

## Chapter 47

[Caden] 1

I'm sitting in what looks like a conference room, staring at the capped bottle of water in front of me. I check the time for the hundredth time and sigh.

This is taking too long.

How hard can it be for a detective like Lopez to convince Vivienne to drop the case?

Maybe I was wrong to approach him myself. Perhaps I should have gone to one of his superiors. I could have surely saved myself from this awkward encounter with Vivienne.

Just then, the glass door opens, and the sound of footsteps snaps me out of my thoughts. I look up to find Lopez grabbing a bottle of water, uncapping it, and gulping down the whole thing. He then pulls out a chair and sits down, placing his hands on the table.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Lawrence, but—"

"I've heard enough," I tell him, and he looks surprised, suddenly speechless.

I stand up, and that's when he finds his voice again.

"But you didn't even... I didn't even tell you... I don't think you understand—"



"I understand everything perfectly. I think it's you who doesn't understand how important my time is."

"But Mr. Lawrence—"

"Were you able to convince Vivienne to drop the case?"

He winces, his jaw tightening. "No. But—"

"Nothing more is required. I'll take this matter to someone who can actually keep their word. Thank you for nothing."

I turn to leave, but he stops me with what he blurts out.

"I tried. But she seems hellbent on pursuing this. Besides, now that I think about it, it's a family matter, Mr. Lawrence. Maybe you two should sit down and talk this out yourselves and spare everyone the effort and pain of being tossed around between you two."

The fact that he's right annoys me even more.

But there's no point in wasting my breath on him. The man has already proven himself useless to me once.

I walk out of the conference room, take a turn, and come face-to-face with Vivienne for the second time. But I should have expected this. After Lopez's failed attempt to talk her out of pursuing the case, she must have suspected something.

This is what I always liked about her. She could read people like books. She read me better than anyone ever did, sometimes even more than my own parents.

"What are you doing here, Caden?" she asks with a frown, proving my point.

I sigh, slipping my hands into the pockets of my pants. "Why do you care, Vivienne? Are you done pretending to hate me?"

My words make her frown even harder, her perfect eyebrows snapping together, and her naturally pink lips pressing into a thin line. "What the hell are you even made of? Why do you—"

She stops herself, closing her eyes and then smiling. "You know what? Never mind." She opens her eyes again. "Just answer my goddamn questions. What are you doing here? I saw you with Detective Lopez. And the fact that he was trying to intimidate me into dropping the matter makes me think you're responsible for it. So, tell me, am I right? Are you really behind this? And why?"

Part of me wants to deny it, to tell her she's wrong, but the truth is, she's not.

I pinch the bridge of my nose and sigh.

Then, I grab her wrist and drag her out of the precinct myself.

"Are you crazy? What are you doing? Just let me go!"

Once we're outside, I release her hand and turn back to face her.

"Drop the case."

She rubs her wrist, glaring up at me accusingly. "What? Why? Why would you say that? And what do you even know? Why—oh!"

Realization hits her sooner than I expected. Her jaw drops, and her head tilts to the side as if she's seeing me for the first time. "You're involved in this somehow. I don't know how, but you are. And the fact that you're asking me to drop the case can only mean that you're either trying to protect yourself or..."

I can't believe she put the pieces of the puzzle together so fast. I knew she was smart, but this crazy smart? Why didn't I see that before?

The fact that I want to kiss her so badly right now—I'm not sure what to do with that.

She continues, her voice cutting through my thoughts. "You knew I was drunk last night, but not that I was drugged. And I remember bits and pieces of the night. You beat someone and kicked them out. You accused me of what happened last night. That means you didn't know then, but now you do. And that means something changed between the time you walked out of that room and now, as we're standing here," her eyes narrow, and she takes a dangerously close step toward me. "What changed, Caden? Whom are you trying to protect?"

She sneers when I say nothing, shaking her head. "Let me guess. Is it Sasha? Or some other skank you've been hiding? I mean, what do I know? You've never been the faithful type—"

Something takes hold of me. I don't know what.

Before I can even think, I slam my lips onto hers, kissing her hard and rough.