was a short walk to a spacious office. Dimly she heard the clacking of keyboards and idle office chatter but it was indistinct. They were definitely not being escorted through the main area of the floor probably an off hallway. They were ushered into the office quickly and left alone without even being offered a seat.

Almost immediately the phone rang. Without hesitation Alexis left her mother's side and approached the desk. Her mother whispered her name in panic but Alexis picked up the receiver.

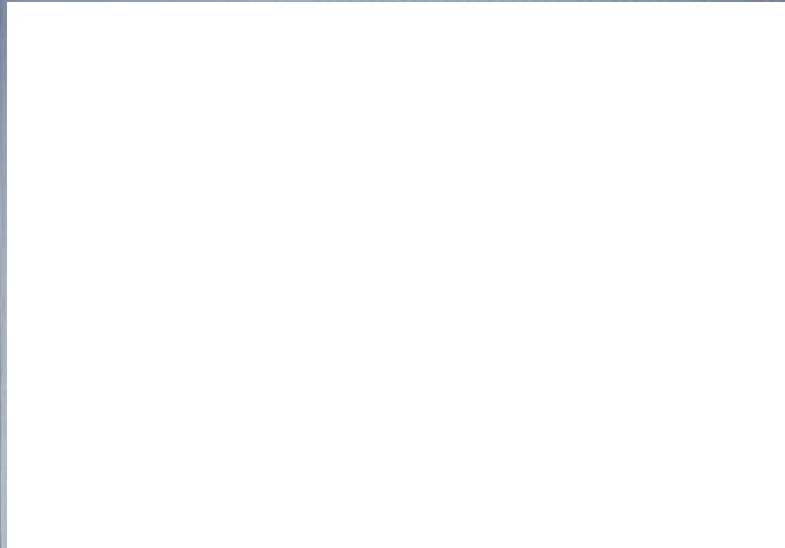
"Hello."

"Hi, sis. If you feel along the right side of the phone near the bottom you'll feel three buttons. Press the second one to put it on speaker and hang up the receiver so we can listen in."

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+50 Points

Alexis did as instructed and returned to her mother before she could truly panic. No sooner was she back at her mother's side than the door opened and a new presence filled the room.



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Lynn sucked in her breath as her gaze fell on her father. In ten years he seemed to have aged twenty. Yet he still commanded attention and obedience. His suit was finely pressed, his thinning hair styled with mousse and colored though he was due for another session as gray was showing at his temples. In his youth he had been handsome and now he was distinguished

even when his expression twisted in disgust as his gaze settled on her.

Lynn's heart faltered. Deep down she always hoped perhaps to be forgiven but those hopes were dashed in an instant. She meant nothing to him, like a bug crawling on the floor.

"Just when I thought you couldn't sink lower," Emerson announced as he walked to his desk. "A waitress? Just how much do you intend to insult your family you wretched, ungrateful girl?"

Lynn trembled. She had done her best. Why wasn't that enough? She made a life for herself and her children without help. Didn't that count for something? Alexis squeezed her mother's hand in silent support like a rock in a storm.

"I have gone to great pains to have these drawn up quietly," Emerson said, "if you know what is good for you, you will sign."

"W-what is that?" Lynn hesitated.

"Custody papers. I will be taking Alexis. You will not see her or make any contact with her. You will disappear from her life and never show your face to me again."

"...But she's my daughter."

"Who do you think can take better care of her? With me she will be given all the best opportunities. With you she'll rot in a sewer."

Lynn bit her lip. It was true she didn't have the same means as him but she gave everything to her children and loved them unconditionally. Surely he had nothing to compare to that.

"What do you think, young lady?" Emerson turned his attention to his granddaughter. "I have a bright shiny piano waiting for you."

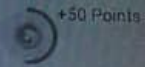
"For what?" Alexis asked. "So you can trot me out in front of your friends like a trained monkey? Hard pass. I'll stay with my mom."

Their guards shared nervous glances. No one dared speak to Emerson Carlisle like that before especially not in his own office. For his part Emerson remained silent. His eyes were pools of rage not that Alexis could see nor cared if she could.

"You show up after ten years, drag my mom from work and me from school like your some Lord of the Land?" Alexis continued. "You are a disgusting old man with no sense of morals. You're a puss filled abscess on the world...and you have to go."

"Now see here, young lady, you would do well..."

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"No! You see here, *old man*. If you at least started with an apology I might have entertained you, but no one, and I mean no one, talks to *our* mother that way!"

"*Our?*"

"Right boys?"



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