

Chapter 2

We Need To Talk

I had left my black, shoulder length hair down in silky waves... did my eyes in a smoky design. Diamond studs in my ears... and a diamond choker necklace with a ten-carat sapphire teardrop pendant.

My gown is royal blue... spaghetti strapped backless number that hugged my curves... with a slit nearly to my hip on the right side. Matching strappy stilettos and I admired myself in the mirror.

I was by no means heavy... I definitely wasn't considered svelte. I was curvy... soft, yet firm... in all the right places. I stand 5'9 in my heels... I am proud of my post baby body. I wanted to look my best tonight... and I feel I have accomplished that!

I went downstairs to snuggle my cuddlebug while I waited on Grandpa. Only to find both he and Ike watching Paw Patrol on the couch. These two fellas are the only men I will ever need! I kissed my son good night and we headed out.

Grandpa said “You look absolutely radiant, my girl! You look so much like your grandmother, Marisol... Everything... your hair color... your blue eyes... sometimes, you scrunch up your nose when you’re thinking... and it’s like looking at Grandma! Enh! It’s probably why I keep you around!”

I laughed and said “You keep me around because you love me! My big, gruff, grumpy Grandpa has a soft spot!” He laughed and kissed the back of my hand “I guess. Whatever you gotta tell yourself to get you through the night, puddin pop!”

We arrived to huge search beams reaching into space and dancing to a rhythm all their own. A red carpet leading inside... and holy fucking media! Grandpa stood up from the limo... taking my hand to help me out. He tucked my hand into the crook of his elbow and held it there.

We walked through the sea of reporters without him saying a word. They shouted questions and snapped photos... he remained stoic... and silent.

As we entered, a young man escorted us to double doors. I hear a booming voice say “Presenting Mr. Solomon Andrews and his granddaughter, Marisol Andrews.” The doors opened and we entered.

All eyes turned our way, gauging our every move. Walking to the center of the room, Grandpa said “I have to speak to someone... mingle.” The fuck? Mingle!? With whom shall I mingle!? I don’t know anybody! I made my way to the bar and ordered a Crown Royal rocks... and turned, just in time to be tackled by Susannah and Allen. I started laughing... and she was fighting tears.

I whispered “Don’t cry, Suz! I’m good! I am really good! And I am happy! You look so pretty... and you have such an ugly cry face... so don’t do it!” She laughed and said “Oh My God! We have missed you sooo much!” I nodded and said “Me too!”

Halfway through the night, Grandpa got on stage... signaling me to join him. He took the microphone and said “Thank you all for coming! As you know, the purpose of this gala is to announce my newest venture. I have become silent partners in my granddaughter’s very successful business. Two years ago, she founded her own publishing company in London. She has agreed to open offices here... in this very building... and will make it her home base! She is the proud owner... and founder of Mandrew Publishing! A very supportive, up and coming digital publishing house... with worldwide clientele! I am very proud to be getting in on the ground floor!”

The entire room was quiet. For a whole minute. Then I heard “How dare you! How dare you set yourself up in my town and try to compete with me! You are my daughter and you will stop this nonsense right now!”

I grinned... the entire time he was spewing that bullshit... and waited. When he stopped talking, I said “The beauty of free enterprise is... one can open any business... as long as it’s legal... in any village, town, hamlet, or city, of their choice. I chose Columbus because my grandfather lives here. As he is my only family, I find myself wanting to be closer to him. I don’t compete with anyone. I am the number one digital publisher around the globe... all the rest compete with ME! I am not your daughter. You disowned me, nearly three years ago... because I refused to support your actual daughter... while she married the man I was engaged to... by your design... and on your command!”

As I was helped off the stage, Bonita pushed her way through the crowd, toward me. I stood calmly still and waited. She reached me... looking like a harridan... and practically screeched “You stand up there... looking down your nose at us... Like you are so much better than we are! You probably fucked your way into owning this business! Think you are better! Wait until Daddy is through with you.” Anna had stepped up behind her. Robert and Jason behind her.

My only thought, in that moment, was how old and tired Jason looked. 25 and he had the posture of a fifty-year-old man. Hnh! Shame! Apparently, married life doesn't suit his weak constitution.

When Bonita had finished screeching, I asked quietly “Are you done? Good! Now listen carefully. I am not better than anyone. I have never looked down on a single soul. What I have... I worked hard for. I was disowned. I carved a life for myself. Never approach me again. Whatever we once were to each other... no longer exists. I have never taken anything away from you. I have let you do whatever it is you and your mother do. I never went out of my way to deliberately hurt any one of you... to take something precious from you... to steal your happiness. That... all of that... is your claim to fame! Get to stepping' Mrs. Tyler... we have nothing further to discuss.”

Anna raised her hand to slap me... and I caught it midair. I sneered “Ever raise your hand to me or mine again, I will snap it off at the elbow. Are we clear? I Said ARE WE CLEAR?” She nodded and backed into the crowd.

Grandpa took my elbow... leading me back to the bar. His grin never faltered... he tells me “I have never been prouder of you, than I was in that moment! I cannot wait to see the morning's news and trending topics!”

I started laughing and said “Look at you! All tech savvy and shit! Trending? Please tell me you don’t have TikTok and Snapchat?!” He laughed “As a matter of fact, I download TikTok this morning! Isaiah is solid comedic gold! We have three TikTok’s right now... we plan on at least one a day! Going to do a day in the life series with my great grandson... are you kidding me!?” I laughed... shaking my head.

Jason walked up to me... asking if I had a moment. Grandpa took a step back and I said “Look, Jason. If you are here to apologize, don’t. I have forgiven you. I obviously wasn’t enough for you... so you looked elsewhere. It no longer matters, in the overall scheme of things. If you have come to berate me, don’t! It will not end well.”

He shook his head, with tears in his eyes... he said “She lied, Mari. There never was a baby. Now I refuse to have sex with her... she will never be a mother. The downside is I will never be a father.” I shrugged “Divorce her. Move on! Find whatever it is you need to be happy again. Because this... this... what the fuck ever is... is killing you! You have aged ten years already! Walk away from that toxic family, like I did.”

He whispered “I can’t! It’s my penance for the pain I caused you.” I scoffed “Oh please! You are a fool! And I damned sure do not appreciate you playing the martyr for me! I am happy, Jason. I am over it! I moved passed it... a long time ago. I suggest you do, too. Before it kills you!”

I walked over to Grandpa and slid his arm over my shoulder... he looked down to say something when we heard a booming voice say “Mr. Malakai Winters” and the crowd gasped... While Grandpa laughed and took my hand... leading me over to meet Malakai Winters.

Standing in front of the man, I lifted my eyes... up and up... until I met his eyes.
Good God! What is he? Eight feet tall? Damn!

Once I looked into his eyes, I knew. Gawd Damnit! I look into those same
beautiful green eyes every single morning!

I said “Do you know where Grandpa lives?” At his nod, I responded “Can you
come by tomorrow?” He said “I most certainly will! You disappeared without a
trace... I looked for you everywhere!”

I nodded and said “Yeah... about that... We need to talk!”