

Chapter 1

Playing in the Sandbox

Three and a half months short of three years... that's how long it's been. I moved to London... finished my degrees at Oxford, in just under six months. I purchased a nearly defunct eBook publishing house... and worked tirelessly for six months... turning it around and putting my name on the map of the publishing world.

I developed a system where I was able to offer my authors more money than anyone else. I arranged promo tours for them... granted more exposure for their titles. In doing that, I had authors clamoring to become my clients... leaving their old publishers for greener pastures.

Did I care that I was taking clients from other publishing houses? Hell no! Was I happy when an author came to me from Andrews Publishing? You bet your sweet ass I was!

I stopped referring to my one-night stand as a mistake. Therapy forces you to take long, hard looks at yourself. And in doing that, I have accepted my responsibility in it... I like myself, again. And how could it have been a mistake, when it had given me the greatest gift in the world!?

My little boy just turned two, yesterday. Isaiah Solomon Andrews blessed my life just after midnight... exactly nine months after I left Columbus. I think of his father often. I want him to know about his son... but I don't know who he is.

Susannah and Allen have tried finding him... but they haven't seen him again... Not at the bar where we had met... and nowhere in the area.

Ike and I disembarked the plane... and Grandpa's driver met us in baggage claim. You guessed it. I have been summoned home. Grandpa told me it is time for phase three of his plan.

Phase one was releasing the photos to the media... with his statement... enumerating the egregious way my engagement had been broken...claiming until his son made things right, he would pretend he didn't exist.

Phase two was attending the wedding of Bonita and Jason... Standing when asked if anyone objected. Calling Bonita a cheater... a home wrecker...a few other choice names. Then said to Jason "Don't come crying to me, boy! Once a cheater... always a cheater. And you both are! You both will cheat on each other!" And then he walked out!

My Grandpa is old school... kickass and take names! He made his fortune as a sea captain on a salvage ship... recovering sunken treasure. He hit big when he salvaged a gold laden ship downed by a hurricane off the coast of Bermuda.

Grandma was the love of his life. She was as rough and tumble as he was. Salt of the earth... the pair of them... and my guiding lights! Always! Grandpa took me out of piano lessons and put me in soccer. He placed me in every martial arts class that trained hard and heavy. While my mother had me in ballet... he had me learning to defend myself.

My mother was once a societal Deb... she married my father because Grandpa paid her father's debts. She is a firm believer in always saving face. No scandal must touch the family name. Good thing I have been disowned... An unwed single mother... with no clue who her baby daddy is? Oh My God!

Grandpa was waiting on the steps of the mansion when we arrived. He was around the car and lifting Isaiah out and tossing him in the air, before I could say boo!

I said "Grandpa... be careful! I don't want you to hurt your back!" He laughed and said "Don't be throwing dirt on me just yet, young one! I'm only 65."

We walked inside and the nanny took Ike to get him ready for lunch, while I freshened up. Grandpa wanted to talk about his plan... and he wants me ready for... his words... the shit to hit the fan!

After lunch, I was sitting in the back garden, watching Isaiah play in his new sandbox. Grandpa handed me a Crown Royal rocks... and sat down.

He smiled at me "I have taken the liberty of purchasing the penthouse offices in Colum Towers. It's a beautiful new building... developed by Winters Contractors. I got a good deal... since Malakai Winters is a good friend. I saved

his life once... he kind of owes me a life debt. I have hired your friends Susannah and Allen as office managers. The rest of your staff will be your responsibility. Your business name is being painted, as we speak.”

I said “This is phase three? Opening an office here in Columbus?” He laughed “No, child! This is to keep the light of my life closer to me. Phase three begins tomorrow night. I am holding a gala in the banquet hall of Colum Towers... to announce the branch opening of Mandrew Publishing. Your family will be in attendance.”

I stopped him right there. “No... your family will be in attendance. I will be attending with MY only family. I have grown and matured a lot, Grandpa. Looking back, I was never treated like I mattered, at all. A second-class citizen. Fuck that! I know my worth, now. They will lick my boots before I ever call them family again.”

He nodded... then grinned... a slow, sly grin that let me know, now he’s getting to the good stuff. “As I was saying, the Andrews family will be in attendance. All the elite... upper crust will be there. Malakai Winters will also be there. “

I laughed “Are you trying to give Anna Andrews an aneurysm? The head of the mafia in attendance? Oh, I can’t wait to see her face! This is going to be pure gold! No one knows what he looks like. He never allows his photo taken. How did you get him to attend?”

Grandpa shrugged “He’s a good guy... and the majority of his businesses are legit. He’s just a man who takes care of business... when it needs taken care of.

It's no different than things your own father has done. Malakai is just a man about it. Not afraid to get his hands dirty."

I said "Robert has dealt in illegal activities?" He nodded "Many times. He hires it done, though. Which brings me to the why Malakai will be there. He will publicly announce you are under his protection. Like I said... he feels he owes me... so this is my request of him. I fear what Robert will try to do, once he realizes his losses the past two years are because of you. And I know it isn't because of you... but he won't see it that way. He will only see you pilfering his clientele."

I whistled low "Damn! You apparently want to poke the bear right into a hornet's nest! I will warn you, though! I will not be held accountable for what I say... or do... if that family tries to accost me, in any way!"

He grinned again and said "I'm counting on it. A little tidbit for you to mull over... Bonita never had a child. Bonita was never pregnant. It was all a ruse by Anna and Bonita to get Jason to marry her. Bonita always wanted what was yours. Her whole life. Now she has him... but the grist of the rumor mill says he doesn't fuck her... He fucks around on her... but never her. He refuses to let her have a child now."

I busted out laughing "It was a bald-faced lie! A ruse, my ass! Oh God! That's priceless! Karma is alive and well... and apparently living with the Andrews!" He laughed and hugged me... telling me he is happy I'm home. As he left me to play in the sandbox with a two-year-old!