

Chapter 6

Looking Beautiful, As Usual

Marisol's POV ~

Mandrew Publishing was flourishing... I have finally hired my full staff. I have four people who scour the web for authors with talent. Three editors... six publicists. I chose Susannah as my personal assistant and Allen is my office manager.

As we grow, so will the number of employees. I have over sixty employees in the London office. It's run perfectly by my right-hand guy, Nigel. We met at Oxford and became fast friends.

Days had been fading into weeks... Isaiah has adjusted well to his dad being in his life. It's been difficult arranging time for them, since Malakai is in the middle of a huge takeover deal of a construction company. He's moving into the building aspect of construction...and not just design.

Grandpa has been acting a little off, and it has me concerned. I called Malakai this morning to request a lunch meeting... I want to discuss it with him... I'm on my way to meet him.

As soon as I walked in, he spotted me and waved. Walking over, he smiled... That curl my toes, steal my breath smile. We haven't moved much further in this relationship. He wants me to go at my pace... so he doesn't make any moves. I'm just not sure how to take it to the next level.

He held my chair, as I sat down... and asked "You sounded concerned on the phone. What's up?"

I shook my head "I'm not really sure. I'm worried about Grandpa. The last several days, he's been on edge. Stressed. When I try to talk to him... he says its business related... or that he will handle it. Something is going on... and he's being so secretive it has me concerned for his safety."

Kai said "Does he have any enemies? Can you think of anyone who may threaten him?" Again, I shook my head. "I don't really know anything. He has a couple close friends... and I can't imagine anyone being his enemy. I just know that his anxiety is through the roof... and I need to know the cause. I want to help."

We stood to leave and he told me he was going to see Grandpa right away and try to figure out what's going on. I thanked him... kissing his cheek. As I started to get into my car, he stopped me and pulled me into him... kissing me deeply. He grinned from ear to ear "I really needed that! The ice is broken now... can we do that more often?"

I felt myself blushing, smiling and nodding all at the same time! I got in my car to go back to work. Hell yes! We can do that more often! More often? Every waking moment of every waking day... Can we do it again? Right now. is what I should have said... yet, the only word my brain could form, in that moment, was yep!

The afternoon breezed by, Susannah teasing me because I was humming... apparently, an unrecognizable tune completely off key. She said I have no singing voice. Good to know! I reckon Karaoke night at the local dive is not on my bucket list!

I arrived home a little after five... and could hear raised voices in the study. I walked into Kai and Grandpa in a yelling match. Kai said "How many times do I have to tell you... something like this, you call ME! This is what I DO!" Grandpa said "I thought I had it handled!"

I cleared my throat "Ahem" and nothing... so I did it again "AHEM" They both turned... with deer in headlights looks. I said "What THE fuck is going on? Do not try to lie or sugarcoat a gawd damned thing! I want the truth! All of it!"

Grandpa sighed "Bonita has been kidnapped. I have been receiving videos via email. The kidnappers ransom demand is to hand you over to them. Robert is in negotiations with them, as well... and he is badgering me every day to get her back, by any means... or he will take matters into his own hands."

I said "Okay. What do we know? Show me the videos." There has been six, in total. I watched each one... over and over. She was being beaten... tortured. She

was screaming and crying... yelling out my name, to help her. After the fourth time, I started noticing little things.

“Something isn’t adding up. The videos come in at the same time, every time? Are they sure to be live?” Grandpa nodded... “They are live... but they aren’t always the same time.”

I told them “Then, they can’t be live. Watch the clock above her head... the time is always the same... give or take ten minutes. Hold on... I am going to enlarge that picture on the wall... something about it.... It looks familiar... “

After about a half hour, I said “I know where she is. Grandpa, have they asked for anything more? Money? Business shares?”

He said “The first two were asking only for you... then they wanted my shares in Mandrew... now they are asking for you, the shares, and thirty million.”

I grinned “What kidnappers up their ransom, when their first demands are denied? They aren’t negotiating... they are extorting. That picture? On the wall? Look at it... closely.”

Kai leaned over my shoulder... he said “It’s just a house... on a lake...” I nodded... and said “It certainly is. It belongs to me. My grandmother painted it when I was little... It’s of their lake house... where we spent every summer of my life. Two glorious months where I mattered!”

Kai said “Okayy? Where does it hang now?” I pulled my phone out and dialed a number... when it was picked up, I asked “Jason? Where are you?” He said leaving work and asked why. I said “Who is living in my condo? Are you still there?”

He answered “No! Bonita made me move out... even though you leased it to me. I’m staying with Gus and Linda, for right now.” I looked at Grandpa, as I hung up.

He said “Let’s go! If this is what it’s shaping up to be, God help them!” Kai took my hand and we all got into the limo. Kai said “Fill me in?”

I smiled “That picture hangs in my condo... that clock was a gift from Jason’s cousin. I leased the condo to Jason when I left... simply because I couldn’t be bothered. He pays rent through a leasing agent, so I never had to see him. Since he asked for the divorce, apparently, Bonita decided she wanted the condo... and because everyone kowtows to that family, he moved out. That’s where she’s being held, presumably.”

Grandpa said “Which would be stupid as hell! That condo has neighbors... beside...above...and below. Not an ideal place for a screaming... crying... assault victim.”

Kai said “So... it’s a setup? To extort money? That is, one fucked up family you’ve got, Sol!” Grandpa shook his head “This is more about getting Marisol out of the picture. Forcing me to decide which granddaughter to save.”

I leaned over and laid my hand on his knee... “I’m so sorry, Grandpa. I don’t know what I ever did to make them hate me, like this. There has to be a reason.”

Grandpa said “I may have an idea. But I thought it was just rumors and conjecture. We will look into it. Malakai, maybe you can help... once this kidnapping is resolved.”

We arrived at the condo... I searched my purse for my spare keys... and we headed up to the eighth floor. As we exited the elevator... I put my finger to my lips and slid the key into the lock.

Walking in, I heard the shower running... so we all took a seat in the living room. Glancing around... the condo was messy... cluttered. But nothing indicating a kidnapping or hostage situation.

We sat quietly... and finally heard sounds of the person getting dressed... as she walked out of the bedroom, I said “Hello, Bonita! Looking beautiful, as usual!”