

## Chapter 40

[Vivienne]

Alright, this has gone too far. There's no way I'm letting this asshole touch me.

"How much?" I ask, finally realizing that if this is all about money, then I don't have to lose my eyes over it. He can just name his price, and we'll see how that goes.

My question takes the two of them a little off guard.

The man tilts his head to the side. "Excuse me?"

"I said, how much is that big shot willing to pay you for the eyes?"

The two of them look at me as if I have lost my mind. Before I know it, they start laughing, and they laugh until the woman has tears in her eyes and the man lets out a loud, exaggerated sigh, as if this has been fun but now he's tired.

He shakes his head. "Listen, lady. I'm not going to waste my time trying to negotiate with someone who's obviously a little delusional. We both know you don't have the money."

Maria snickers. "Yeah, like, what are you? A maid or something?"

The man raises a hand and waves her off. "It doesn't matter. We have a buyer. Someone's willing to pay a lot of money for these pretty, young eyes of yours. And that's good enough for me."

He starts to walk away, but I'm not done. "But I can pay you much more."

That gets his attention. He stops and turns around.

"How much more?"

"Ten times."

The woman bursts into laughter, but the man remains silent. He narrows his eyes at me, and I can see the wheels turning in his head.

"What?" Maria scoffs. "Come on, she's lying. Look at her. Does she even have a dime to her name? Please."

The man holds up his hand, silencing her. "Let her talk."

"Thank you," I say.

Maria glares at me, her gaze searing, but she remains silent.

I turn to the man, who is staring at me intently. "Look, I'm not sure how much that man is willing to pay you, but whatever it is, I can offer you ten times more to not make that deal."

The man looks me up and down, sizing me up. I can tell he's not sure if he can trust me, but I can also see the wheels turning in his head. I know he's considering my offer.

Maria interferes again, clearly unhappy with how this is going. "Babe, come on. She's lying. Don't fall for it. She's just trying to save herself. Don't listen to her. Make the deal and take the money."

He holds up his hand, silencing her once again. "And how do I know you can even back up your offer?"

"Just let me make a call, and I promise you'll get your money."

"That's it!" Maria exclaims, as if she's caught me in a lie. "Can't you see? She's trying to outsmart you, honey. She's going to call the cops on us. We can't let her do that."

"No, I won't."

She whips her head to face me, snarling. "Oh, really? And we should just trust you? You must be out of your mind."

"You should believe me because I have the money and I can pay you right now."

The man takes a step closer, his expression unreadable.

"You know what? My wife is right. Why should I trust you? This could be a trap. For all I know, you could be stalling for time, hoping the police will come and rescue you. Is that what you're doing? Is that why you're offering us this ridiculous amount of money?"

I shake my head, trying to remain calm and collected. "First of all, I don't think anyone is coming for me. If you had left behind my driver, then maybe I could've used him to negotiate. But you didn't, so no, no one is coming for me. As a matter of fact, no one will even know I'm missing until dinner. That's when my family expects me to be home. And that's hours from now. So, no, I'm not stalling for time. I'm offering you a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make ten times more

than the deal you already have. You just have to trust me, I guess."

The man's eyes bore into mine, searching for any sign of deception. After what seems like an eternity, he finally speaks. "Okay, you have yourself a deal."

"Wait, what?" Maria exclaims.

He holds up his hand. "Just let me finish."

"What? No! Babe, this is a bad idea. She's clearly lying. You can't fall for this scamming bitch's game. Come on."

He gives her a pointed look. "How many times do I have to tell you to shut your fucking mouth?"

"But—"

Before she can say another word, the man backhands her so hard she stumbles backward and lands on her ass.

"Shut. Up. I'm talking here. Can't you see?"

I hold back a gasp, watching as the color drains from the woman's face. She stares at him with wide, fearful eyes, her lips pressed together in a thin line. She's holding her cheek, and I can see her hand trembling.

I guess, money is everything he cares about.

"There," the man says, straightening his suit. "Now, where were we? Ah, yes. You're saying you can pay ten times more, right?"



I nod. "Yes."

"Alright then. I'll give you an hour to make a call and get the money here."

"And you'll release us?"

"Of course."

I raise an eyebrow. "Why should I believe you? How do I know you're not just going to take the money and still keep me and Marcus captive?"

The man laughs, his voice echoing in the empty space. "I'm a man of my word. I never go back on my promises. Plus, I'm a businessman. I only care about making money, and right now, you're giving me a great opportunity to make more. So, as long as you deliver, you and your friend will be free to go."

For some reason, I don't trust him. And that means I need to plan my escape myself.

"So, do we have a deal?" he holds out the phone that one of his men snatched from me, a wicked smile on his face.

I look at the phone and then at him. "Deal."