

Chapter 4

Ava's POV

I stood still, the thumping of my heart against my chest loud enough for all in the room to hear. Good thing I was alone.

I was dressed in a silky white gown. No, it wasn't fancy or eye-catching, nor was it expensive. It was my aunt's dress, one she had made for her wedding years ago.

Although Liam had tried hard to get me to use his card to buy a dress and everything I'd need, I had rejected his offers. "We would need the money after the wedding," I had told him, my tone at, signaling the end of our conversation.

The door suddenly opened behind me as the sound of wheels made their way to my ears. I turned around quickly, barely catching myself from face-planting the oor.

"Dad," I muttered, my voice cracking as I gazed at my dad, who had just been pushed into the room in his wheelchair by his caretaker.

"My Princess, you look so adorable. You're all grown up now," Dad expressed, his face spread into a beautiful smile.

My heart ached as a pang of guilt hit me hard. He thought I was getting married out of love.

All these years, I had never told my dad what my mom and sister were doing to me, knowing his fragile heart wouldn't take it well. Especially if he found out the reason.

"Dad, I'm going to miss you so much. I just came home after so many years, and now I'm leaving again," I whispered, my voice breaking.

His gaze icked towards me, a small smile appearing on his face. "Sit down with me for a moment, Ava."

I sat down on the bed, and he took my hands in his. "You are a strong girl, Ava. You know how I felt when your mother told me about your decision to go to boarding school?"

Of course she did, I'm not surprised. What other reason would she give to a man for his seven-year-old daughter being absent for over 15 years?

"I was worried. We fought for over seven years before I nally realized something; I failed."

My eyes widened as I heard the last thing I could have ever expected to hear.

"Dad, you—"

"No, Ava, let me nish," he cut me off.

"I failed because you were traumatized and had to heal. You were supposed to be around your family, friends, and loved ones to achieve that healing. Not in some useless dormitory. I'm sorry for not ghting harder"

My heart ached, my father's pain reecting in my heart as if it were mine. I had a tough time dealing with the trauma, and I hadn't fully recovered. He was right.

"But then your mother told me the good news. Your therapist had declared you trauma-free. You were ne. That was the second-best day of my life."

Rage.

Pure rage exploded in my chest, simmering its way to my face. My mother was despicable. How could she lie so effortlessly?

I had never been to therapy after that dreadful day. I had pleaded and cried, but she had told me to get over it. And then she had the audacity to lie to Dad about it.

"Ava, honey, are you okay? You look pale. Did I say something wrong?" Dad questioned, a concerned look taking over his face.

I couldn't let him nd out. It would break him. So shaking my head, and putting on a fake smile, I whispered, "No, Dad, I'm just emotional."

He looked like he didn't believe me but didn't argue. Thank heavens. I couldn't let him nd out.

"I know you'll make a good wife, honey. You're stronger than you think. Never let anyone walk over you. You are your own person, okay?" my dad whispered, holding my face in his hands.

Oh, Dad, if only you knew.

Not knowing how to respond to that, I just threw my arms around him, savoring the feeling. I didn't know when I'd be able to do this again.

A knock suddenly sounded on the door. "Mr. Patel, it's time to go. Mrs. Charlotte and Miss Natalia are waiting," Bertram announced.

My dad looked as sad as I did. Neither of us were ready to end this moment. "Are you sure you and your husband can't stay here? There's enough room."

He had offered for Liam and me to stay here, and though it would have been a good opportunity to save money and still be with Dad, I couldn't do that to Liam. Natalia was moving here, to the mansion next door, with him—Dallas.

I knew Liam was trying to be strong, but he'd be hurt if he saw them every day. I also wanted to be as far away from my mother as possible.

So with a soft sigh, I mumbled, "No, Dad. Liam and I want our own place. But we'll come visit as much as possible. Now go. Don't keep the bride waiting."

Unlike my mother, my dad knew that Natalia and I never got along, so it wasn't a surprise when he found out we were getting married on the same day in two separate places.

He insisted on coming with me and walking me down the aisle, but I refused, knowing what my mother would do if Dad chose me over Natalia.

"I love you, baby," Dad whispered, a soft smile spreading across his face.

"I love you too, Daddy."

With that, he left, and I was left to myself. Bertram's voice sounded once again from behind me. "Are you ready, dear?"

Turning around, a faint smile playing on my lips, I said, "Yes, Uncle, let's go make me Mrs. Ross."

To that, we laughed as I took his hand, and together we walked out to the car and to the little church where only Uncle Bertram, the pastor, Liam, and I were to be present.

And while Natalia was becoming Mrs. Natalia Patel Dallas...

I was becoming Mrs. Ava Patel Ross.

A name I didn't want, but as I made my vows before God to Liam, I knew that I'd do all I could to keep them and be the best wife ever. I was going to make this marriage work.

Natalia and my mother sought to destroy me, but they didn't know. They didn't understand.

I wasn't the naive Ava anymore. I had grown. They didn't know it now but they would soon. And they will wish they had treated me better.