

## Chapter 8

Sable's POV

I'd managed three hours of sleep before my phone alarm dragged me back to reality.

I showered quickly and grabbed coffee from the hotel lobby before driving to the hospital. The familiar routine felt grounding - rounds, patient charts, the steady beep of monitors.

My phone buzzed during my lunch break. Caelan's name on the screen made me pause.

\*\*Good morning, Sabi. Did you sleep well? Have you eaten anything today?\*

I blinked at the message. When was the last time someone had asked about my basic needs?

\*\*Slept like a baby. Currently having a romantic lunch with a vending machine sandwich.\*

His response came quickly: \*\*That's not a proper meal. Promise me you'll eat something decent tonight.\*\*

\*\*Yes, dad.\*

\*\*I'm serious, Sabi.\*

Something warm unfurled in my chest. \*"I promise. Now stop worrying about my dietary habits."\*

\*"I have something for you. Your engagement ring is ready - I had it custom-made and delivered to Lunar Jewelers in Moonridge. You can pick it up whenever you're free."\*

I stared at the screen. \*So this was his surprise.\* The timing felt impossible. I'd only agreed to the marriage several days ago, which meant he'd ordered this ring weeks or months earlier.

\*He was that confident I'd come back? Or has he been waiting all this time?\*

I typed back: \*"Okay."\*

\*"That's it? Just 'okay'? I expected at least a few exclamation points."\*

Despite everything, I found myself smiling. \*"!!! Better?"\*

\*"Much. Though I was hoping for more enthusiasm about our impending doom- I mean, blessed union."\*

A laugh escaped before I could stop it. Several nurses looked over curiously.

\*"Did you just make a joke about our arranged marriage?"\*

\*"Who says I was joking? I'm terrified you'll try to reorganize my entire kingdom within a week."\*

\*"Only a week? You underestimate me."\*

\*"God help me."\*

I realized I was grinning at my phone like an idiot. When was the last time I'd felt this light during a conversation? With Darrell, every text felt like walking through a minefield.

But with Caelan, even after all these years, talking felt... easy.

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The brass nameplate outside Lunar Jewelers gleamed in the afternoon sunlight. I'd finished my shift early, claiming a family emergency. It wasn't entirely a lie.

"Welcome to Lunar Jewelers." The saleswoman's smile was professional but warm. "How may I help you today?"

"I'm Sable Crawford. I believe you have a ring waiting for me."

Her expression shifted to one of recognition mixed with awe. "Of course! Please, follow me to our private viewing room."

The back room was all cream marble and soft lighting. She gestured for me to sit in one of the plush leather chairs while she retrieved a black velvet box from the safe.

"His Majesty was very specific about every detail." She set the box carefully on the table between us. "He wanted nothing but perfection for

you."

When she opened the box, my breath caught.

A five-carat blue moonstone sat at the center, cut in a perfect heart shape. The band was platinum, delicate but strong, with tiny diamonds trailing down the sides like captured starlight.

"It's beautiful," I whispered.

"Would you like to try it on?" She lifted the ring from its velvet nest. "His Majesty was very particular about the sizing."

I extended my left hand. The ring slid on perfectly - no adjustments needed.

\*How did he know my ring size? We haven't seen each other in years.\*

"Check the inside," she suggested gently.

I slipped the ring off and tilted it toward the light. Engraved in flowing script: \*CB & SC\*.

Caelan Blackwood and Sable Crawford.

"It looks stunning on you." The saleswoman's voice held genuine admiration. "His Majesty has exquisite taste."

I was still admiring the way the moonstone caught the light when a cold voice cut through the air behind me.

"Sable. What are you doing here?"

The saleswoman immediately lowered her head. "Alpha Darrell."

I turned slowly. Darrell stood in the doorway of the private viewing room, several ring boxes clutched in his hands. Camila stood beside him, her arm linked through his, a sweet smile on her face that didn't reach her calculating green eyes.

"Trying on rings." I kept my voice light, casual.

Darrell stepped closer, his gaze dropping to the blue moonstone on my finger. His face darkened as he took in the size, the quality, the obvious expense of it.

I tilted my hand slightly, letting the stone catch the overhead light. "What do you think? Do you like it?"

"No." His voice came out rough. "I don't like it."

Camila moved forward with practiced grace. "What a coincidence, Sable! Darrell and I are here looking at rings too." She displayed the simple bands in his hands like trophies.

\*How fast they move.\* I watched Darrell's face for confirmation. He didn't deny it.

Camila's eyes fixed on my ring, clearly calculating its worth. I could practically see the dollar signs reflecting in her pupils. Seventy-five

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 +25 Coins

thousand? A hundred? More?

\*She's wondering how someone like me could afford something like this.\*

"Your ring is lovely, Sable." Camila's tone dripped false sweetness. "Actually, I really like that style. It's exactly what I've been looking for."

She reached toward my hand. "Mind if I try it on? Just to see how it looks?"

The saleswoman started to speak. "Miss, I'm afraid that ring is—"

I held up my other hand, cutting her off smoothly. "Of course you can try it, Camila. But you should probably know the price first."

Camila's smile widened. "Oh, price isn't really an issue for me."

"It's two hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

The number hung in the air like a dropped bomb. Camila's reaching hand froze mid-motion.

"Two hundred and..." Her voice came out strangled.

"Fifty thousand." I smiled sweetly. "Plus tax, of course."

Color drained from Camila's face. Even Darrell's jaw dropped.

"That's..." Camila swallowed hard. "That's ridiculous. Why would you try on something so expensive when you obviously can't afford it?"

"Can't I?"

 12:28 PM

6/7

Commented [Ma1]:



"Please." She let out a bitter laugh. "You're going to walk out of here and find some knockoff version online. Just like those shoes the other night."



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