

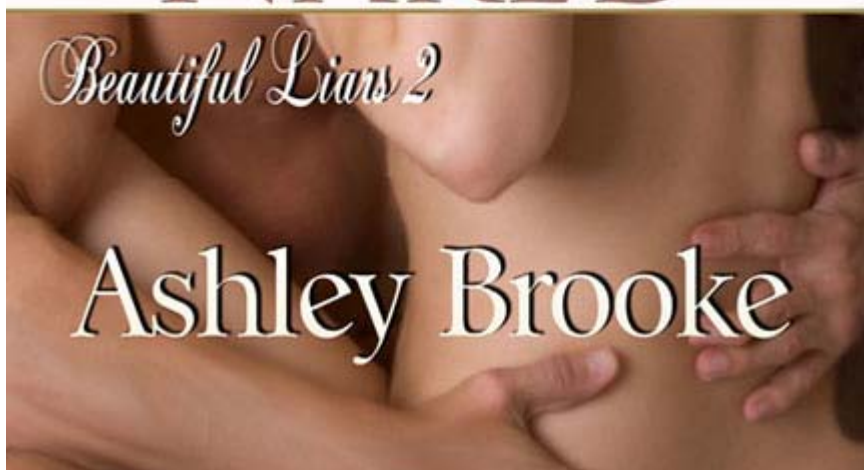
SIREN PUBLISHING *Allure*



# NAKED

*Beautiful Liars 2*

Ashley Brooke



## Beautiful Liars 2

### Naked

Sia is forced to play the role of a temptress to seduce the man the Crane crime family has been seeking to destroy. The only problem is he's in an alliance with Taylor, a man Sia has been loving with both her heart and body. She tries desperately to avoid his unyielding passion with the desire to stay loyal to her first love, Carrington Marino.

When Carrington and Sia are called to Moscow to investigate the Cranes, they try desperately to unveil the mystery of the motives and strategies of their enemies. They must also avoid being found out as lovers.

One woman. Two men. Three lives, and one life must end. Who will Sia choose to sacrifice when death comes knocking at her door? Carrington, Taylor, or herself?

**Genre:** Contemporary, Romantic Suspense

**Length:** 44,158 words

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**Ashley Brooke**

**EROTIC ROMANCE**



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**NAKED**

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## **DEDICATION**

Thank you, Lord, for blessing me with the ability to write and thank you, Mom, for giving me the critique I needed to bring this story and series alive.

# NAKED

## *Beautiful Liars 2*

**ASHLEY BROOKE**

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### **Prologue**

Finally, the snow was beginning to melt and the wind was losing its icy touch. The breath of God nearly lifted Sia off the ground as it carried her across the tall grains of grass covered in thin blankets of crystal sleet. She laughed aloud with glee, allowing its gentle gust to kiss her rosy cheeks and comb through her glossy brown curls. She was right behind her lover, laughing and taunting him as they ran through the meadow field behind her home. They panted for air, taking in the chilled sensation of the whispering wind. Carrington swore aloud. He'd stumbled across a rock hidden beneath the snow.

"What's the matter? Tired already, old man?" Sia teased.

He laughed. "Don't kid yourself, Sia. I'm just getting started!" He ran faster, widening the distance between them.

Sia gasped and tried to run faster. It didn't help her much. Carrington was much too fast.

"Give it up, Si-Si! You'll never catch me! Ha-ha-ha-ha!" he taunted.

"Now you're gonna get it! I told you not to call me that!"

\* \* \* \*



It was just like the moment they first met. Carrington had run away as fast as he could to keep from being sucked into the bottomless pit. Love had scared him, but loving Sia had scared him even more. The sincerity in her precious almond eyes made him grow weak, and her dangerous curves nearly brought him to his knees. He was afraid, deathly afraid of the harm their love might bring, so he ran away as fast as he could. The only problem was he kept looking back...

"You can't get me if you can't catch me!" Carrington yelled, glancing over his shoulder.

"Oh, I'm gonna catch you! You'll get tired and eventually stop running!"

And that is exactly what happened nearly a year ago. Carrington grew weary of fighting a battle he never signed up for. He gave his heart to Sia, vowing to share his body and soul with her.

"I'm stronger than you!" Carrington was more than twenty-five feet ahead.

"I'm faster than you!"

They ran across the bridge connecting to the dock.

"Then why are you so far behind?"

"I'm preserving my energy!"

"For what?"

"You!"

Carrington ran through the aisle of Sia's rose bushes aligned along the bridge before reaching the dock. She caught up seconds later. They stood within a few feet of each other, panting heavily. Carrington was leaning over with his hands on his knees, and Sia stood with her hands on her lower back.

"Tired yet?" she managed to say.

"Are you kidding me?" Carrington took a few more breaths before saying, "This is nothing."

Sia began to creep over to him.

He slowly backed away from her.

She chuckled. “Why are you moving backwards? I’m this way, baby.”

“Because you’re moving forward. The psych ward’s that way, baby.”

Sia’s eyes grew wide, and a perverse smile spread across her face. “I’ve got you now, my pretty!” She laughed like a witch when she said this.

“That voice suits you.”

She growled and then lunged at him. They fell onto the wooden floor of the dock, laughing hysterically.

“You’re a feisty little thing.” Carrington chuckled. He was six-four, two hundred twenty pounds to her five feet, one hundred ten pounds.

Sia climbed on top of him. She straddled him with her thighs and began to bite his neck, growling as she did this.

“Ow,” he whispered playfully.

Sia laughed impishly as she stuck her teeth into his neck.

Carrington chuckled again. “Are you trying to poison me with your venom?”

She lifted her head to glance at his lips, and then into his eyes. She was slow in giving her answer. “Not yet,” she said softly.

Her voice was soft, and the look on her face was breathtaking, making Carrington’s heart swell inside his breast. His breathing became erratic, and naughty ideas began to course through his mind as her pussy remained pressed against his abdomen.

His hands were still on her sides. A burning sensation swept over him as his fingers began to boldly explore her waist and slightly rounded belly through her wool sweater.

Alicia gently ran her slender fingertips down the thick red sweater covering his chest. He listened as her breathing trickled through her tiny frame slowly and steadily, like the ripples of the deep water beneath the dock on which they lay.

\* \* \* \*

His violet eyes appeared much softer in the sunset. Sia kept her eyes fixed on his as she slid her hands upward to frame his head. She adjusted her hips so that the mound between her thighs kissed his cock.

Carrington sighed and dragged his hands down to her hips, arching his hips upward as he pressed her down against him.

Sia nuzzled her nose against his chin, and they lay like that for a moment. She inhaled and exhaled with satisfaction. She could feel him responding to the closeness of her body.

They remained quiet, listening to the sounds of the birds and the frogs. Sia's breath felt warm against his lips and lured him in to a soft, gentle kiss. Carrington sighed as he kissed her, tightening his grip on her hips as her warmth brought his dick to full attention.

Sia pulled away, and then planted a soft kiss on his right cheek.

Carrington turned his head and stole another kiss, this time kissing her passionately, slipping his tongue between her lips. He kissed her hungrily, breathing heavily as he did this. He sat up, taking her with him and wrapping his arms around her waist as he plunged his tongue deep into her mouth.

Sia opened her mouth wider, allowing him more access. She ran her fingers through his sweaty hair and straddled him more with her thighs. Her toes secretly curled with excitement inside her boots as he slid his strong hands down her back. He gripped her hips firmly and then pulled her into him more so that their aching genitals were pressed hard against each other.

Carrington quivered helplessly. His cock was harder and a little longer. Seconds later, he pulled away from her sweet lips and then nestled his nose against the tender flesh of her neck. He held her decisively, hungrily keeping her body close to his.

Sia hugged him back, enjoying the closeness and the masculine scent of his body.

“Oh, Si,” he whispered in her ear, “I love you *so* much. I’m never gonna let you or our baby go.”

## Chapter 1

Her long, dark curls flowed in the wind, and the black she wore added to the mystery of her born identity. She wore black skinny jeans, a gray off-the-shoulder sweater, and sexy black boots. Late winter had always been Sia Foxworth's least favorite time of the year. It reminded her of everything that could have possibly gone wrong in her life, starting at the young age of eight. An ocean full of dark secrets was she to the rest of the world, and a lovely rose with a hidden thorn to her lofty underestimates.

The strident sound waves of music filled Sia's delicate ears as she walked through the door. She made a beeline to the far corner of the bar, daring to play pool with a group of average-looking guys huddled at the pool table.

"Good evening, boys. How about a nice game of pool with a woman who can teach you a thing or two?" she taunted.

The four men immediately hushed their laughter and gave her their undivided attention.

"Look who decided to show up." Carrington purred in her ear as he made his way past her. He was indeed the tallest and most attractive man in the bunch.

"Hi to you, too, Carrington." Sia gave him a playfully wicked look, almost daring him to challenge her again.

"Are you sure you wanna do this to yourself?" he teased.

Sia grabbed a pool stick and then rubbed the tip of it in a cube of chalk. "Do what? Practice altruism? I figured you and your little friends might need a little assistance."

Carrington cocked his head and smirked. "You've got a lot of

nerve, showin' up here tonight talkin' all that junk," he said in his pretend Southern accent as he pointed to her. "You better watch yourself, little girl. You're playin' a dangerous game."

Sia chuckled impishly to herself as she gave the sexy, dark-haired man with striking violet eyes a once-over.

"All right, ladies, I'd hate to break up this little love fest, but we really need to get the ball rollin'," one of the guys interrupted. His name was Taylor. He was a year younger than Sia—twenty-two years old—and by far the most energetic. Sia had seen him around a couple of times, but they'd never spoken to one another.

"As you wish," Sia muttered and then took a shot.

The triangle of balls scattered in all directions, some of the balls falling into the holes, others landing pretty close to the edges.

"Not bad for an amateur," Carrington whispered into her ear. He spanked her plump ass and then waited as she took another shot.

She scored again.

Carrington moistened his lips and shifted his weight to his left leg.

Sia glanced over her shoulder and gave him a cocksure smile. She redirected her attention and eyed the other three men as she made her way over to the opposite side of the pool table. "Nervous yet?"

"Not in the least," Paul answered. He was a tall, bald African American who'd recently retired from the Army. He'd just moved back in town after twenty years of living and traveling overseas. He loved being in the military, but a combat injury he suffered in Afghanistan forced him to retire. Paul was an overall decent guy. He and Carrington hit it off wonderfully the first day they met.

"Damn it," Sia swore out loud. She scratched. A taunting grin spread across Carrington's face, and she could see the pleasure he took in her mistake.

He made his way over to where she was standing. "You've got a lot of nerve, challengin' me to a game of pool." He leaned forward and took a shot.

"Nice." Taylor applauded, standing on the other side of Sia.

Carrington sent her a daring smile and then took another shot. He scored again. "Paul, Anthony, one of you guys keepin' track?"

Sia rolled her eyes and crossed her arms, waiting patiently for him to screw up. When he did, she smiled and took a step in front of him, bending over in front of him as she leaned in to shoot. She was well aware of how close her nicely round ass was to his large cock, and she was sure he was, too.

Sia stood up straight and smiled with victory. If she kept her cool, she just might win. She made her way over to the opposite side of the table. Carrington was watching her. She knew she was making him sweat.

"One more shot, boys, and the game is over." Sia was looking directly at Carrington when she said this. She scored. "Game. Over." She paraded softly over to Carrington, looking him in the eye.

"She's good. I'll give her that," Taylor admitted, coming up behind her. "So how are we gonna celebrate, beautiful?" He leaned down and wrapped his strong arms around her. He too held a foot and a few inches over her head. "I've got an idea."

"You better get your hands off of her." Carrington sent him a challenging look and then pulled Sia away. He gave Taylor one more look of warning before he and Sia made their way over to the bar.

"What can I get for you, ma'am?" the bartender asked.

"A Coke will be just fine."

"Make that two." Carrington sat beside her. He sent her a flirtatious smile as he moistened his lips.

Sia blushed and bashfully glanced away. "What?"

The bartender handed them their drinks in exchange for Carrington's money.

Carrington grabbed his bottle of Coke, keeping his pretty, violet eyes on Sia as he drank. "You beat me."

"I'm sorry, you said I did what?" she teased.

He moistened his lips and grinned. "You heard me the first time."

Sia snickered. "How'd those words taste coming out your smart-

aleck mouth?”

“Taste and see.”

“I’m not drunk.”

Carrington frowned. “Oooh, that was cold.”

Sia smiled sardonically. “Like your drink.”

Carrington released a quiet laugh. “You’re something else.”

They were silent for a moment.

Sia took a sip of her drink before speaking again. “You know I love you,” she said softly. “I always have.”

Carrington nodded as he gulped down his Coke. He remained quiet for a moment. “You wanna get out of here?” he finally asked.

Sia watched him closely for a moment. “And go where?”

“Back to your place.”

“Okay.”

They stood to their feet, and then Carrington walked with Sia to the front entrance. He grabbed her hand and leaned in from behind for a quick kiss on the lips before opening the door. “I love you,” he whispered in her ear.”

“I love you more,” she whispered back and then walked through the door.

\* \* \* \*

Taylor smiled mischievously to himself as he stood off in a far corner, savoring every moment he captured of Carrington and Sia.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington chuckled at a memory of him and Sia. He was laying down on her king-sized bed and staring at the ceiling of her master bedroom. He was remembering a specific time he spent with her back in Boston. He’d pinned her down with one hand, straddled her with his thighs so that she couldn’t move, and then tickled her middle with



his free hand. She'd screamed and tried to get away, but her strength was no match for his.

Carrington released a noise before covering his face. "Oh my God, I can't breathe!" He was beginning to lose control of his composure. "Do you," he said laughing, "remember the night at my apartment back in Boston—"

"Yes," Sia chided playfully. "And it wasn't funny. It was mean and crude." She was lying in the crook of Carrington's strong arm and looking up at his.

"Yeah, but I bet you won't pull another stunt like that again."

Sia giggled this time. "I remember the look on your face when I jumped out of your closet and howled to the top of my lungs!" She laughed a little harder. "You looked like you'd nearly pissed your *pants!*"

"Now *that* was mean," Carrington said. He waited a moment for Sia to compose herself. He moistened his lips as he took in the femininity of her attractive features. He'd never get over how beautiful she was.

\* \* \* \*

When Sia stopped laughing, she looked up at Carrington and smiled sheepishly. She noticed the scrutiny of his violet eyes, blistering in contrast to his golden skin and dark brown hair. Her smile partly faded. "You're so handsome," she commented softly.

"Come here," Carrington said in a low, comforting yet seductive tone of voice.

Keeping her eyes glued to his, Sia turned on her side and leaned in to softly mesh her lips with his.

Carrington wrapped his arms around her and held her to him so that her breasts pressed firmly against his chest.

Sia nuzzled her nose against his and then kissed him softly again, this time lingering a little longer.

She closed her eyes and laid her head on Carrington's chest. She still hadn't told him that she was Jake's fiancé before he died. She loved Carrington just as much as he loved her, but she was afraid to tell him the truth for fear of losing him. At the same time, she felt justified for not sharing that bit of information with him. When Jake Crane died, her relationship with him did, too. She could officially call herself a free woman. Free of Jake, anyway.

The Cranes were mutual in the quarrel between the Foxworths and the Marinos, so when Sia accepted Jake's hand in marriage, there was a promise that she would be safe. One thing the Cranes always did was protect their own. That family was not to be crossed. One mess up and the betrayer was through. Sia knew this before she became deeply involved with the Cranes. Only she had no idea that she'd fall in love with the son of the man she murdered nearly fifteen years ago.

"Are you hungry?" she asked.

"No, but I've got a sweet tooth. Why?"

"Come on." Sia grabbed his hand and brought him to the kitchen with her.

She opened the cream-colored refrigerator. "So what will it be, Papa? I can make a cake, or we have some ice cream." Her eyes lit up, and she gasped. Turning with an eager smile, she proclaimed, "I bought chocolate chip *cookies*!" Her voice was higher than usual.

Carrington's mouth curved into a broad smile "You remembered," he cooed.

"Awe, look at you, bein' all cheesy 'cause I got your favorite snack." She nudged his chest.

Carrington chuckled. "You're so corny."

Sia giggled at his comment. "I know, right? But yes, I remembered." She waved the unbaked cookies in his face before placing them on the cream-colored island. "Wanna help me bake them?" She grabbed a pair of scissors from the drawer and then cut the plastic wrapping open. Then she reached for a sharp knife on the

left side of the drawer, closed it, and then began to slice the cookie dough.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington wrapped his strong arms around her waist and rested his chin on her shoulder. He kneaded her shoulder blade with his chin. The sensation he created caused her to wiggle.

“That tickles!” She giggled.

She put the knife down and began to mold the cookie dough with her hands.

“Carrington!” She squealed as she squirmed in his arms. “You’re tickling the baby!”

Carrington enjoyed the sound of her laughter and got a kick out of torturing her like that.

“*Ca-har-ring-ton!*” Sia kneeled. That, unfortunately for her, gave him more access. She helplessly fell on her back. “Carrington!” She screeched, wriggling around and laughing hysterically.

When she rolled over on her stomach, Carrington straddled her sides with his thighs but didn’t sit on her for fear of hurting her. He aimed for her sculpted thighs and perky bottom. She was especially ticklish in those areas.

Sia squealed and wriggled violently.

This broke Carrington and made him crack up with laughter. Setting her free, he curled into a ball on the tiled floor and laughed hysterically. His face turned cherry red, and tears formed in his eyes.

\* \* \* \*

Sia took advantage of his sudden weakness and sat on top of him. He rolled over on his back, and she noticed how bright his violet eyes were. She began to tickle him viciously, first on his neck...then on his

sides...and finally on his stomach. His hysteria amused her, and she was laughing just as hard as he was.

“Woo! Okay!” He laughed some more. “Babe, please...*Please*, I can’t take it anymore. *Stop!*” He laughed uncontrollably, for Sia was unrelenting. Finally, after another thirty seconds of getting her revenge, she got off him.

“Serves you right, you big tickle monster!” she chided playfully.

Both stood. Carrington wiped away the last of his tears and flashed Sia an innocent smile. “You’re too funny.” He barely got the words out.

“Mhm.” She smirked as she crossed her arms. “See, these cookies could have been almost done, but you just had to start with me.”

“I’m sorry.” He tried to hug her, but she pushed him off.

“No, you’re not. You’re just going to try to catch me off guard again. You might as well stop lying.” Sia averted her eyes to the cookie dough and then the empty tray. She sighed and began to put the unbaked cookies on the tray. “Well, I better get these things in the oven.”

Carrington hugged her from behind and then kissed her on the cheek. “I wouldn’t mind getting into *your* oven tonight.”

Sia smiled sheepishly as she continued to put the cookies on the tray. “Not tonight, babe. I’m tired.”

“Too tired for sex?”

“And for what you’ll do to me.”

Carrington chuckled impishly as he pecked the delicate flesh on her neck. “Tomorrow, then?”

Sia nodded with a grin on her face.

He kissed her on the cheek again. “You promise?”

“I promise.”

“You *promise?*”

“Yes.” She giggled as she said this. Carrington was tickling her sides again.

## Chapter 2

The sun beamed through Carrington's window, and icicles hanging from the roof outside shimmered in the light. The sight was breathtaking and spectacular, just like the night he'd shared with Sia.

Carrington checked the last of his emails before closing the window on his computer. He already had plenty on his plate and wasn't exactly looking forward to his meeting with Frank. God only knew what that man had up his sleeve. Carrington was in the midst of putting his cell phone in his pocket and standing when Jordon barged into his office.

"Don't you ever knock?" He frowned.

"Don't you ever stop asking stupid questions?" Jordon pierced him with those icy blue eyes.

"Listen, ass-wipe, I don't have time for bullshit. I have a meeting."

Jordon stood up straighter and blocked Carrington as he tried to go around his desk. "Watch who you piss off, you son of a—"

"You better leave my mother's name out of your fucking mouth."

"Aw." Jordon tilted his head to the side. "Defending mother dearest? Perhaps if she truly loved you she would have aborted you from the womb."

Carrington scowled. "Excuse me?"

"You still don't know who dear old Daddy is."

"You better shut the f—"

Jordon lifted up a hand. "I'm not speaking in terms of biology."

"Then what *terms* are you speaking in?"

The smile on Jordon's face was satanic. "Identity. Honor. *Loyalty*."

"And what the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"In time, in time, Carrington. You will find out in time. But for now, your focus needs to be on his murder-*er*."

Carrington hissed at his comment.

"You still haven't figured out who murdered Daddy, oh pal," Jordon answered his silent question. He circled around his opponent and hissed in his ear, "Have you?"

Carrington turned to face him. They were at eye level. He snickered. "You're old news, pal."

"Am I?" Jordon cocked his head.

"Don't you ever stop asking stupid questions?"

Jordon ignored his underlined rhetorical question. "Are you sure about that?" He arched an eyebrow.

Carrington thought for a moment as he watched Jordon move around to the front of his desk.

A wicked grin spread across Jordon's face. He continued to stare at his competitor, and a low chuckle escaped his throat.

"What the hell are you getting at?" Carrington frowned.

Jordon's reply was a smug smile.

Carrington shrugged. "I'm waiting."

"I've literally *given* you the answer to your question. If you still don't know by now, you don't deserve to know."

"What have you *given* me?" Carrington was utterly confused.

Jordon released an exaggerated sigh. "We'll chat later, doormat. That is...if I'm not too busy. But in the meantime"—he began taking another step forward—"you have a meeting." He gave Carrington a light smack on the cheek and whispered, "Don't be late."

\* \* \* \*

Jordon wanted Carrington Marino dead. He loathed his former partner with a passion and felt that he posed too much of a threat. There was no question of what would happen if either of them were caught being intimate with the beautiful temptress. It was no secret each man wanted Sia Foxworth for himself.

Jordon gave his head a shake, ridding his dark silky hair of the cold droplets present from taking a few laps in his indoor pool. He resigned his position as an undercover professor at Harvard University two weeks after his cousin's funeral and joined his Uncle as Co-CEO of the Crane Assassination Association.

Jake's death altered everything, and CAA needed a replacement fast. Frank Crane, head of the undisclosed organization and father of Jake, contacted his nephew, Jordon, the day before the funeral. He told him that he had no choice but to stay in Oregon. Jordon was restless the night of Jake's death. So much had taken place in the midnight hour, and he had yet to hear news of Sia's condition.

"I agree, Uncle Frank, Carrington is one of our finest, but he violated two important rules and needs to be stopped. The consequence of his of actions is death. You said so yourself when you established CAA. If we allow him to get away with this, everyone else in the organization will think that it's 'okay' to break the rules, and what will we do then? We can't just kill everyone off. It takes a special kind of person to fill their shoes, and the CAA only takes the best."

Frank stood along the side of the pool, dressed in his black suit and red tie. He exhaled the smoke of his cigar, saying nothing for a moment as he thought of a way to handle the awful mess of the situation. "The boy's a skilled one," he said, halfway to himself.

\* \* \* \*

Frank knew he was going to take care of Carrington, it was just a matter of when. He was hesitant about removing Carrington at that

particular moment because he needed him for the upcoming project in Moscow. That was one of the main reasons why he hired the skilled assassin. The mission in Moscow was such a major one, and only the best of the best could accomplish it with perfection. Not only that, if Carrington was to mysteriously disappear immediately after the death of Jake, there would be a lot of controversy and speculation. People would become suspicious, and all eyes would turn to the Crane Family.

Frank didn't have a problem with people knowing that the Cranes took care of their own, but with all the storm and investigation, all of the Crane secrets could come out, and he wasn't going to allow that to happen. If he was going to get rid of Carrington, he was going to have to do it through another source and only after Carrington finished the job in Moscow. The Crane Empire was at stake, and there was no way in hell Frank was going to surrender his power to Hector Petrov.

Frank pressed the call button on his cell phone and waited as the phone rang on the other end.

\* \* \* \*

Frank was in the midst of sipping his warm coffee when his office phone rang.

"Frank Crane."

"Mr. Crane, you have a visitor. He said he's scheduled—"

"Oh, yes, thank you, Jules. Bring him in."

Frank sat back in his cherry leather seat and waited for his guest. A few moments later, there was a knock on the door.

"Come in."

The door opened slowly, and a young man standing at about six foot three walked in. He had the darkest of hair and eyes. He wore a navy blue suit.

"Have a seat." Frank gestured with his brawny, wrinkly hand.

The young man nodded and sat before the middle-aged man.



Frank opened a folder and began to flip through his interviewee's application.

"Zachery Cruise?" He looked up and waited for the lad's response.

"That's me." He smirked, and his dimples became visible.

Frank did a double take. He didn't remember his eyes being baby blue. "Okay," he said and looked through the folder again. "Okay, so you've been a spy before...Where?" He glanced up from the application.

"Westbrook Keys. That's actually in New York. I lived there before I moved here."

"And how did you hear about this organization?"

"Word of mouth." His eyes were brown again.

Frank realized he wasn't crazy—the lad's eyes changed colors. "And you're twenty-five?"

"That's correct." *Blue.*

"So why do you want to work for CAA?" Frank sat forward.

The young man cleared his throat and sat straighter. "I have a lot of respect for the association and the way it operates as a whole. There is only one solution to every problem, and everything is all or nothing. There's no such thing as in between. That's what I love about this organization. The answer to every problem is only one, and it's non-negotiable."

Frank nodded in approval. "Well, this job will definitely do that for you. Now, you say that you heard about CAA by word of mouth. Who referred you?" He squinted and tilted his head.

"A friend, and he didn't refer me. We just happened to be talking about this organization, and I became interested."

"Does your friend work for CAA?"

"No." *Brown.*

"So how did your friend hear about us?"

"Perhaps he knows someone who works for you all. I'm really not sure." *Blue.*

Frank nodded again. “When can you start, Zachery?”

“As soon as possible.” He grinned, and his eyes became dark brown again.

\* \* \* \*

Empty voids and unanswered questions haunted Sia for most of her days. When she was just a newborn baby, her biological parents left her in a dumpster, never to be seen again. A lovely couple happened to be passing through after attending a cocktail party when they heard the sound of a precious baby crying. They followed the sound of the noise and found Sia lying on piles of trash screaming at the top of her lungs. She was teeny and just as cute as could be. Rebecca Foxworth and her husband, Ben, had always wanted a baby girl. The couple didn’t bother to go through the adoption process—they chose to simply call her their own and brought her home.

The older Sia got, the more she favored her loved ones. She shared their facial features and personality traits. The only difference was her size. She was much shorter than the Foxworths. The women were either five-seven or taller, and all of the men were over six feet. Sia was only five feet. Her delicate skin was golden beneath the sun in contrast to their paled skin.

Sia inhaled as she ran her slender fingers through her hair. She was looking at a picture she’d taken with her brother six years ago. Ryan was twenty-three at the time, and she was only seventeen. They were the best of friends. Sia told him everything. When she heard about his and his son’s mysterious death, her heart was crushed. Ryan was an honorable man and didn’t deserve to die, but because he was everything like their father Ben, he paid the price, just like their father.

Pushing away a stubborn tear, she kissed the small picture before placing it back inside her purse. She couldn’t stop thinking about everything that was going on in her life. It was as if she was standing

off to the side, watching herself drown in the middle of an ocean during a storm of secrets and lies. Everything was happening so fast, and all of the big things suddenly seemed so small. The pretty palm trees weren't so pretty anymore, the sport of surfing wasn't such a thrill anymore, and no volcanic eruption could rock her world the way her beseeched nightmares had. Hawaii was no longer her vacationing place, but a place where she could go to visit her deceased brother and nephew at their burial site. As desperately as she wished to, she knew that she'd never find serenity until justice was served.

When Sia arrived back at her home, she quickly showered and changed into a comfortable pair of jeans accented with a light pink sweater, brown boots, and her red trench coat for the chilled night.

She loved taking pictures, whether it was for business or simply for the hell of it. With her camera resting delicately around her neck, she felt like the true photographer she was.

She enjoyed taking long walks in the park and giving to charity, even if the only thing she was giving was her assistance. She often volunteered at the homeless shelter, but she was willing to go wherever help was needed. She found great tranquility in knowing that she was making a difference in someone else's life. Helping one was always better than helping none.

As she was walking along the snow-covered path, she was toying with her camera and didn't realize how fast she was walking until she slammed against a strong body. Nearly as stunned as the tall male, Sia widened her eyes. She was speechless for a few seconds.

"I'm sorry. I didn't see you," she finally said, still feeling a bit frazzled.

"It's all right." Taylor rubbed his nape.

Sia took in the full length of his strong body. He was bigger than she remembered and much more attractive. He had the darkest of eyes and short, dark wavy hair that curled at the ends. When he flashed her a smile, she noticed the dimples in his cheeks. His skin was fair, and his nose was as cute as a button.

“Are you all right?” He arched an eyebrow and chuckled.

Sia blushed, realizing that she’d been staring. She slightly nodded her head, said an awkward good-bye, and then moved around him.

That was the young man from the bar. Sia didn’t know if she should be flattered or concerned. Every time she ran into him, she noticed him eyeing her closely. With all the secrets the Cranes had up their sleeves, that man could be anyone. Sia scowled as thoughts began to course through her mind. *What was he doing here of all places?*

The wind was brisk, and the snow felt like a multitude of needles falling against her paled flesh. Strings of hair blew across her face, lightly brushing against her rosy cheeks. She was so busy looking down at her camera that she didn’t get to take a picture the frantic man in a black suit and tie rushing past her, or the frustrated woman trying to walk with a broken red heel on one of her boots. When Sia did look up, she noticed an elderly couple passing by holding hands. She snapped once, then twice, and then a third time.

Looking to her right, she noticed a young couple kissing on the side of a tree. They reminded her of herself and a guy she once dated in college...while she was promised to another. It was her freshman year of college. Jordon was much older but very sweet. He was intelligent and very masculine, gentle, and extremely kind. He never made her feel cheap, and every time they talked, he hung on her every word. He treated her like she was the only woman who existed in the entire world and nothing else mattered. He never asked her for anything, and when it came to priorities, he always put her first. He met her every need and every want. He treated her like a queen. Christ knew he was the closest to heaven she’d ever been since that horrible night. He was everything Sia had ever wanted in a man...

Until the night her fiancé left to go out of town. Sia and Jordon were alone in her bedroom. Jordon became someone she didn’t know. He began to make unattainable promises and pressured her to make

unethical decisions. That night changed Sia's life forever. She never looked at herself the same.

Sia snapped a picture of the couple. *Maybe she'll be luckier than I was.* She strolled along until she found something worth taking a picture of.

She'd made a complete circle around the neighborhood when she came across that young man again. He was standing beside a tree and appeared to be deep in thought. He tore off a branch and then tossed it to the side, placing his palm on the bark of the tall tree with his head bowed. Sia lifted her camera and proceeded to snap a shot when he sent her a sidelong glance. She quickly put the camera down and held his gaze. She could feel the sharpness of his dark brown eyes even though they were several feet away.

Not wanting to seem any more creepy than she'd probably already come across, she thought she'd offer him an explanation for her actions, but when she opened her mouth to speak, nothing came out. She cleared her throat and tried again.

"I'm sorry, you just seemed so deep in thought, and it seemed like the perfect moment to snap a picture." She hoped she didn't sound as ridiculous as she felt.

Taylor simply eyed her quizzically before standing to his full height. He towered over her, making her feel smaller than she was. He said nothing, just gazed down at her.

"Are you part of the paparazzi, or is this just a hobby?"

Sia chuckled to herself. He had a sense of humor. "That depends."

"I think you've got the wrong guy. I'm no celebrity. I'm just a regular citizen, simply passing through." His voice was quiet and calm.

Sia watched him closely. His eyes went from dark brown to baby blue in a flash. She wanted to comment but feared she'd done enough damage already, lest he think she was flirting with him. Besides, she was in a hurry to get back into her home. The night was getting older, and she didn't exactly feel safe being out by herself.

"If I was part of the paparazzi, I'd be fired. Clearly, I'm not suited for the job," she muttered, walking backwards. "You have a good night," she said before completely turning around.

"I didn't get your name."

She turned to face him again. "Pardon?"

"Your name. We've run into each other countless times, and I don't even know your name." His eyes turned blue.

Sia smiled meekly and replied, "Goodnight."

"We're neighbors. We should at least know each others' name."

Sia was still walking backwards, but her smile remained paralyzed on her face and a hint of amusement lingered in her eyes. "See you later."

\* \* \* \*

Taylor watched her turn and walk along the sidewalk leading to the homes on the hills. She was beautiful, had a lovely smile, and would definitely give him a challenge. Taylor smiled to himself. He was more than willing to take her on...and then some.

\* \* \* \*

Sia threw her comforter back and adjusted her pillow. She'd had a long week, and Carrington was on his way over.

The doorbell rang, and Sia's heart leaped. Carrington would always have that effect on her. She grabbed her robe and dashed down the stairs, soaring through the living room before flicking on the chandelier light. She peered out of the peephole, and a huge smile spread across her face. She unbolted the lock and opened the door to let her lover in.

Carrington rubbed his hands together as he walked in and then turned to face Sia, who'd just secured the lock. When he placed his palms on her soft cheeks, she slapped his hands away.

“Stop! Your hands are cold.”

“And your cheeks are warm,” he teased.

Sia rolled her eyes. Carrington was such a boy when he wasn’t being serious. “Are you hungry?”

“Starved.”

“Good because I made dinner.”

Carrington removed his shoes at the door and then followed her into the old-fashioned kitchen.

Nothing but the sound of their golden forks clamping against the china plates filled room for the first half of dinner. Sia sat on one side of the round kitchen table, and Carrington sat on the other. It was decorated with several dishes filled with tasty appetizers to accommodate the evening’s meal.

The two lovebirds laughed and joked, flirting ruthlessly with one another. Sia blushed many times, laughing sheepishly every time Carrington opened his mouth. He had nothing but dirty things to say that night. “How about some pussy licking tonight?”

“Carrington!” she gasped.

“I can tie you to the bed, spread your legs, and then bury my face right in between those sexy thighs of yours.”

“Carrington *stop!*”

He laughed impishly as he sat back, chewing the last of the mash potatoes on his plate. “Oh, come on. You know you want me to.”

Sia smiled as she shook her head and glanced away.

Carrington cocked his head as he said, “Admit it.”

“Shut up!”

“Yeah, I’m right.”

“Whatever.” Sia chuckled. She took a final bite and then swallowed as she glanced at her plate, then back up at Carrington. She was full of food and butterflies. She placed her fork down and wiped her mouth with the white cloth in her left hand.

Carrington stopped eating, too. He was full as well. "I feel like going for a swim in the pool tonight," he said, leaning back in his chair. "How about it?"

Sia had an indoor and outdoor pool.

She sighed and then shook her head of long brown curls. "Not tonight, baby."

"Aw, is my baby getting old?"

Sia playfully scowled at Carrington. "No, Tin Man, but I think you are." She cocked her head. "Hey, is that a gray hair I see?"

Carrington plucked a grape off one of the platters and then threw it at her. When Sia jerked her head back and looked at him with unbelieving eyes, he laughed and then threw another one.

Sia picked up a small cheese cube and threw it at him. She gasped when he picked up his glass of grape wine and chucked it at her.

"Oh my God!" she cried as she stood to her feet.

"My God, too," Carrington teased, standing to his feet.

Sia reached for a glass of water.

"Aw, stealing my ideas I see."

She smiled impishly as she twiddled her hair. Before she could react, Carrington jumped over the table and mauled her with her own weapon. Sia squealed and tried to get away, but he had her.

"Carrington!" she squealed as she gracefully fell to the floor.

Carrington laughed, taking pleasure in her helplessness as he straddled her with his sculpted thighs. He turned her over on her back.

Sia reached up blindly and grabbed a saucer with a cake slice on it. Carrington gasped when it toppled on the side of his head, and she laughed hysterically at his surprise.

Carrington smiled and began to giggle. They were a mess, a hot mess, but it was worth the pleasure they felt in that moment. Life was too short.

"Oh my God," Sia muttered and began to laugh again.

Carrington wiped some of the icing off his face and painted it onto her neck.



“Oh, what the hell? Might as well, right?” She smiled as she laid flat on her back, giggling uncontrollably.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington moistened his lips and continued to smile as his laughter died down. Sia was still lying on the floor, laughing beneath him. She was so pretty when she laughed. Her eyes got smaller, and the dimple in her cheek became visible. Sia’s laughter...

...Such a sweet sound to his ears.

\* \* \* \*

Half an hour later, the two lovebirds were cleaned up and in Sia’s room, full of sugar and butterflies. Though they’d been together many times, nothing could quench the fire that burned within nor rain on the parade of immortal butterflies. Their love was far too strong.

Carrington closed Sia’s door and stood against it.

Sia walked over to her bed and stood against it.

They remained quiet, looking deeply into one another’s eyes. Their gaze held the same intensity it did the first time they ever met.

“Your eyes,” Sia swooned. “They’re...violet. More so than usual,” she gasped.

“Are they?”

“Yes. I mean, I’ve always known that they change colors, but...I’ve never seen them like this before. They’re beautiful. They’ve always been, but they’re so...bright and pretty right now...” She marveled. It was almost as if she was in a trance.

Carrington held her gaze as he made his way over to her. He towered over her, leaning forward to place his hands on her bed. His strong bronze arms straddled and barred her to his needing body.

Sia leaned back, placing her hands on the bed next to his. “And it’s funny because every time we make love, it’s like your eyes

become different shades of purple. I remember the first day I ever saw you. Your eyes were so gray I thought they were black for a moment. Some days they were light gray, other days they held a hint of violet, but the gray was still there. And now, I see none. I've barely seen any since the night of the accident."

Carrington sighed as he cupped her face with his hands. "That was the worst night of my life. I don't ever want to endure anything like that again." Carrington furrowed his brow as he nuzzled his nose against hers.

Sia closed her eyes. She knew exactly how he felt. It was an absolute miracle she didn't lose her baby after that nasty fall that night, an absolute miracle. But was it a blessing or a curse? She had yet to find out who the father was. If it was Carrington's, she'd be thrilled. She wanted to have his baby. But if the baby was Jordon's, she would be exposed and lose Carrington forever. He'd find out about her affair with Jordon, her connection with the Crane family, and that it was really her who murdered his father that night. Her life would be over.

Even still, Jake was dead, and Frank would never allow Jordon to marry her as long as there was breath in his body. Such an act would bring dishonor to the Crane family, and he would not tolerate that kind of humiliation. Sia was technically a free woman as far as romance was concerned. There was nothing *legally* tying her to the Crane family.

Sia was overwhelmed with worry. She often had trouble sleeping at night and wasn't sure how she was going to tell Carrington about her pregnancy. He was bound to find out at some point. Physical changes on her body were already beginning to take place. Her hips were a little wider, and her breasts were a little fuller.

She'd have to keep her pregnancy a secret from Jordon. If he ever found out, he'd force her to take a DNA test. Carrington would wonder why Jordon was pushing the issue, put two and two together,

and she'd still be screwed. She was just glad her doctor didn't slip up and reveal her pregnancy to Carrington that horrible night.

Sia opened her eyes. "You could never lose me." *I just hope I never lose you.* She peered deep into Carrington's eyes. "God, I can't get over how beautiful your eyes are right now."

Carrington's lips were just centimeters from hers, and she could feel his breathing becoming more ragged.

"It's because you're happier now."

He didn't speak.

"They only look like that when you're excited," she rasped.

"Yes," he whispered lightly against her lips, barely kissing her.

"Kiss me."

Carrington stood taller but leaned in more, causing Sia to lean her body back further and tilt her face upward a little more. He opened his mouth and hovered over her lips. She tried to nip his bottom lip, but he drew back before she could. He repeated this method a few more times before she grew frustrated.

"Carrington!" she demanded in a whisper.

He buried his face in her neck and began to kiss it softly, wetting it with his tongue. And just as Sia was getting into it, he quickly drew back. He pecked her lips, then opened her lips with his, surged his tongue forward...and then quickly drew back. His lips lingered agape over hers. When she leaned in to capture them, he moved his head back. When she attempted again, he moved again. When he lowered his head this time, Sia didn't try to capture his mouth.

"Baby, please don't tease me," came her plea.

Carrington scooped his hands under her rounded bottom and lifted her. Sia wrapped her legs around his waist and her sleek arms around his neck, allowing him to bring her to the head of her bed, crawling across her cover and sheets on his knees. When he laid her down, she rubbed his arms, which were straddled beside her. Her eyes were locked on his blazing violet ones.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington stared in awe at the beautiful young woman and thanked God for bringing her back to him, for making him whole again. She looked stunning, wearing nothing but natural beauty on her face and loose curls flowing from the crown of her head to her sexy shoulders. That's what he found to be sexiest about her. She never hid herself from him and always embraced her God-given curves. She was confident but humble, young but wise, bashful and yet so sure of herself. Sia was the only woman who could arouse him and keep him at his peak with little or no effort. Her very presence turned him on in ways that could only be felt and hard to describe.

Carrington stroked the side of her cheek tenderly with his thumb. He wanted her, *needed* her so badly. "What do you want?" he rasped, wanting desperately to please her.

\* \* \* \*

The unexpectedness of his question made Sia blush. "I—I like it when you kiss me," she answered shyly.

Carrington leaned in and kissed her passionately, stroking her tongue with his. When Sia framed his face with her hands and opened her mouth wider, Carrington deepened his kiss. Their breathing hastened, and Sia could feel his strong arousal pressing firmly against her cunt.

Carrington drew his head back. "What else, babe?" he asked breathlessly.

"I want you to touch me," she replied, a little bolder this time.

"Where?" His voice was low and sensual.

Sia's heart fluttered. She'd never explained anything to Carrington while being intimate. He usually did all of the work, and she went along with it. This was so different and new.

"On my breasts...and in between my legs."

\* \* \* \*

“Here?” Carrington placed a firm hand on her inner thigh. He was being crass. He knew exactly what she meant, but still, he wanted her to *tell* him.

Sia shook her head. “Here.” She brought his hand to the mound between her thighs and covered it with her palm.

Carrington held her gaze. He was getting harder. She wasn’t wearing panties, and her pussy felt warm against his hand. He briefly sat up to take off his sweater, then straddled Sia’s thigh while pulling her belt so that he could open her robe. Her beautiful breasts were exposed through her sheer white nightgown. Carrington slowly dragged his fingertips over her breasts, sweeping them across her puckering nipples, and then circling them around her areolas.

Sia sucked in her breath.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington’s nostrils flared as he played with her round, sharpened buds, plucking...pressing...then rubbing with his thumbs.

Sia arched her back and moaned from the agony he’d created. She shut her eyes and gripped his wrists tight as he rolled her nipples around between his index and middle fingers. When he tugged them downward, she released a whimper and gasp as she reached for his belt. It was hard for her to concentrate while Carrington continued to play with her breasts.

\* \* \* \*

He squeezed them and then rolled them around. He couldn’t help himself. They felt ridiculously soft and full beneath his palms, fuller than he remembered...

\* \* \* \*

Sia finally managed to unbuckle his belt. She unfastened his pants and tugged them down until they fell below his hips. She placed her fingers inside the band of his briefs and then looked up at him. His face held a look of wanting, like he was waiting for her to strip him of his garments.

Sia narrowed her gaze again. She would never get over how fully endowed he was down there. She pulled his briefs down past his hips but didn't completely remove them. She sighed with desire. A head swollen to the size of a plum crowned his thick, massive cock. His fat dick jutted out from a neatly groomed base of perfectly large, round balls. He was all male, through and through.

Sia sat up on her knees and wrapped her arms around her lover's neck.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington sat back on his buttocks and helped her straddle his hips. He removed her robe and then pushed her nightgown up to the middle of her torso. He eased her down, wanting very much to fill her tiny hole.

"Mmmm..." He closed his eyes and gripped Sia's hips. He pushed her down harder so that his cock was deeper inside.

*"Carrington."*

He groaned. Sia was rotating her hips against his, grinding him with great love...and lust. The feeling of her breathing heavily in his ear was arousing and a huge sign of the effect he was having on her.

"Oh, baby," she whispered. "This feels so good." She continued to rotate her hips. She clenched her internal muscles and felt Carrington tense.

He exhaled deeply, slowly lifted her, and then crushed her into him again.

“Ah!” Sia cried out.

“God, your pussy feels good.” He growled in her ear.

Sia squeezed him again...and again.

“Mm,” Carrington grunted. She was riding him well. He continued to grip her hips firmly as he leaned back to lie down. “Faster, Sia,” he said.

She sucked in a breath and placed her palms on his chest. She began to undulate her hips in a very controlled motion.

Carrington arched his hips so that he was deeper inside. “That’s it...just like that.” He hissed.

Sia’s breath grew more ragged, and her need increased. She bit her bottom lip and moved her hips even faster. She closed her eyes as pleasure took its toll. Small waves of pressure began to build in her clit, and she anticipated the final release.

\* \* \* \*

Sia opened her eyes and gave Carrington a dazed look. Her mouth fell agape, and she began to gasp for air.

Carrington watched her closely and waited for her to orgasm.

“*Play with me,*” she begged.

Carrington forced her still and pushed her hips up slightly. He reached forward and squeezed her clit, while pinching her ass with his other hand as she squealed and arched into his fingers, pressing her palms against his chest.

\* \* \* \*

Sia sobbed uncontrollably when he began to wiggle his fingers on her clit, teasing her until he brought her to her peak. She quivered and drew in a shaky breath. She was very close to coming.

Carrington released her throbbing clit just before she finished and eased her back down so that his cock was completely inside of her again. "Come on, babe," he rasped, "give me some more of that coochy."

Sia moaned as she began to thrust forward passionately. She placed her hands on his chest and rocked her hips with infatuation. Her juices soaked his cock.

\* \* \* \*

"Ah!" Carrington grunted. The slushy sound her pussy made was the sweetest sound he'd heard that night. Her loud sobbing was a booster for his ego. It made him feel wanted, like she couldn't get enough of him. He panted for air as she increased the speed of her fervent rocking.

Sweat formed at Carrington's brow, and his body felt warm all over. His heart was racing, and the head of his cock began to tingle. When Sia squeezed him inside, he thought he was going to die.

\* \* \* \*

Sia clenched his shoulders as she rode him deeply. His dick was like a sharpened sword, piercing her deeply with every thrust and strike. Her thighs were wide open, and she could feel her pussy spreading as Carrington held her against him. His fat dick was buried deep inside of her. He was stretching her tiny hole wide.

"That's right, babe! That's right!" He groaned. "Pop that coochy! Pop it, baby! Pop it!"

Sia squeezed his shoulders tighter. He was gripping her hips and arching into her, demanding that she ride him hard and good.

"Oh, baby...Oh, baby..." Carrington groaned.

"*Carrington*," she sobbed. She was grinding the hell out of him.

"Mmm," he growled. "Fuck me, Sia. *Fuck* me."



“Carrington, you’re in so deep...Aw.” She hissed. “Aw...” Sia closed her eyes tight as she quivered against her lover. Her pussy was going wild with spasmodic motions in response to her orgasm.

Sia sucked in a deep breath and began to ride him again. She rode him harder...and harder.

“Same my name,” he demanded.

“Carrington!” She cried.

“Same my name!”

“Carrington!”

“Say my name!”

“Carrington!”

“Louder!”

“Carrington!”

“Louder!”

“*Carrington!*”

Carrington sucked in a deep breath and forced her still as he bulked forward. He dug his fingers into her flesh, bruising her as her as he exploded inside her...

He was tense all over, holding his breath and squeezing his buttocks as he convulsed against Sia. She lowered herself so that her breasts were pressed against his. She could feel his dick shooting sperm inside of her and his warm breath against her skin. She sighed with satisfaction. She loved the feeling. She slid her hands down his sides and then brought them to his tight, locked ass, pushing him into her even more.

“I want you in deeper, baby.” She felt Carrington arch his hips into her more. She closed her eyes and began to squeeze his ass. “That’s it, baby,” she gasped breathlessly. “That’s right. Come. Squirt inside of me.” She squeezed him internally and heard him groan. “Mmmm...” She moaned. Being this close to Carrington always felt so good.

It was a while before Carrington’s breathing subsided. He finally lifted her hips so that he could withdraw. He stayed on his back.

Sweat covered his brow and chest.

Sia tugged his pants and briefs the rest of the way down before curling up at his side and intertwining her legs with his. Carrington wrapped his arms around her warm body and snuggled his nose in her hair.

The night was still young, but it wasn't long before sleep overcame their weary bodies like the strong waves of an ocean washing over grains of sand, leaving them to spend the rest of the night resting in each other's arms, like true lovers wrapped in love's eternal spell.

## Chapter 3

Sia woke up bright and early the next morning. She said her good-bye to Carrington, kissing him several times on his way out the door. Her meeting was at seven thirty, and she had exactly one hour to be sitting in the office, ready to go. Frank had called her a couple of days ago, asking to meet with her. Why, she hadn't a clue. The only thing he told her was that it was important.

Exactly one hour later, Sia was dressed and ready, sitting in Frank's office. Her skin glowed, and the pearl studs she wore went well with her outfit. She looked up from her stack of paperwork when she heard that familiar knock on her door. She rolled her eyes when she laid eyes on the man who walked in. No one on earth irked her as much as Jordon did.

Jordon gave her an annoyed look as he walked past her.

"What?" Sia snapped.

"Are you kidding me? This is who you chose?" Jordon looked at Frank. "She's never even worked with CAA. There's no way in hell she's going to survive on that mission." He sat on the edge of Frank's desk with his arms folded and held a horrified look on his face.

Frank fixed his icy blues on his cocksure nephew. "And that's *exactly* why she's perfect. She's perfect for the job and is the best partner for Zachery."

Sia perked up. "What?"

"What is she going to do? Seduce him and then ride him to death?" Jordon gave Sia a once-over. "You have got to be kidding me."

“Wait a minute. What the hell are you guys talking about?” Sia was utterly confused.

“I never kid about business,” Frank retorted.

“What if she slips up?”

“What are you guys talking about?” Sia demanded.

“Would you be quiet?” Jordon finally shot back. He looked at his uncle. “See what I mean. She doesn’t even know how to sit back and listen. Rule number one for emissaries and hired guns.” He glanced at Sia again. “This is a terrible idea. Someone’s bound to figure it out or at least believe that there is, in fact, a connection.”

“I’m confident in my decision, Jordon. Now, when you become the head of CAA, you can make any decision you want. But for now, you will follow my orders and leave the decision making to me.” Frank redirected his attention to Sia.

She stood with her arms crossed as she studied Frank’s body language carefully. She wore a black turtleneck paired with black slacks and matching boots.

Jordon brushed his shoulder against Sia’s as he walked past her. He turned to face Frank again. “She’d ruin everything.”

“Why are you so insecure?” Sia taunted.

“Insecure?” Jordon scoffed.

“Jordon, you gripe more than any woman I know.”

“Go to hell.”

“Oh, no, you’re a much better fit for that place than I am.”

“That’s enough, you two,” Frank cut in. “Now, Sia, your job for this assignment is quite simple. It may be a little challenging for you given the circumstances, but I have great faith that you’ll follow through.”

“What circumstances?” she asked.

Frank inhaled and exhaled for effect. “Sweetheart, I know that you are devastated by the tragic loss of Jake, and so are we, but you must understand how important this is. We need you, Sia.”

She watched him closely. Curiosity was beginning to take its toll.

Frank continued on. "No one knows about this yet, but I will tell you this, the men you will be dealing with are very sharp, so you *must* be on your A game one hundred percent of the time."

Sia nodded.

"You're going to partner up with Zachery Cruise on the Moscow mission."

Sia frowned. "I'm going to Russia?"

"That's where Moscow is," Jordon replied sardonically.

Sia sent Jordon an ice-cold glare. "Go fuck yourself hard."

"Stop it!" Frank slammed his fist down on his desk. "Both of you! Jesus, you two are like two mad dogs, always bickering!"

Jordon and Sia fell silent, and for a moment, no one said anything.

"Now, can we collaborate like adults and get this thing settled or not? I've got business and other more important things to handle than the two of you heathens!"

Jordon and Sia remained quiet.

"Answer me, damn it! Just a minute ago you two had everything to say!"

"Yes, sir," they replied in unison.

*Talk about a change in personality. I always knew that man was crazy.*

Frank was silent for a moment. The red in his cheeks began to fade. He sighed.

Sia braced herself. She knew he was about to tell her to do something outrageous.

"Sia," he began, his tone low and commanding, "I need you to read over this very carefully." He handed her a large envelope. "Guard it with your life and don't let anyone see it. I'm giving you twenty-four hours to get back with me."

"To let you know how I feel about the overall project?"

"I don't give a damn about how you feel. You're going, whether you like it or not."

“Ouch. You could have just put a bullet through my head. That would have been less painful,” she shot back.

“Believe me, I considered that.”

“Until you realized how much you needed me.” She flashed him a sardonic smile.

“Don’t test me, little girl, and that’s the last time I’m going to tell you that.”

Sia cursed him in her mind and flipped him off with her hand held behind her back. She placed the envelope in her purse and said nothing more on her way out.

Jordon and Frank exchanged smiles and a fist pound after she exited the room. It was time to let the game begin.

\* \* \* \*

The wind was brisk against Sia’s skin. It combed through her hair and caused her nose to redden. The sky was a bright pink base above her head, accompanied by the pallid full moon, which decided to show up early that evening. It glowed shamelessly in the sky, soaking in the attention of distant onlookers roaming the land.

Two children, one boy and one girl, came dashing across the cobblestone trail. Their laughter went mute, but their smiles remained paralyzed on their faces. They were motionless, posed in eccentric positions that one might capture if he or she was vigilant during that split second...

Sia lifted her camera to snap another shot of them. The beauty of their innocence would be captured in those images forever.

Sia carried her camera everywhere. She sighed to herself, remembering the time when life had no sorrow. That was before the fragile years of adolescence. The time before she learned about the birds and the bees. The time before the better half of her drowned in the demanding waters of lies and broken dreams.

Sia continued on along the trail, looking around for anything and everything to hold captive to her memory. She strolled along through the snow, shivering helplessly from the unrelenting cold. Thin blankets of snow covered the driveways and rooftops of the mansions on the hills. Sia sighed to herself. The entire scenery reminded her of the moments she spent with Carrington back in Boston.

“You again?”

She turned around to look into the eyes of the man who dared speak to her. She smiled, and then slowed her pace. “Hello to you, too.”

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to frighten you.” Taylor offered a warm, friendly grin.

“You didn’t.”

He replied with a nod. It was his way of saying okay.

“I thought you were simply a stranger passing through.” Sia arched an eyebrow.

“I said I was a *citizen*. *You’re* the one who labeled me as a stranger.”

“Whatever.” She grinned and rolled her eyes.

Taylor remained close at her side. They were nearing the gated entrance of the neighborhood. A car came around the corner, and an older man driving behind the wheel was sitting in it, appearing rather annoyed as he held his cell phone to his ear. Taylor allowed Sia to enter through the gate first.

Sia stopped at the corner of the sidewalk. She was waiting for Taylor to break away first, but he didn’t move either. Both exchanged glances before Taylor finally spoke.

“Waiting for someone?”

Sia only shrugged.

“Are you just gonna stand here all evening?”

She smiled broadly, but didn’t answer his question. She was uncertain of him. She was still trying to figure him out.

“I was hoping I could walk you home.”

She frowned. "I don't need you to walk me home. I can do that by myself."

"I'm sure you can, but you shouldn't be walking alone. It's too dangerous."

Sia chuckled. "In this neighborhood? With the level of security that we have?"

"Nothing is ever one hundred percent."

"Your eyes change colors."

"Yes."

"I've never seen anything like it. It's like they go from—"

"You're changing the subject."

Sia began to walk in the direction of her home, but she didn't reply.

"I mean, don't worry. I'm not saying you should be afraid." His chocolate brown eyes turned baby blue.

"I wasn't, and I'm not." She didn't look at him.

The two said nothing more for the next couple of minutes. When they came around the corner, Taylor proceeded.

"Look, let's be cordial, if anything else. There's no reason for us to be estranged when we're living in the same neighborhood." His eyes turned brown.

Sia folded her arms and nodded. When they reached her home, she pulled out her keys and made her way up the driveway. "It was nice talking to you."

"This is where you stay?"

She nodded.

"What a coincidence. I stay across the street from you. I actually just moved in a few days ago."

Sia shrugged her shoulders and giggled. "Lucky you."

"You got that right." He walked her to her door. When she opened it, she stepped inside before turning to face the tall, masculine young male.

"What do you want from me?"



"I just want to get to know you," he admitted innocently enough as his marble eyes became blue.

"Let me make myself plain and clear. No, you can't have my number. No, I'm not interested, and no, I don't want to get to know you like that." She tried to close the door on his face, but he quickly put up a hand and stopped her. "What?"

"Why can't we just be friends?"

"Because I don't want us to be."

"That's not a good enough answer. Not for me at least." His eyes were brown again.

"Well then, I hope you enjoy disappointment," she said before closing the door in his face.

\* \* \* \*

Sia wiped away the small spill of sparkling water on the wooden table while holding the glass bottle in the other hand. She took a step back to marvel at her beautiful work. Carrington was coming over around nine for the night, and she thought it'd be nice to cook for him. He had a long day at work, and she figured he'd be hungry. She smiled proudly and turned to place the bottle back on the island.

She stopped short and dropped the bottle. Glass and sparkling water went everywhere, but her heart remained frozen in her chest. Her eyes were wide, and for a moment, she couldn't speak.

"Hello, beautiful."

"How the hell did you get in here?" She was still trying to catch her breath.

"A key. How else?"

"How did you *get* a key?" Sia walked across the kitchen to get a bundle of napkins.

"When you leave your keys lying around, it's very easy for people to go make copies, sweetheart."

Sia kneeled and began to pick up the shattered glass. “You made copies of my keys?”

“I made copies of my *cousin’s* keys.”

“Oh my God.” Sia was appalled, and it showed on her face.

“No, it’s just Jordon.”

“Why are you here? What the hell do you want with me?” Sia was still on her knees cleaning up the mess. Her dark loose curls framed her face, and her robe hung partially open.

Jordon stood over her and waited for her to look up. “Goodness, Sia, don’t be silly. What does any man in love want? After seeing how delicious you looked earlier today, I just knew I had to come visit you.”

Sia stood to her feet and carefully carried the used napkins and broken glass to the trash. “And try to give me a heart attack,” she mumbled as she tossed the trash into the can.

Jordon cocked his head to the side. He chose to ignore her comment. “Did you really make all of this for me?” He made his way over to Sia, who backed up into a counter. Hovering over her, he kept his body close to hers as he brought a steady hand to her cheek and brushed it gently.

Sia stood stiff and remained silent.

Jordon cupped her chin with his hand and leaned in for a kiss. She quickly turned her head, and his mouth landed on her cheek.

“You were always such a tease,” he whispered in her ear. “I *hate* teasers.”

Her breathing grew ragged. She was petrified.

“What’s the matter, beautiful? Why so afraid?” Jordon ran his hand down her side and then brought it back to her ass cheek. He pinched it hard and then brought her into him, lowering his mouth to her ear again. “What’s he got that I don’t?” Jordon raised another hand and peeled away the front of her robe, exposing a bare breast. He caressed her breast with his icy cold eyes before opening her robe the rest of the way. His scrutiny was painful and nerve wrecking.

“You filthy bitch,” he whispered before slapping her across her face.

Sia fell to the wooden floor, landing on her side.

Jordon kneeled by her side and grabbed her slender shoulders.

“When were you going to tell me?” He shook her once.

Sia was speechless.

“Answer me!” His eyes were wide.

“I...I...” She struggled for words.

“Are you pregnant?”

She said nothing.

“Are you pregnant by Carrington?” Jordon yelled.

“I don’t know!” she snapped. “I was sleeping with both of you at the same time!”

Jordon pushed her back down before standing. “I should make you get rid of that bastard you’re carrying.”

“Don’t talk about my child that way!”

Jordon chuckled. “You know, I’ve always known you couldn’t be trusted.”

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?”

“I knew you were lying when you told me you were on birth control.”

“What was I supposed to do? Jake was my fiancé and didn’t want me taking anything.”

“That’s because he was never around to actually get you pregnant!”

“The fact is he was better fit for that position than you were.”

“What?” Jordon’s glare was ice cold.

“He was my *fiancé*.”

Jordon swallowed.

“I don’t know who the father is,” Sia admitted.

“I do.”

“How?”

“There’s no way I could have gotten you pregnant.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“I have my own personal brand of contraception.”

“And it is?”

“Infertility.”

Sia remained quiet. She didn’t know how to respond to that.

“You’re done. Carrington’s going to find out everything. He’ll see just what kind of filthy whore you really are. He’ll never want you after he finds out what you’ve done.”

Sia stood to her feet and adjusted her robe. She combed her hair out of her face, looking Jordon dead in the eye. “He’s not going to find out.”

“What? You think I won’t tell him?” Jordon pointed to his chest.

“You won’t. You’re full of more shit than a fucking sewer.”

Jordon chuckled. “Wanna bet?”

“I already have.”

Jordon frowned. “What the hell is that supposed to mean?”

Sia glanced at the clock on her counter. It was eight fifty-five. “I’ll make you a deal.”

“What kind of deal?” Jordon crossed his arms.

“I’ll break up with Carrington after the mission if you promise never to breathe a word of our affair.”

Jordon’s eyes lit up, and he considered that for a moment. “No, you’ll do more than that.”

Sia eyed him quizzically.

“You’ll break up with him the next time you see him.”

Sia remained silent.

“Then again, you may not have to. Once he finds out you’re going on the Moscow mission, he’ll realize you’re involved with CAA. You’ll have no choice but to tell him why.”

“My father.”

Jordon shook his head. “There’s more to it than that. He’ll know it, and you *do* know it.”

“We don’t have to tell him anything.”

“You’re right. The man’s a quick one.”

Sia sighed hopelessly.

“But it’s okay, because when all of this ends, you’ll be mine.” He reached out to stroke her cheek. “And *only* mine.”

Sia was disgusted, but she chose to play along. “Why does Frank want me, of all people, to go on that mission?”

Jordon smiled in approval. “Read the papers in the envelope. They’ll explain everything.”

Sia begrudgingly kissed Jordon on his way out the door at the foyer. The touch of his lips sliced the flesh on hers and the taste of his tongue left a horrifying flavor in her mouth. She thought she might die of severe vomiting. She was getting ready to close the door when headlights flashed before her eyes. Her heart sank. It was Carrington.

“Damn, that was close,” she muttered to herself. She glanced away from her driveway. Something else caught her eye. A flicker. It was coming from the house across the street. Sia kept her eye on it. *What was that?*

“Something wrong?”

Sia snapped out of it. Carrington was at her side. “Oh, uh, I don’t know,” she replied, looking over at the house again. “There’s just something a little odd about that house.”

Carrington turned around. “Which one?”

“The one across the street. That dude lives there now.”

Carrington turned to face her again. “What dude?”

“The young man we met at the bar.”

“The one that kept hitting on you?”

Sia laughed. “Are you serious? That’s all you remember? Come here.” She framed his face with her hands as she leaned in and kissed his lips. “Yes, Care-bear, that’s him.”

Carrington stood up straight. “I remember him because he kept flirting with my girl and putting his hands where they didn’t belong. Next time, I’m kickin’ his ass.”

Sia smiled and shook her head.

“What about the house, anyway?”

“There was a constant flickering in the window.”

Carrington glanced back at the house. “Just now?”

“Yeah. I don’t know, maybe it was a glare.”

“Or maybe it was a ghost,” he teased, grabbing her by the waist as he made his way into the house.

Sia giggled as they entered her home. It was warm and cozy inside.

Carrington turned to secure the entrance, skeptically eyeing Taylor’s house one more time before closing the door.

Sia placed a hand on his arm. “You thirsty or hungry?”

He shook his head. “No, thanks.” He removed his leather jacket and placed it on the armrest of the cushioned chair.

Her jaw dropped. “Are you serious?”

Carrington was slow in answering. “Did you make something?”

“Well, yeah. I thought you might be hungry after work.”

“Oh. Well, babe, I wish you would have called me. I would have told you not to bother.”

She sighed. “It’s all right. I’ll just put it away. I’ll eat it tomorrow.”

“What did you make?”

“Okra, baked chicken, and garlic bread.”

He nodded. “I’m sorry.”

“No worries.”

A mischievous smile spread across his handsome face, and he arched an eyebrow. “Wanna kiss and make up?”

Sia walked over to him with her arms held out. She stood on her tiptoes and wrapped her arms around his neck as he leaned down to kiss her. Their tongues collided as they said their silent, “I love you.” Carrington moaned against her mouth as he framed her face with his hands.

Sia slowly pulled away and then pecked his lips. It was her way of ending their passionate kiss. She grabbed his hand, and they made

their way over to the plush white loveseat. Carrington sat down first, pulling Sia into him. She slid across his lap so that her legs were splayed across his thighs. He placed his hands on her knees, rubbing his brawny hands up and down her shins. They sat there in silence for a moment, gazing into one another's eyes. Sia gave Carrington a warm smile, gazing into his eyes. He returned the sweet gesture.

"I was thinking..." Carrington was studying her face as he said this.

Sia watched him closely with a quizzical smile.

"I'm going to take you out this weekend. We're going to get out of town and go somewhere."

She laughed nervously, shaking her head. "Baby, I can't. We can't. It's not such a good idea. Not this time, anyway."

Carrington frowned. "Why not? For God's sake, you don't even work."

Sia took offense to his comment. "You act like I just sit around on my butt all day."

"Well, do you?"

She sat up straight in a huff. "Are you effing kidding me?"

"Do I look like I'm *effing* kidding you?"

"I am out every day volunteering and trying to help make this screwed up world a better place! Using the money I have saved away, at that!"

"Using the money your *father* saved away."

"At least I'm making a difference! What the hell are you doing?"

"Working, like normal people! And don't you dare say or imply that what I'm doing is insignificant to this world! You don't know a damn thing!"

Sia stood to her feet. "I don't know because you don't freaking tell me anything! At least I've told you about what it is I do! Maybe because it's actually *legal*!"

"What I do is legal! What the hell do you think I am, some freaking villain? And anyway, you've only mentioned what you do

once or twice. I guess those were the only times you actually *did* something worth bragging about.”

Sia scoffed. “So, what, I have to boast about my actions all the fucking time to prove that I’m actually doing something worthwhile? Are you fucking kidding me right now?”

Carrington stood to his feet. “Hey! Don’t you dare talk to me that way! I don’t talk to you that way, so don’t you dare talk to me that way!”

“You started this whole thing!”

“No, you did! Lately you never want to go out! Every time I ask you to go out with me, and I mean simply *go out* with me, you come up with some crappy excuse as to why we shouldn’t! Hell, if I asked you to stand outside with me right now you’d refuse! What is with you? What, are you too ashamed to go out in public with me?”

“No!”

“Are you trying to tell me something?”

“No, Carrington! Don’t be ridiculous!”

“Then why don’t you want to go out with me?”

Sia tried to think of a good explanation. She couldn’t tell him the truth. She couldn’t tell him that if she was seen out in public with him too often it might get back to Jordon and that he’d ruin her if he ever found out. She couldn’t tell him the truth about her, about who she *really* was.

“I do go out with you,” she said softly. “I hung out with you at the bar the other night.”

Carrington rolled his eyes and widened the gap between them. “You still never told me why you had to *meet* me there.”

“I was volunteering at the homeless shelter,” she said, “as a matter of fact.”

\* \* \* \*



It was total bullshit, and Carrington knew it, but instead of arguing, he remained silent. The same thoughts that roamed through his mind the night he murdered Jake were soaring through his mind at that very moment.

*What's going on, Sia? Why is your house still under Ben's name after all these years, and why were the Crane brothers at your home the night of Jake's death? Why did they have guns, and why did Jake try to take your life that night? Why is Jordon so enamored with you, and why did Frank mention you at the last meeting? What's going on?*

*What are you really hiding or hiding from?*

## Chapter 4

Sia handed her mother a cup of coffee before sitting beside her in the living room. Their relationship had improved since the night of the accident. They were much closer than ever. Sia had flown back to Oregon after four years of hiding in Boston. Sia was the daughter of a fearless man who stopped at nothing to keep her safe. His loyalty and unconditional love kept her out of harm's way for many years, but the treasures he left behind compared neither to the shoes he demanded she fill nor to the life she was expected to live.

“Carrington and I got into an argument last night. He was upset because I declined his offer to take me out for what is probably the hundredth time this month.”

“Did you tell him why?”

Sia shook her head.

The brown-headed woman placed the mug down before turning to fully face her daughter. “Do you know how dangerous this is?” Rebecca looked at her Sia with watering eyes. “Do you?”

Sia rubbed her mother's hand softly. “Yes,” she whispered. “But it's okay. I'll figure something out, you'll see—”

Rebecca was shaking her head, and tears began to stream down her pale cheeks. “Sia, for God's sake, you're pregnant! You do too much thinking, and you may not have a—”

“Don't you dare speak those words over me!”

“Sia...”

“I mean it.” Sia was very protective of her baby. She wasn't going to allow anyone to mutter negative things about her child. She didn't give a damn about the context or who it was speaking the words.

"I'm sorry, okay. I'm just worried about you. Jake is dead. He was your only and last form of protection, Sia. How on earth do you expect to make it out alive?" Her voice broke. "How do you even know that this is for real?"

Sia stood and made her way over to the frosted window. "It's not. I know they're up to something. I just don't know what it is yet."

"Then why are you getting involved?" Rebecca demanded.

"I've always been involved, Mom! I was involved the night Antonio died!"

Rebecca wiped away the last of her tears before joining her daughter. "So what are you going to do?" She lightly ran a hand down Sia's slender arm.

Sia faced her mother again. "I'm going to fight. With everything I have."

Rebecca nodded.

"I want you to help me."

Rebecca shook her head. "No, I can't."

"But, *Mom*." Sia couldn't believe her ears. "Think about everything we'd be fighting for. Think about everything they've done!"

"I can't," Rebecca whispered sadly. "And quite honestly, you shouldn't challenge them, either."

"They lied to us, Mom! They made us believe that they were on our side! They told us they would do anything to protect us! Mom, they screwed us over, and they're going to try to do it again if we don't do something!"

Rebecca watched Sia closely. Her eyes were watering again.

"Mom," Sia said, standing straighter, "*we've* got to stand up for ourselves. I can't do this alone. I need you by my side."

"You shouldn't be doing it at all!"

"If I don't come after them, they'll come after us."

Rebecca remained silent.

"You know that, and I know that."

Rebecca was slowly breaking down. “I just don’t want to see my baby and my grandchild hurt. It’s happened before, to Ryan and my grandson. I can’t bear to see it happen again.”

Sia took a step back.

“Sia, you know that if I could, I would step in, but I can’t. I’m much older now. I’m not cut out for all of this. I’m not the woman I used to be.” She reached out and briefly grasped Sia’s hands.

Sia shook her head. “Mom, I can’t do this alone.”

“You shouldn’t be doing it at all.”

Sia inhaled deeply and then ran her fingers through her hair as she thought for a moment. “I’m not walking away, even though that’s what they’re expecting me to do. Especially now that Daddy and Ryan are gone.” She gnawed on her bottom lip as she thought for a moment. So much was at stake. She rubbed her temples as she made her final decision. She took in a deep breath as she momentarily separated from her mother.

\* \* \* \*

Rebecca looked away and gazed hopelessly out of the dew-covered window. She watched as the snow fell relentlessly onto the pallid, sparkling ground, not seeing it but her son and only grandson at the naïve age of five, wrestling in the snow. Their precious laughter still played like glorious music in her ears, and their innocent smiles shimmered like shooting stars in the midnight sky. It seemed like it was just yesterday that her entire family was united, eating and drinking to their favorite holiday songs while they laughed in this very home. It seemed like it was just yesterday that many tears were cried for the innocent that died. It seemed so unfair that the Cranes would strike the undeserving with their mighty swords and not even care.

After a moment, Rebecca turned to face Sia again. “What are you thinking?”

Sia turned to face her mourning mother. "I'm going to beat them at their own game."

\* \* \* \*

She waited patiently in Frank's office. It was their second and final meeting. Frank sat quietly behind his desk as he filled out one document after another. He rubbed his forehead with his free hand before dropping his pen with the other and removing his glasses. A knock came at the door, and Sia tensed. She sat up straighter and waited for Frank to answer.

"Come in," he said.

A tall man with the darkest of eyes and brown pretty waves walked through the door. Sia's face fell, and she sulked in her seat. This was a disaster.

"Have a seat." Frank gestured with his brawny, wrinkly hand.

Taylor sat in the leather chair beside Sia. "Thank you, Mr. Crane."

Frank folded his hands on his desk and looked from Sia to Taylor. "Zachery, this is Sia. Sia, this is Zachery."

The two exchanged glances. "Hi." Sia was still in shock.

"Hi." Taylor didn't seem the least bit upset. Instead, he seemed to be enjoying the moment.

"Get used to one another, and remember each other's names, because you'll be partners on the Moscow mission."

"Partners?" Sia sat straighter.

"Yes. What, have you forgotten already?"

"Frank, with all due respect..." Sia glanced at Taylor and then back at Frank. "This isn't such a good idea."

Frank scowled. "And why the hell not? I told you you'd have a partner. What? Were you expecting someone else?"

"I wasn't expecting *him*."

"Ooh, harsh," Taylor muttered.

Sia chose to ignore him.

“Sia, I’ve thought this over countless times, and I do believe that my judgment is correct. You’re a very bright young woman, but you’re not as skilled as the others—”

“Then why the hell am I going?”

“Jordon had to drop the case and take over Jake’s job.” Frank glared at her for a moment before continuing.

Sia kept her eyes on his. That look said it all. This was all a setup. *He knows about me and Carrington. He knows.*

“The date of the Moscow project is fast approaching, and we need two people who will be able to get the job done *effectively*. Two roles, twice the impact. You’re the bait. Zachery’s the trap.”

Sia briefly tilted her back and released a chuckle. It was a reaction from her disbelief. “This is a mistake.” She chuckled again. “Frank, I can’t go to Moscow with him.”

“My name is Zachery.” His eyes turned blued.

Sia looked his way.

“I’m just letting you know. I guess you forgot again.” Taylor’s tone was a little sharp, and he seemed defensive.

Sia faced Frank again. She started to make a smart-ass comment but thought the better of it.

“You can, and you will. That’s all there is to it,” Frank answered. “Now act like a professional, and suck it up.”

“That’s the thing. I *am* professional. I didn’t just walk up in here thinking that this was all a game. I *know* how dangerous this is. I *know* what I am getting into.”

Taylor had had it. “First of all, I never said that this was a game, nor did I just *walk up in here*. Secondly, anything you have to say about me, you can say to me directly. Are we clear?”

Sia rolled her eyes. “Whatever.”

“How many men have *you* killed?” Taylor gave her a daring look.

“I don’t have to answer to you.”

“Just answer the question,” he said calmly.

“Is this even relevant?”

“You’re avoiding the question.”

“Sia’s right. That isn’t relevant. The number of men she’s murdered has nothing to do with your partnership.”

“It has everything to do with our partnership! If she can’t aim to save her life, she sure as hell won’t be able to save mine.”

“Are you questioning my judgment?” Frank was becoming agitated. He hated being questioned. “Mr. Cruise, I would advise you to pull your head out of your ass and get your act together. This isn’t a democracy, and I did not call you in here for you to question my judgment. That goes for you, too.” He looked at Sia. “Now, *both* of you will be going to Moscow together. I don’t want to hear another word from either of you. Do I make *myself* clear?”

“Yes,” they answered in unison.

“You’re dismissed,” Frank’s voice was low and threatening.

Taylor and Sia rose up from their seats. Sia smoothed the back of her beige slacks and then adjusted her lavender turtleneck sweater before following behind Taylor. He didn’t bother to hold the door for her, and the gesture pissed her off even more. When she closed the door behind her, she decided to say the one thing she knew would irk him.

“He obviously believes that you’re a lost cause, otherwise he wouldn’t have sent me to help you do *your* job.”

Taylor shot her an “are you kidding me” look. “Don’t underestimate me, little girl. I’m not someone you want to fuck around with.”

\* \* \* \*

Carrington rubbed his temples and squeezed his eyes shut as he leaned against his desk. He needed an Aspirin. Sia was really beginning to get to him. She was becoming more secretive as the weeks went on. She never used to be like that. She used to tell him everything. She’d always tell him how glad she was that he’d walked

into her life and that he wasn't just her boyfriend, he was her best friend, too. And she was his.

Carrington sat back against his chair. He wanted terribly to believe that Sia was who she said she was and that she'd been open and honest with him about everything, but after everything that had taken place in the past couple of months, he wasn't so sure. He'd called her earlier to ask if he could come over later after work. He'd felt bad about their argument the other night. She hadn't answered.

That only made him more suspicious, and he just couldn't shake the feeling that somehow she was deeply connected with the Cranes. He knew that the Foxworths were affiliated with the Cranes on some level, but he never thought that it was as deep as his relationship with them, at least not with Sia.

What was going on with her?

Carrington pulled out his cell phone. He contemplated calling Sia again but then decided against it. *I'll just stop by on my way home.*

\* \* \* \*

Sia removed her silver hairpiece and shook her hair loose. Loose waves fell down her back, and she glowed like the sun at the break of dawn. She wore an elegant white turtleneck sweater with blue skinny jeans. Jordon would be arriving shortly, and she needed to be ready. The sooner she could get him out, the better.

She placed the silver piece on her dresser and then framed her belly with her hands. She gazed at her belly for a moment before looking at her own reflection. *A blessing or a curse?*

"Honey, I'm home!"

Sia tensed. Jordon had arrived. She turned to face the mirror again and quickly touched up her fire-engine-red lipstick. If she wanted her plan to be a success, she would have to look the part. So far, everything was going accordingly, but she knew the importance of



expecting the unexpected. She gave herself another self-check before heading down the stairs. He called for her again.

Sia rolled her eyes. "I'm coming!" she grunted to herself.

She quickly trotted down the flight of stairs, walked through her living room and then into the foyer. Sia forced a smile upon her pretty face.

"Don't you look lovely." Jordon handed her a bouquet of roses and kissed her cheek. "You smell good, too. Mm...what is that? Jasmine?"

Sia accepted the bouquet. "Uh, no." She pulled away and chuckled nervously. "It's...not. I'd better get these in a vase. How long do you plan on staying?"

"Well, considering that I am *home*, I was thinking for as long as I like." Jordon smiled sardonically.

"Right." Sia glanced past him. "I'll be right back."

When she reached the kitchen, she sank against the fridge and released an exasperated sigh. She closed her eyes for a moment, holding the flowers upside down at her side. She inhaled...exhaled...inhaled...exhaled. She opened her eyes.

Sia ran her fingers through her hair and slowly walked over to the trashcan and tossed the flowers inside. Jordon could go to hell. She tensed. A firm, steady hand smoothed across her middle, and that familiar scent filled her nostrils.

"Why didn't you just tell me you didn't like them? I would have gotten you something else." He was inhaling the scent of her hair and breathing down her neck.

Sia closed her eyes. "I didn't want to offend you," she answered softly.

Jordon gripped her arms and forced her still. "You're such a bad girl," he whispered.

"I know, but that's how you like me." She turned to face him. "Isn't it?" She stood on her toes and strained for his kiss. When

Jordon lowered his head, she grabbed a glass cup from the counter at her side and chucked it at his head.

Jordon staggered backwards. "You bitch," he gasped, holding the side of his head.

"Go. To. Hell," she gritted as she walked past him. "Ah!" She hissed.

Jordon had grabbed her by the hair and yanked her backwards so that she fell against the trashcan.

Sia was on the floor, holding the back of her head.

Blood trickled down the side of Jordon's head. "You always did like to play dirty." The smile on his face was wicked beyond belief.

Sia silently stood to her feet, watching him closely.

"That was one of the reasons why I fell in love with you."

"You never loved me. You just wanted control."

"I wanted you."

"Fuck you."

"Oh, baby," he said softly as he made his way over to her.

"Ah!" Sia cried when he reached for her. She ducked in the nick of time, grabbing a knife and slicing the flesh on his arm as he reached for her."

"You bitch!"

Sia threw the knife at him, not caring where it landed as she took off in the opposite direction.

\* \* \* \*

Jordon didn't go after her. He wiped the blood off his head and smeared it on his blue-collared shirt. He was done. He simply laughed to himself as he made his way to the front door. A pathetic fool and a sorry man was what he'd allowed her to make him look like. A joke. That was all it was. That was all he had ever appeared to be. A joke. A fucking...joke.

Jordon opened the door and then closed it behind him. He didn't fret over what had just happened, nor did he waste his energy being upset. He'd always known that Sia was a lost cause. She'd never get what she was fighting for. She wasn't strong enough. Her life was over, one way or another. It was only a matter of time.

Jordon held the unrelenting gaze of the man with blistering gray-violet eyes pulling up in the driveway. He flashed a sardonic smile, one that made the moment worthwhile.

\* \* \* \*

A load of questions swarmed through Carrington's head. He slammed the door of his silver mustang. He had to see Sia. He blocked out the sound of the black Bentley pulling out of the driveway. He was so focused on getting to her that nothing else mattered. He made a beeline for the front door. It was still unlocked. When he entered the mansion, he stopped short. Sia was standing before him with a gun.

Sia caught her breath and quickly dropped the gun.

"Can you please tell me what the hell is going on?"

She was speechless.

Carrington arched an eyebrow. "Is that a yes or no?"

"I thought you were Jordon." Her voice was soft.

"Jordon left. You wanna tell me why the hell he was here?"

She shook her head. "You wouldn't understand."

"Then make me understand!" Carrington roared.

\* \* \* \*

Sia's heart began to race. "Okay." Her voice remained soft pitched. "Just calm down."

"Calm down? Calm down? Sia, *calm* is all I've been for the past couple of months!"

"I know, and I understand your frustration, but if we're going to talk about this, I need you to just stay calm."

"You need me to..." He scoffed. "How about doing what I need *you* to do for a change? How about that?"

Sia ran her fingers through her hair and tried as best she could to fight back tears. She wanted to tell him desperately, but she didn't know how.

"Sia," Carrington demanded.

A frown formed at her brow, and she shook her head as she covered her face. She battled vulnerability and fought for pride. She was losing terribly.

Carrington turned to walk away.

"Carrington," she called after him through red, puffy eyes. "Carrington, wait." She trotted after him.

Carrington peered over his shoulder and looked down at her. "Have you been lying to me?"

She drew back. "What?"

"Yes or no, Sia."

"I..."

"Yes or no?" he roared, turning to face her.

Sia flinched. "Carrington." His name was a mere whisper across her lips. She was standing face-to-face with the man she loved more than anything. She could barely move, much less speak.

"Have you?" His voice grew louder.

"Yes!" she blurted out and began to cry.

Carrington's eyes grew wide "What?" he whispered to himself.

"I have." Her tears flowed uncontrollably, but she remained silent in her weeping.

They stood before one another, saying nothing with their mouths, yet everything with their eyes.

"I'm sorry, Carrington," Sia whispered.

She flinched. Carrington had thrown a hard punch at the door.

\* \* \* \*

“How could you do this to me?” He growled. “How could you do this, Sia?” He turned and slammed his fist against the door again. The impact caused his knuckles to cry tears of warm blood. His heart was racing with rage, and his soul was close to bursting into flames. “Why?”

“Because they told me that you were going to kill me if you ever knew!” she cried.

Carrington frowned. “Who?”

\* \* \* \*

She rushed on to tell him the truth, fearing that if she didn't get everything out right then she'd never be able to again. “The Cranes. They wouldn't leave me alone. They said that I was the one you were looking for, and that they'd tell you everything if I didn't do what they said. That's why I ended things between us in Boston. It wasn't because I didn't love you, it was because I afraid!”

Carrington lunged toward her, grasping her shoulders as he penetrated her with his searing gray eyes. “Who exactly, Sia? Who told you this?”

“Jake and Jordon,” she said through tears.

“What was the connection between you and them?”

“I was engaged to Jake.”

Carrington stopped for a moment. He swallowed. “Why? Did you love him?”

She shook her head. “He promised to protect me. They all did.”

“Jake and Jordon?”

“And my mother.”

“Protect you from what?”

She hesitated before answering. She was growing a little more fearful. “You.”

Carrington braced himself. “Why?”

She furrowed her brow, and she began to shake her head. Her shame was overbearing and suffocating the life out of her. It seeped through her exterior like a tiny bucket overflowing with gallons of contaminated water.

“I didn’t mean to do it,” she whispered. “I swear to God.”

“What did you do?” He was watching her closely.

Sia took in a deep breath before speaking. “I know who murdered your father.”

“I do, too. It was Ben.” It was as though he was trying to convince himself.

She shook her head slowly. “My father didn’t do it. He framed himself.”

“Why did he do that?”

She shrugged. “Because he loved me. Because he was trying to protect me.” She released a shuddering breath, and as if on cue, a warm tear streamed down her cheek. “But after everything that’s happened, I see now that he died for nothing.”

“What are you talking about?”

She watched him closely through her clouding eyes. “I killed Antonio Marino.”

“What?”

“I can explain—”

“What is left to explain?” he roared.

“There’s plenty, Carrington!”

“You were guilty all this time, and you deliberately didn’t say anything!”

“Just let me explain—”

“Explain what? All you’ve done is lie!”

“I never lied to you! Not about this.”

“*Omission* is lying!”

“Then how many times have you lied to me?”

“This is completely different, and you know it!”

“Is it really? Because the last time I checked, we were both playing this game!”

Carrington inhaled and then exhaled. His nostrils flared, and his violet-gray eyes flashed with fury. “So you’ve been playing me for a fool.” He growled.

“You played me, too. You said it yourself. You knew who I was, and still, even after everything we’d been through, you were going to kill my father!”

“You left me! You slept with me, made me believe that you were coming back to me, and then you left me with a fucking note! You didn’t even have the nerve to tell me good-bye to my face! When I came here and found you, I admitted that I was searching for your father! I told you what my intentions were and why! And you *still* let me believe that *he* was guilty of the murder! Why didn’t you just tell me then? If it wasn’t a malicious act, why didn’t you just tell me?”

“Because I was scared, Carrington! I didn’t know what to do!”

“So you slept with me.”

“Would you stop saying that? Carrington, I *love* you! I made love to you because I *love* you! I had no idea you were Antonio’s son when I first met you! I didn’t even know what you *looked* like!”

Carrington frowned. “You spent years running from a man, and you didn’t even know what he looked like? And anyway, you knew who the hell I was after I told you!”

“I knew who you were *before* you told me. Jake told me. He told me the day we were caught having sex in the locker room. He was the one who set everything up. Apparently he’d been watching us the whole time.”

“You knew, and you still never said anything,” Carrington muttered. He was giving her a look of disgust.

“And you were no different! Neither of us wanted to say anything because we were both bound to this shithole of a game! Admit it, Carrington! You are just as guilty as I am. Both of us needed a form of escape, so we did the only thing we could. We pretended like

nothing ever happened!”

“You were pretending, not me.” His voice was low.

“Oh, Carrington, come on! You spent years searching for a man you say you never knew was dead!”

Carrington reached his boiling point. He framed his head with his hands, turned his back to her for a moment, and then threw a punch at the wall. He quickly turned around again to face her, grabbing her by the arms and then backing her up against the front door. He barred her in with his arms as he stared her straight in the eye.

“Why did you murder my father?” he demanded.

“Because I thought he was trying to kill my mother!”

“What?”

“I walked in on them having sex!”

Carrington’s beautiful violet-gray eyes held disbelief.

“He had his hand wrapped around her neck, and she was screaming. Carrington, I was only eight! I didn’t know! I—”

“I don’t believe you.”

“I’m telling the truth!”

“You’re making this up! My father would never—”

“But he did! And I’m sure that wasn’t the first time!”

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?”

“What do you think it means, Carrington? Our parents were having an affair! You didn’t find it the least bit odd that every time my father went out of town, your father was always at my house?”

“He was at work!”

“He was at my *house*!”

“Liar!”

“I am not!”

“Yes, you are!” He kept his eyes on her, slicing her to the core.

“Why, Carrington?” Sia lowered her voice. “What reason would I have had to maliciously commit such a crime at eight years old, and to a family friend?”



\* \* \* \*

Carrington's eyes began to water, and his throat tightened. "Explain your engagement to Jake Crane. Explain why you never told me. Why you insisted that we have a relationship, even though you were promised to another man."

"I didn't love him."

"And that makes it right?"

\* \* \* \*

Sia balled her fists and bit her lower lip. Tears were burning her dark brown eyes, and a heat wave was warming her beating heart. "You know it wasn't like that."

"You're a lying, two-faced—"

"I am not!"

"You didn't even have the nerve to stand up for your dead father! You just sat there, letting him take the blame for what *you* did! You selfish bitch!" He slammed his fists against the door.

Sia quickly reached up and slapped him on the face.

The gesture caught Carrington off guard, but he quickly recovered, taking her hand and pinning it against the wall. When she fought back, he grabbed the other.

"Stop!" she cried. "Let me go!" She wiggled around, but he was much too strong. "Let me go!"

"I hate you!" he said through gritted teeth. "Do you understand that? I fucking hate you!"

Sia kicked him in the shins and then kneed him in the groin before breaking free.

Carrington fought the pain as he chased her through the living room.

Sia reached for a pillow and then threw it at him.

Carrington quickly tossed it to the side and picked up speed. He

chased her up three flights of stairs.

When they reached her bedroom, she tried to shut the door in his face. He flung it open with one hand. Sia quickly picked up the gun hidden beneath her pillow before he could grab her and pointed it at him. Carrington froze, staring at the lethal weapon in her hand.

She chuckled it at him. "Come on! Shoot me! This is the moment you've been waiting for! Shoot me!" she cried. "Shoot me!" Her voice broke. "Come on!" And then warm tears began to flow. "Shoot me."

\* \* \* \*

Carrington tossed the gun to the side as he made his way over to her. He placed his hands on her cheeks and lifted her face so that he could look into her eyes. Her tears were dribbling against his palms and moistening his flesh. Tears filled his eyes, and an overwhelming wave of emotion bled through his softening exterior. He leaned in and kissed her passionately. His tongue stroked hers with great ardor in his devotion to love her for better or for worse.

He cuffed her bottom, lifted her up, and then climbed onto her bed with her in his arms.

\* \* \* \*

Sia wrapped her arms around his neck. His tongue collided against hers like fire flickering in the wind, and his tears meshed with hers like melting snow on a sidewalk beneath the sun. Sia whimpered in the silence as she soaked in the sobs escaping Carrington's throat. His desperate cry was like a warm body of water overwhelming her aching body. She cried with him, allowing him to hold her as they basked in one another's pain.

He sat back on his knees to unzip her jeans. He pulled them off in one fluid motion before aiming for her lacy pink panties.

Sia whined. He was ripping her panties off, something he'd never done before. She inhaled and braced herself when he released her after tossing her panties to the side to unzip his own jeans.

Tears ran down his cheeks as he kept his violet eyes on her. He swallowed a sob as he pulled out his cock. It was already rock hard and had darkened in color. A swollen head glistening with semen was jutting out on his shaft.

Sia released a breath. She reached for him, opening her legs wide so that he had full access to her. When he lowered himself on top of her, she immediately wrapped her arms around his neck. His lips were centimeters from hers, and the tip of his nose tickled hers as he nuzzled it against her flesh.

Carrington drew in a deep breath as he bowed his back.

"Ah!" Sia cried.

Carrington pierced her hard when he entered her.

"Ah!" she cried again with his second strike. "Carrington!" There was a third. "Carrington!" And a fourth...

Her tears were warm against his neck, flowing like a river as her soul connected with his. She brought her hands to his shoulders, gripping him firmly as he rode her passionately.

"Carrington!" Sia was falling apart in his arms. Her pussy stretched with every thrust, and she could feel his penis inside her belly every time he pierced her deeper with penetration. "Carrington!" She was going crazy with emotion. The way he used his body to say, "I love you," was like no other man, and he was very clear in just how *deep* his feelings were for her. "Ah!" Sia arched her back and cried out to the top of her lungs. She held on to him tight. She was too afraid to let go. "Oh, *God*! Carrington! Carrington! Carrington..."

\* \* \* \*

"Mm! Mm! Mm..." Carrington grunted. He fucked her deeper and deeper. He couldn't. Stop. Loving her. Her screams added to the

fire in his arousal, and her body was the medicine for his open wounds. She was the magnet keeping him attached, and because she was so different, *nothing* in this world could force him to repel. Carrington bit down on her comforter, and a vein bulged from the side of his head as he rocked her soul. He loved her so much it hurt.

Sia was beautiful. The crown on her head was a lovely chocolate brown and flowed like an endless waterfall down her slender back. She'd always captured his eyes with her dangerous curves and made his heart dance with her killer smile. She was his dream woman. He melted at the mere sight of her, and her sex appeal made him fall like rain.

\* \* \* \*

Sia grimaced and her mouth fell agape. She was keeping up very well with his rhythm, rocking her hips against his in the heat of their passion. Her pussy was soaking wet, and her clit was responding to the firm kisses of his shaft. She brought her knees into her chest and curled into a ball. She dug her fingers into his back and allowed him to finish her off. She closed her eyes tight. Her pussy felt amazing, and the deepness of the penetration was remarkable.

She tensed. He was pushing her over the edge, bumping her G-spot as he massaged that swollen clit with his cock simultaneously. Sia gasped. She was getting ready to come. "Carrington, don't stop! Don't stop!"

"Sia, I don't know how much longer I can hold off." He grunted.

Sia leaned back and brought her hands to his chest. She grabbed the front of his shirt and began to thrust her hips against his again, riding him with passion from below. "Carrington," she sobbed. "I love you."

He lifted his head to look deep into her eyes. He didn't say the words back, but his kiss said it all.

"Oh my *God!*" Sia squealed as their bodies shook in unison.

She couldn't stop her knees from shaking. Carrington writhed helplessly on top of her. His cock pulsed rapidly inside of her, and her sopping-wet cunt hugged his cock hard for a moment before tapping it several times inside. Sweat covered their weary bodies, soaking through their shirts and onto the comforter. Their heavy panting filled the warm room. It was moments before either of them moved.

Several moments later, Carrington pulled out of Sia. He rolled over on his back and pulled her into him. He kissed her crown and whispered, "I love you more." They laid like that for the rest of the evening, intertwined in each other's arms, safe and sound.

Several hours later into the night, Sia woke to an empty bed. Nothing but the smell of Carrington remained on the rumpled area in which he laid on her side of the bed. She glanced at the clock on her nightstand. It was three in the morning. She ran her hand through her chiseled curls. Soft sobs came flowing from her throat as she laid back down to bury her face in her comforter.

He was gone, and she wasn't even sure if she was ever going to see him again.

## Chapter 5

Carrington leaned against the iron gate separating him from the frozen lake. The sun was rising on the world and setting on him. The air was cold, but the wind was still. He was deaf to the sound of children laughing and blind to the beauty of their innocence as they made snow angels with their little bodies. He'd seen the truth, and now everything was black and white.

He'd spent years searching for the right opportunity and the right moment to avenge his father. Now, it lay before him. Perfect opportunity. And he couldn't even take it. Maybe it was because he'd known all along. Maybe it was because he'd figured it out when he learned that Sia changed her name back in Boston and when he saw Jordon stroking her thigh that day in class. He knew when she ended their relationship back in Boston that there was in fact a connection. He knew. He'd *known*. He just never admitted it because hope had encouraged him to believe otherwise. Even still, he loved her. And that's what angered him the most.

Carrington glanced down and brushed away a patch of snow that'd gathered on one of the rails of the iron gate. How could she do this to him? He trusted her. For God's sake, he *trusted* her! He gave her *everything*, his heart, his hope, his love. She was the only woman he'd ever loved, the only woman he'd ever risked his life for...and the only woman who'd ever truly wrecked him.

Carrington brushed away a stubborn tear before sighing and standing up straight. He thought she was having *his* baby. He must have been wrong about that, too.

\* \* \* \*

Sia tossed and turned in her sleep that night. Something was wrong. She could sense it. Empty promises and a stream of broken dreams were all the Cranes had ever given her. Four years later, the bondage was of no more, yet they were still after her.

The flight was a long one, but it felt like seconds to Sia. She slept through hunger pangs and daydreamed through the long hours. She was so consumed with her own heartache and guilt that she hadn't even noticed how much time had elapsed.

Sia's eyes were wide open. People were coming and going from all directions, and so was the unrelenting snow. She inhaled the foreign fragrance of the land as she stepped off the plane. Its aroma was captured by her sense of smell and lingered in her mind. It was one of the few things she'd never be able to capture through her camera, only in her memory.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington walked off the plane with tunnel vision and one thing in mind. The black wool coat he wore shielded the strong muscles of his form, and the shades on his face swathed the flames dancing in his eyes. His heart was guarded by the shield on his chest, leaving plenty of room for apathy.

He hadn't bothered to call Sia, nor tell her that he was leaving town. He was still angry, still hurt, and he resented her for it. Unfortunately, his hatred wasn't as strong as his love, and to his family, loving an enemy was the ultimate betrayal.

Carrington swore under his breath as he made his way through the town of busybodies and icy streets. He saw Sia's face everywhere. No matter what he did or where he looked, she was always there, looking back at him. He fought desperately with his mind to stop thinking

about her and demanded that his body stop craving hers. It was of no use. His heart was much too stubborn.

There was just something about Sia that made it nearly impossible for him to walk away. It was like everything in existence stood still when she entered a room, and the only sound he heard was the noise coming from the fast rhythm of his heart. He'd never met anyone like her. She was adventurous, altruistic, and precious, *so* precious. She was his own personal teddy bear, one he liked to cuddle with day and night. One he wasn't ashamed of carrying around and putting on display.

\* \* \* \*

The hotel was nice, and the suite was even nicer, but Sia personally would have preferred a crappy motel with separate rooms if she had to choose. Anything was better than being in the same room as a total stranger. She sighed. At least they didn't have to sleep in the same bed. The suite had two bedrooms, a beautiful living room, and a small kitchen. She could deal. If not, she had a high-tech gun hidden under her bed. She didn't mind a little practice before the day of the mission...for just-in-case purposes, anyway.

The bedrooms were on opposite ends of the suite. Sia chose the room with the master bathroom. She placed her bags beside her bed and then went back into the living room. She'd unpack later. She needed to get out of that room and off the mountain or she was going to go crazy. Unfortunately, Frank had given her direct orders about staying inside until Zachery arrived.

Sia glanced out of the window of the living room. She ran her fingers through her hair. She was already homesick and missed Carrington dearly. She'd give anything to move back to Boston and start a life with him. She liked to think that he was back in Oregon waiting for her and that they would one day be together again soon, but as time went on, the idea seemed more like wishful thinking.



Sia glanced over her shoulder. There was a click, and then the front door opened. It was Zachery. He had the sweetest smile and pearly white teeth. Sia would have presumed him to be Carrington's younger brother if she didn't know any better, but Carrington's nose was straight while this guy's was a little squarer at the tip.

"Hello," he said at the door.

"Hi, Zac."

Taylor's eyes lit up, and a smile spread across his face.

Sia chuckled and rolled her eyes as she crossed her arms. "Shut up."

Taylor made his way over to her.

"I guess we're staying in the same room." Sia shifted and put most of her weight on her left leg.

"That's correct."

She nodded.

"Well, it looks like we're going to get to know each other *really* well after all," he teased.

Sia's only reply was a counterfeit laugh.

Taylor simply shook his head and smiled.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington stood beside his bed and took off his coat. His room was elegant but very simple. It had one bed and a bathroom. He didn't mind. That was really all he needed. It was actually quite cozy and comforting. It was probably the only bit of serenity he'd gotten since he left Oregon.

The evening was pleasant but extremely cold. Still, he felt the need to get out. He'd been cooped up on that plane for far too long and was about to lose his mind. He called the front desk and inquired about an indoor pool.

He was relieved. He hadn't been swimming in a while.

The scenery was nothing like the reality outside of the walls in which he stood. Palm trees were everywhere. There was a tall rose bush separating the pool and the Jacuzzi, giving the appearance of two separate rooms. It was calming and helped take Carrington's mind off all of the drama that was going on in his life. He climbed into the steaming Jacuzzi. He'd just swam several laps and needed to relax his muscles. He was tense all over and wasn't exactly sure when he'd last been so far away from Sia.

Carrington closed his eyes and leaned his head back against the wall of the Jacuzzi for a moment. The bubbling hot water felt amazing against his taut flesh. He opened his eyes. A chill swept over him, and he instantly got goose bumps. He was feeling rather warm, and his muscles were relaxed. He had a lot of work cut out for him in the day to follow and needed to get some rest. He climbed out of the Jacuzzi and grabbed one of the towels, wrapping it around his waist. He was tired and already feeling homesick. Only he didn't know where home was anymore.

\* \* \* \*

Sia gently brushed her hair. She gazed at her reflection as her tears quietly trickled down her cheeks. They came slowly and steadily, being sure to leave their mark on her pretty face. Her heart beat like a broken record set on repeat, and she wondered how it could go on so long without burning out. She missed Carrington.

Sia stroked her hair one more time before placing her brush back onto her dresser. She didn't want to be there. She didn't *need* to be there. Her place was back at home with her family. She released a sob. If it wasn't for her baby, she would have laid down and died right there.

Sia fought to compose herself, wiping away her warm, unhappy tears. She grabbed the key and then closed her bedroom door. She was on her way to the pool area.

She stopped short and caught her breath. She was walking down the hall when she noticed Zachery undressing in his room. The door was wide open, leaving nothing to her imagination. He was taking off his khaki pants. His thighs were sculpted, and his calves were as solid as stone. He had abs of steel and strong, sexy arms.

Sia thought she was going to have a heart attack. He dropped his briefs in one fluid motion. She turned her back to him. “Oh my God,” she whispered to herself, trying to get rid of the image of his beautifully formed cock. He was even huge down there.

“Like what you saw?”

She turned to face him again. He was standing before her, wearing nothing but basketball shorts. “You know, you should really start undressing with the door closed.”

“Why? Is temptation really that heavy?”

Sia glared at him. “Go to hell.”

“Ladies first.”

“You make me *sick*!”

“You seem fine to me.”

Sia stalked over to one of the white plush couches and picked up a red fluffy pillow. She threw it at him as hard as she could.

“What is this pillow, a symbol of what you’d really like to do with your own body? *Throw* yourself at me?”

“Ooohh!” She growled and then stormed out.

Taylor ran his fingers through his glossy waves and chuckled to himself. He loved to irk her.

\* \* \* \*

Sia peered around the door and then scoped out the entire area. Palm trees, rose bushes, and a set of tall glass sliding doors surrounded the pool area. The moon’s smile reflected off the clear waves of the heated pool, giving the scenery a very romantic theme that made Sia think of Carrington.

She ran her hand through her dark pretty curls as a tear slowly slid down her rosy cheek. She placed her towel down on one of the folding chairs and then made her way over to the pool.

She walked down the steps until her lower half was in the heated pool. The only hope she had rested in the life of her baby.

She walked further until she was treading water. After a while, she felt the need to become invisible and nonexistent. She held her breath and sank to the bottom of the pool. Tiny bubbles flowed from her nostrils every few seconds, and her hair stood tall on her head like an oversized crown. She closed her eyes and began to dream about the possibilities. Dreaming seemed to be the only form of pleasure she had left. The rest of her life was over...

## Chapter 6

They were trapped. The snow was unrelenting, and the wind was as brisk as ice. The unexpected blizzard altered everything. Sia lay on her side in a complete daze. It was five thirty in the evening. The sun had fallen asleep, and the clouds were like pink streamers shifting in the deep blue sky. The atmosphere was cool, and her bedroom was dark. The wind slipped through the cracks of her glass doors, and its chill brushed against her tender flesh.

“Hey! Wake up! It’s too early to be going to bed!” Taylor pounded on Sia’s door before opening it.

Sia moaned and pulled the cover over her head when he flicked on her bedroom light.

“Hey!” Taylor yanked the covers off her naked body.

Sia shrieked, and Taylor covered his face. “Sorry! I totally did not mean to—I—just—”

“Get *out*!” Sia screamed.

Taylor hurried out of her room without uttering another word.

Sia continued to hold her breasts. Her heart was beating profusely, and her cheeks felt hot. She wondered how much he saw. Taking in a deep breath, she ran her fingers through her hair. If nothing else could snap her out of her daydreaming and self sorrow, that sure as hell did.

Sia pushed herself up off her unmade bed and made her way over to her mirror. Her lovely curls draped over her delicate shoulders as she leaned against her dresser and peered into her mirror, piercing the holes in her soul as she searched desperately for the lion living deep inside her wounded spirit. She ran her fingers through her long, glossy

hair and inhaled deeply as she closed her eyes...and then exhaled as she opened them.

She reached for her pale pink robe and covered her body with it before walking out of her bedroom.

\* \* \* \*

Taylor stood from the fourteenth floor peering through the curtain, simply watching the pretty, white flakes fall from the sky. Cars were stranded in the ice-covered streets, and pedestrians, the few that were out there, bundled themselves so that only the whites of their eyes could be seen. It was pearly white and a beautiful disaster outside.

“How long do you think we’ll be snowed in?” Sia came around the corner.

Taylor turned around. His eyes trickled down her body and then made their way back up before connecting with her dark brown eyes. She wore no makeup and had a lovely glow. Taylor’s breath caught in his throat, and he tried to swallow as the memory of their recent encounter came flooding back to his mind. He wondered if she was wearing anything under her robe. “I don’t know, hopefully not long.” He turned to face the outside again. His cheeks were hot.

Sia folded her arms and went to take a look for herself. “It’s horrible out there.” She shook her head and turned to walk away. “Hopefully it’ll be gone before New Year’s Eve. It would seriously suck to be stuck here any longer than needed, much less stuck here with you.”

Taylor closed the curtain. He wore dark green pajama pants and a matching long-sleeved, button-down top. He glanced at Sia, who was sitting on the couch with the remote control in her hand.

“Sorry, little girl, no soap operas today,” he said and snatched the remote.

Sia sent him a glare as he sat down beside her and reached for the remote. Taylor jerked his arm back and then raised it so that she was unable to reach.

“Give it back!” she demanded through gritted teeth.

“I will as soon as I’m done using it.”

“You can use your hand to fuck yourself.” She reached for the remote.

“But I’d rather use yours.” He jerked his hand back. “Or your mouth, whichever is more useful.”

Sia ignored his comments. “This isn’t fair. I had it first.”

“Sorry, babe, finders aren’t always keepers.”

“But assholes are always weepers,” she sang and plunged forward.

Taylor tossed the remote in his other hand and chuckled.

“Are you kidding me right now?” She reached for the remote again.

“Well, don’t you have a temper on you?”

“All of this for a darn remote.” She reached for it again.

Taylor quickly placed the remote under his bottom and then caught Sia’s hands with his as he laid on his back. Sia released an exasperated sigh as she looked him in the eye.

“Why do you have to make things so damn complicated?” she demanded.

\* \* \* \*

Taylor chuckled in celebration of his victory. An impish smile spread to the corners of his mouth as he silently dared her to try to take the remote.

Sia rolled her eyes and climbed off him. She couldn’t wait to get back home. “I’m going for a swim.”

“If you have any thoughts about suicide, let me know. I’ll walk you through, step by step.”

“I’d rather practice on you.”

Sia removed her robe before heading into the bathroom. She made a quick transition into her black polka-dotted bikini. Her curls fell loose and long down her back.

\* \* \* \*

Taylor allowed the warm water to rain upon his strong back. He couldn't stop thinking about Sia. No matter what he did, or where he went, she was always on his mind. As the days went on, he found himself frequently doing things to purposely piss her off. Inevitably, she bitched at him, but he didn't care because it got her attention. She was just so...different. He'd never met anyone like her. She was laid back, but very slick at the mouth and ridiculously uptight. She drove him insane, yet still, he enjoyed being around her, and he didn't know why.

Taylor slid his hands from his face to the crown of his head. *Snap out of it. This is strictly business. You're not here for sex and certainly not to form any kind of new relationship. You're partners, not friends. Get your head in the game. She's affiliated with the Cranes, and they are not to be trusted. Your father taught you that.*

Taylor switched the water to cold and then leaned against the tiled wall. He needed to calm down. Sia was in the next room, which wasn't too far from where he was, and the sexual tension was getting to him. He didn't know what it was about her that drove him over the edge, but he was hanging by a thread, and it was very, very thin.

\* \* \* \*

Sia came up for air and then plunged deep again. She kicked her legs rapidly in a scissor-like motion while extending her arms as far forward as she could. When she reached the concrete wall, she curled up into a ball, flipped forward, and then kicked off in the opposite direction. She lifted her head and sucked in air. She plunged deep



again. Everything was a blur, but she could still see where she was going. Air bubbles scattered from her nostrils, and the warm water felt heavenly against her flesh. She swam to the surface again but remained there this time, breast-stroking the rest of the way back to her starting point.

When she reached the concrete wall, she pulled herself up and then turned to sit so that her feet dangled in the water. She wiped the water from her eyes and then rang her hair dry. She swam through a large pool of water. Maybe she could swim through her pool of dilemma, too. She panted heavily, willing her breath to return.

Sia looked up from where she sat. She heard a click and then saw the knob on the door twisting. Slowly but surely, her heart was finding its normal pace again. She perked up more. The sound of multiple objects crashing onto the tiled floor bounced off the walls and pierced her sensitive ears. She leaned to her right, trying to sneak a peek at the clumsy person in the hall. She frowned. It sounded like whoever it was, was cleaning up the mess.

Sia stood and then grabbed the towel lying on the chair. She dabbed her face with it, clearing away the excess water, and then wrapped it around her hips. Her belly was the perfect little pudge beneath her polka-dotted bikini top. As she walked across the wet pool floor, she noticed the door opening wider.

“Careful!” she announced. “The floor is wet!”

“Oh, thanks. I’d sure hate to—”

“Carrington.” His name came out of her mouth in a mere whisper. “What are you doing here?”

He scowled as he stalked off towards the steaming room.

“Carrington, wait!” Sia hurried after him.

He quickly opened the door of the steaming room and then slammed it shut behind him.

“Carrington!” Sia cried from the outside. “Carrington, don’t do this!” She banged on the door with her small fists. “Carrington,

please! I'm *sorry!*" Her voice broke, and her eyes were beginning to well up.

She gasped when the door flung open.

"I hate you! Do you understand that?" he roared. "I fucking *hate* you. *You* and your family can rot in hell for all I care."

Sia gasped and threw her hands up. Carrington snatched her towel from around her waist and threw it on the ground. "Don't you ever come near me or my family again," he said, pointing to the towel he'd just thrown on the floor, "or *that* will be your life." He stormed off.

Sia found herself panting heavily. Her heart was caught in her throat, and she found it difficult to breathe. She was trembling from the crown of her head to the soles of her feet. She couldn't even cry.

A moment later, she composed herself enough to kneel down and pick up her towel. She made a beeline for her room and never looked back until she was locked away from the world. She tossed her towel on the floor but then thought the better of it. *I'll use it to step on when I get out of the shower.* She kneeled down to pick up the piece of fabric. When her flesh came into contact with it, she froze. It was as if she'd been carrying her heart on her sleeve as she made her way back up to her room.

\* \* \* \*

Cold air conspicuously seeped out of Carrington's nostrils as he exhaled. He stood on the corner with his hands in the pockets of his wool coat. Naked branches swayed in the midst of the heavy wind as it howled stridently. It was deafening in its cry and powerful with its touch.

Carrington inhaled as he remembered the way Sia danced with him that night in Boston. The fluid motion of her hips was arousing, and the smell of her perfume was like a dangerous weapon permeating his radar. She was the bane of his existence then, but alluring as hell. He sighed. God, he wanted her perfectly rounded ass

pressing against his cock again. He sighed as he looked off into the distance. He was afraid, deathly afraid. He couldn't imagine his life without Sia. He *had* to beat the Cranes at their own game.

Carrington tensed. When he turned around, he didn't smile. "Hello, stranger," he whispered softly. He allowed his partner in crime to climb into the backseat of the cab.

\* \* \* \*

Sia eyed him with inquisition as he climbed in after her. Carrington remained quiet. Instead of an explanation, he gave her a stern look, commanding her to remain silent until he told her otherwise.

\* \* \* \*

The room was much smaller than the ones they were staying in, but still cozy. It had one bed and one bathroom. The bed was in the center of the room.

Carrington made his way over to the opposite side of the room. He peeped through the curtain, making certain the windows were locked.

"All right, you can turn on the light," he said.

Sia did. "Okay, so are you going to tell me what's going on?" she asked innocently.

Carrington's heart swelled. The look on her face was breathtaking. He nodded. "How are you?" he asked softly. "Did you have a hard time finding me?"

She shook her head. "I was relieved when I found your note in my towel. I've been wanting to see you."

He hung his head and chuckled sheepishly. "I hope I wasn't too scary." He looked up again, appearing a bit sheepish.

Sia shook her head again. "Not *too* scary. I know you. You would never hurt me."

His only reply was a shake of his head.

“How’ve you been?” Her voice was soft.

Carrington kissed her eyes with his as he closed the gap between them. He placed his hands on her waist, guiding her as he willed her to walk backwards until she reached the brick wall.

\* \* \* \*

Sia braced his strong arms and looked up into his violet eyes.

“How I’ve been?” His voice croaked. A frown formed at his brow, and his violet eyes became moist with tears. “How’ve I been?”

Sia nodded.

He leaned in close and pressed his forehead against hers.

She ran her hands up and down his arms, and they stood like that for a moment, enjoying one another’s comfort.

Finally, Carrington spoke. “Do you trust me?” he whispered as he ran his hands along the sides of her thickening waist. They were still wearing their wool coats.

She nodded and then nuzzled her nose against his. It was something he’d always done to her.

Carrington continued to whisper. “I’m going to make all of this go away, okay?” He looked at her with certainty. He was talking about the hellhole they’d gotten into with the Cranes. “I’m going to make it go away.”

Warm tears burned her eyes as she melted in his embrace. “I trust you,” she whispered.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington brushed his mouth against hers, getting a feel for her soft lips. “I know you were telling the truth, baby. I know you were.”

Sia sucked in a shuddering breath. “Why did you leave me that night?”

Carrington looked deep into those lovely brown eyes. He shook his head sadly. "I was still angry, still bitter. I wanted to believe that my father wasn't capable of doing what you said, but I know you better than that. I *know* you, Sia." He folded his lips and fought to suppress a sob. A tear streamed down his cheek, and he watched her closely.

Sia reached up to wipe away his tear. She kissed his tear-stained cheek and then wrapped her arms around his neck.

Carrington moaned as he lifted her off the floor. He pecked her left cheek and then aimed for her lips. "You know I love you, baby," he muttered against her lips. "I love you *so* much."

"I love you too, Care-bear," she whispered. "Why did you bring me here?" she asked as he put her down.

"You don't find it the least bit odd that you and I are in the same country and staying in the same hotel at the same time?"

"They know about us."

"My point."

They remained silent for a moment.

"Why are you here, Sia?"

"Probably for similar reasons as you."

"The mission involving PSA's Hector Petrov?"

"That's correct."

"What's your role?"

"Temptress."

Carrington arched an eyebrow.

"I have to—"

"I know what you have to do," he said in disapproval.

"What's your role?"

"Assassin. Something's up," Carrington said. "It was way too easy for us to find each other. What did the papers say?"

"Everything that has happened thus far and everything we've just talked about. They just never told me *who* the assassin was."

“Same here. They never said *who* the temptress was.” Carrington thought for a moment. “Something is very wrong here.”

“Is anything ever right when it comes to the Cranes?”

“Touché.”

Sia sent him a playfully wicked smile. She pushed him back with her dainty hands until he fell onto the bed. She stripped from her coat, unfastening the buttons, one by one. She tossed her coat on the foot of the bed. She was wearing a T-shirt and sweatpants underneath. Her curlicues spilled over her shoulders and down her back. She smiled slightly, keeping her eyes locked on his as she pushed down her sweat pants. She stepped out of them before removing her boots and socks.

Carrington’s pupils dilated, and his breathing heightened with his excitement.

Sia pulled her shirt over her head. Her breasts were naked and free, waiting desperately for his touch. Her nipples strained toward him. She was standing before him in her lavender lacy panties.

Carrington sat up to strip from his coat. He, too, tossed it on the foot of the bed. He was fully clothed, wearing a black long-sleeved shirt with blue jeans. He reached forward and pulled her into his arms, not moving from where he stood. He sat on the edge of the bed before opening his mouth wide on hers and kissing her deeply. He sighed as Sia combed her fingers through his hair. Her tongue felt warm against his. She tasted of peppermint and ice cream.

“Mmm,” he moaned against her lips. “Somebody’s been snacking.”

She giggled. “I’ve been having crazy cravings these past few days *and* nights.”

Carrington brought his hands to the front of her belly. He pulled away from her lips and watched her closely. “How long?” His voice was very low.

“It happened back in Boston. I didn’t feel the symptoms until I relocated to Oregon.”

He nodded.

“I’m naming the baby after you.”

“How do you...” It was impeccably hard for him to get the words out.

“Jordon’s infertile.”

Carrington scowled. “Jordon? I thought Jake was your fiancé.”

Sia looked at him with saddened eyes. “Carrington, I was forced to do a lot of things that have probably cost me some points in heaven.”

He remained silent for a moment. He didn’t like hearing those words any more than she enjoyed saying them.

“And Jake?” he finally spoke up.

“We never...” She was shaking her head.

“But he was your fiancé.”

“So.” She shrugged her shoulders.

Carrington did smile then. It was as if a weight had been lifted off his shoulders. “So it’s mine?”

Sia nodded gleefully.

Carrington stood to his feet and picked her up. He kissed her happily. She laughed and hugged him back. “We’re a family,” he muttered against her neck. “I’m going to take good care of you, Sia. You and our baby. I promise.”

When he placed her back on the floor, she gave him that familiar, dazed look.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington said nothing as he continued to look at her. He cupped her hand and lifted it to his tender lips, kissing her as he held her gaze with his blistering, violet eyes. He lifted her in one fluid motion and then placed her on the bed.

Sia was at a loss for words. He had a powerful effect on her. Being close to him was like heaven, and making love to him was beyond any earthly pleasure. Forbidden as it remained, loving

Carrington was by far the sweetest sin. His passion burst through his hardened exterior, paralyzing her from the head down, and the look in his eyes revealed his silent demand that she fall under his dominion. Her heart swelled, and the mound between her legs ached for him. She burned with passion for him.

Sia remained silent as she watched Carrington reach for the waistband of his pants. He held her gaze as he unashamedly removed them. Next were his boxer briefs, followed by his shoes and socks. Then came his shirt.

Sia's eyes traveled from his face...down his core...until they finally kissed his long, fat dick. Her belly churned with anticipation, and her pussy prepared juices for him without her consent. Her heart began to race. There was bound to be a powerful orgasm, if not several, and many cries for mercy. He was strong, dominant, and knew just how to make her toes curl with devastating pleasure...especially down *there*.

"Like what you see?" Carrington rasped.

Sia swallowed a gasp as she studied his dick with her eyes.

"So...exactly which part of you will I be fucking first? Will it be that pussy or that ass?"

Her eyes flew to his.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington smiled, taking perverse pleasure in her vulnerability and embarrassment. He smiled impishly at her as he leaned on the bed beside her. "What's wrong, baby?" he asked. "Am I being a bad boy?"

\* \* \* \*

Sia watched him closely. Her heart rate was through the roof.

Carrington cocked his head. "Let me spank your ass," he rasped



and then climbed onto the bed before she could protest. “Turn over and lay across my lap,” he ordered.

“Carrington!” She was blushing like crazy.

“Talking back to your master gets you another strike.”

Sia covered her face and released an embarrassed laugh.

“Carrington!”

Carrington’s eyes traveled to her hips and lingered on the V sitting between her thighs. “Take off your panties.”

She uncovered her face. She was bright red.

“Come on,” he urged.

Sia obeyed him. She kept her eyes glued to his as she tossed her lacy lingerie on the floor. She smiled sheepishly and covered her breasts.

“Lay over my knee, and don’t you dare hide from me.” He pulled her into him and then positioned her so that she was laying on her stomach with her pussy on his dick. He ran his palm across her round, plump ass.

Sia closed her eyes and bit her bottom lip when he quickly removed his hand.

*Slap!*

“Mmmm...” Sia clutched the comforter. She tried to suppress a scream.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington slapped her ass hard again with his strong hand and enjoyed the sound of her whimper. He slapped her again and watched with pleasure as she briefly locked her buttocks. The brief motion made her pussy kiss his dick harder, and that made him harder.

Carrington placed his opposite hand on the small of her back and then rubbed her ass softly with his spanking hand. He rubbed his hand up and down...and then swept it around in a full circle. He raised his hand and slapped her ass harder one final time. Sia whimpered again

and then arched into his dick more as he rubbed her tingling backside.

“Good girl,” he rasped, before shifting to lie on top of her. He settled his mouth beside her ear. “Did you like that?” He began to grind against her behind.

\* \* \* \*

Sia closed her eyes and nodded. Indeed, she did like getting her ass spanked by her strong, naughty man.

“Mm...” He groaned as he continued to grind against her soft tush. His dick was slipping between her ass cheeks. “Do you like this, too?”

“Mmhm...” Sia could barely think.

“Me,” he grunted, “too.” Carrington’s eyes rolled back. She was soft and wet in the crease of her ass cheeks.

“Make love to me,” Sia whispered. “*Please.*”

“Is your pussy nice and wet?” Carrington continued to move his hips back and forth against her ass.

“Mmhm...” she moaned.

“Let me see.”

Carrington rolled off her and then turned her over on her back. He lifted her legs high and then spread them wide to see what lay between. He smiled naughtily to himself. She was ready for him. He placed each of her legs on each of his shoulders, coming up closer on his knees.

Sia pushed herself up with her hands and used them to hold herself up as he slowly penetrated her juicy pussy. She pushed herself up more and felt him come in deeper. He withdrew almost all of the way and then slowly entered her again.

Sia moaned loudly and braced herself as he withdrew again. She moaned when he penetrated her again. He continued to break into her at a slow, controlled pace.

Sia closed her eyes tight. She could feel his dick sliding in and

out, brushing against her sodden walls.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington's eyes rolled back as he began to rotate his hips against her. She was so damn hot and *tight* inside. His breathing grew ragged, and sweat formed at his brow. The feeling was overwhelmingly pleasurable, and he didn't want it to end.

"Sia, oh Sia," he rasped. Sweat dripped down his forehead, and his hair was getting damper. Carrington arched into her even more. He just couldn't get enough. He missed being close to her, being inside of her.

\* \* \* \*

"Ah! Ah! Ah!" Sia hissed. He'd buried himself deeper. "I can feel you, baby. You're in so deep...so deep inside." When she opened her eyes, she saw the look of pleasure on Carrington's face. His eyes were closed tight, and he was biting his lower lip. "Carrington," she sobbed. She knew that look. It was his orgasm face. She wasn't ready for him to come yet. She wanted the moment to last a little longer.

Carrington continued to grind her.

"Carrington," she said a little louder.

He continued.

"Baby, please, *stop!*"

Carrington opened his eyes and came to a halt. "What's wrong?"

"I want to taste you. You can finish in my mouth, just not now."

He pulled out of her before lowering her legs. He lay on his back, his cock standing tall and glistening with her nectar. "Sit on my face," he told her.

She remained where she was.

He arched an eyebrow. "I want you to sit on my face while you suck my dick."

Sia's heart sank, and the color completely drained from her face.

Carrington patted his thigh. "Come on. I'm hungry, and I know you're thirsty."

Sia covered her face as she blushed. Carrington *never* used to talk like that. She squealed. Before she could protest, he'd grabbed her and sat her sopping cunt inches above his face. He placed his hands on her curvy hips and inhaled her scent before tasting her pussy.

"Carrington." Sia whispered his name and closed her eyes. She released a feminine growl and thrust her cunt back against his wet tongue. "You're so bad."

She lowered her head so that his dick was leveled at her mouth. She could taste herself on his swollen flesh. She felt Carrington draw back from her warm mound and arch his hips forward as she took him into her mouth. She sucked him gladly as he nuzzled his nose against her cunt. She gripped his hips and then dragged them down his thighs, bringing them back up to his groin before...finally...clutching his big, round balls.

Carrington gasped as he arched into her hands, silently pleading for more as she blatantly massaged his testicles and sucked his dick. He shuddered. Sia was rolling his balls around and lubricating his shaft with her watering mouth. He closed his eyes as she dragged her mouth down the long, thick base of his penis.

"Ah!" He gasped as he slid his hands up her back.

She was deep-throating him.

"Mmm," Sia moaned as she dragged her mouth back up to his swollen crown.

She feather-brushed his plum-sized head with the tip of her tongue for a moment before sitting up straight and grasping his shaft with both of her hands. She slid them in opposite directions, firmly but carefully twisting her hands as they traveled up...and down...

When he became dry again, she lubricated him again with her mouth, enjoying the feel of him shuddering beneath her.

Carrington dug his fingers into her hips as he tensed.

She slid her mouth back up his shaft and then licked the pre-cum seeping from his head. She plugged his hole with her thumb while squeezing his shaft with both of her hands.

They waited for him to calm down again.

When he did, Sia decided to turn up the heat. She took her middle and ring finger and massaged the area between his anus and testicles, increasing the pressure as time progressed. She raised her free hand and stroked his shaft as she continued to massage his perineum with her fingers. She lowered her head to stroke his head with her tongue simultaneously.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington drew in a shaky breath and began to groan. He squirmed with delight as the tension built in his cock. He was reaching his peak again, and the feeling was far more intense this time around. He closed his eyes tight and braced himself for the final release.

“Sia, I’m about to come.” He grunted, gripping her hips.

Sia covered his head with her mouth and continued to torture him with her painstaking procedure.

Carrington arched his feet and roared when the tension finally flowed to his swollen head. His cock gushed sticky, white fluid as it throbbed in his lover’s hand and mouth.

“Keep going,” he begged. “Oh my God, don’t stop.”

Sia lifted her head and swallowed. She fixed her eyes on his cock and watched him squirt out as she continued to pump him firmly with her hand, massaging his perineum with the other. Her mouth fell agape as she rubbed the head of his penis against her face.

Carrington ejaculated again, leaving his mark on the soft flesh of Sia’s face. He groaned and held her close, panting heavily as the last of his seed spurted out of his sensitive cock.

Sia gasped and then closed her eyes. Carrington was stroking her with his tongue in desperate need for a taste. Her pussy was soft and her cream was better than any icing he'd ever tried. He plunged his tongue deeper and devoured in her cream, slipping his tongue deeper inside with each stroke.

"Carrington," she groaned, straining her dripping pussy against his tongue as his cum dripped down her face.

He slid his hand to the middle of her ass and then slithered his middle finger into her crease, penetrating her anus as he began to suck her clit.

Sia sucked in her breath. Her mouth was agape, and she was panting lightly. He was wiggling his thick, brawny finger around in her ass and swirling his tongue around inside her hole again. His breathing grew ragged, and he could feel Sia arching into his hand. That let him know she liked what he was doing. He wiggled his fingers back and forth at a faster pace.

\* \* \* \*

"Carrington!" Sia cried, clutching on to his strong thighs. She panted heavily. What he was doing to her felt like heaven, and she didn't want the feeling to end.

"Lift up and turn around," Carrington commanded after removing his finger from her ass.

"Huh?" She was drunk from pleasure.

"Lift up and turn around. I want you straddling my face."

Sia wasn't as shy anymore, but still, her heart thumped at the authoritative tone in his voice and at the actions he commanded that she perform.

"Do it."

She obeyed him, repositioning herself so that her thighs were straddling his face. She wiped the rest of his sperm off her face and

then held on to the top of the headboard for support. A frown formed at her brow, and she closed her eyes. “Oh, God,” she sighed.

Carrington was hitting the most sensitive area of her clit with the tip of his tongue. He created an electrifying sensation of warm waves swarming through her swollen sex button.

Sia squealed in desperation as she thrust her pussy against his tongue. She was reaching her peak. Carrington gripped her hips tight and covered her clit with his mouth. He sucked her passionately. He took his left hand and penetrated her pussy with his fingers while he kept his right hand on her hip. He moved his fingers rapidly in a scissor-like motion inside her, tapping her G-spot with both brawny fingers.

“Ah!” Sia tensed and lifted up, slightly closing her thighs on his hand.

The explosive sensations she felt in her pussy were caused by him moving his fingers back and forth against her G-spot. It overwhelmed her with intensifying pleasure and was like a powerful electric shock touching every part of her pussy.

“Ah! Carrington!” she cried, latching on to the headboard, desperately trying to hold herself up.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington was pleased. This was exactly what he wanted. He’d often fantasized about doing dirty things to her, and this was just one of the things he’d had in mind. He listened to the feminine sounds escaping her throat with perverse pleasure, becoming more aroused as he played with her throbbing wet genital.

“Open up,” he demanded.

“I *can’t*,” Sia whined. “It’s too strong.” She was tense all over.

“Open your legs,” he demanded again.

She whimpered as she slowly parted her thighs. “Carrington!” She squealed.

He sucked her harder and increased the speed of his fingers inside her.

“Carrington, I’m about to come! I’m about to—*Ah...*” Tears streamed down her cheeks, and her juices squirted out as she convulsed on top of him.

Carrington opened his mouth wide and allowed her to come in his mouth. He swallowed at a fast enough pace to drink all of her nectar. He quickly pulled his fingers out and covered her pussy with his mouth. He held her firmly in place as he drank the last of her juice.

He slowly dragged his tongue through her lips...and then eagerly made his way through the wet crease of her plump backside. He stopped to swallow and then thoroughly slid his tongue from the crease of her ass through the lips of her pussy one final time as her breathing slowly subsided.

After a moment, Sia shifted and came down on top of him so that her breasts were pressing against his. Carrington nuzzled his nose against hers and then kissed her damp cheek. He was hard again, and his cock pressed firmly against her cunt. He opened his mouth and began to nibble on her bottom lip.

Sia rotated her hips slowly, adjusting herself so that her swollen clit was grinding against his cock. Carrington sat there for a moment and allowed her to play with him. She arched into him sporadically, moaning softly as warm aftershocks traveled through her clit.

“You’ve got one more hole to fill,” she whispered against his lips.

“Are you sure you want to do this?” he rasped.

She nodded. “I’ve been wanting to try it with you for a while now.”

“Have you done this before?”

“No.”

Carrington pecked her softly on the mouth. “Tell me when you want me to stop or slow down, babe.”

“Okay.” Sia briefly slipped her tongue inside his mouth and thrust her pussy against his cock before climbing off him to reposition



herself.

Carrington stood on his knees, gripping her hips as he came behind her. He shifted so that her anus was in line with his crown. He spit on his hand and then lubricated the head of his cock.

“All right, baby,” he warned, holding on to her hips again. He arched his hips inward and teased her hole with his plum-sized head.

Sia spread her legs a little wider and strained her hole against his cold, wet head.

Carrington licked his lips with infatuation and then slowly penetrated her.

Sia closed her eyes tight and squeezed the sheets as Carrington carefully entered her.

“Are you okay?” he asked.

“Yes,” she whimpered. “I’m fine.”

“Are you sure?”

“Baby, keep going, I’m fine.” Sia reached up and clutched his right wrist with her hand.

“Okay,” he said softly and slowly completed the process of his penetration.

Sia whimpered again.

“Baby,” he muttered.

“I’m okay, honey,” she insisted.

When he was completely inside of her, he closed his eyes, and gently thrust his hips forward.

\* \* \* \*

Sia whined as he did this and gasped for air. She closed her eyes tight and found his rhythm. It was soft, erotic, and good. *So good.*

Sia was overwhelmed by the pressure of his dick inside of her ass and the blistering sensations bolting through her pelvic area. The feeling was nearly unbearable and was a powerful combination of pleasure and pain as one. She thought she was going to explode.

Carrington came down on his hands so that his strong chest was pressing against her back. He slowly slid his dick in and out of her ass, adding a little more pressure as he lifted his hand to boldly massage her clitoris. His breathing was ragged, and he continuously moaned in her ear. He pressed his fingers against her swollen clit a little harder, causing her to reach her peak even faster.

Sia's mouth fell agape as the electrifying sensations built with intensity. She squeezed the sheets tighter with her left hand and his wrist with her right.

"God, Carrington!" she cried.

He moved his hips faster against her ass.

"Oh!" she groaned, bouncing her delicious cheeks up and down against her man.

"Damn!" Carrington growled.

Sia sucked in her breath and closed her eyes.

"You're so nasty, baby," Carrington whispered in her ear, "so nasty. But I like you like that. I like you like that."

"Ah!" Sia cried.

He fucked her harder. "I see those pretty tits bouncing up and down as you shake that juicy ass against my balls." He was watching her through the mirror on the dresser in front of them. "Oh, baby, you make me wanna do bad things to you."

"Carrington!" she cried. She was quivering from the torturous pleasure of electrifying bombs exploding with every tap, thrust, and flick of her lover's thick finger on her throbbing clit. Sia dared not plead for mercy as she quivered helplessly from the feelings of her powerful orgasm.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington listened to the sound of her heavy breathing as he slid his middle finger through the crease of her pussy. He stroked her for a moment and then slid his hand to her breast, squeezing it as he

erupted inside of her. Warm waves of pleasure surged through his dick, and the feeling of his sperm spilling out into his woman made him want to scream. He gasped for air, and his eyes were partly open as he rode against her, willingly allowing the feeling to go on... and on...

A moment later, he'd finally calmed down and was able to slowly pull his flaccid dick out of Sia's ass. She moaned as he did this, clearly loving the way his dick felt as he pulled it out of her.

Sia and Carrington lay in one another's arms the rest of that night, laughing and joking about their future as they reflected on their past. Carrington kissed Sia's belly and ran his hand across it as he whispered sweet nothings to his child. She watched him with loving eyes, blushing when he referred to her as their baby's pretty mommy. They talked about plans and dreams, wishes they wished to see fulfilled, and the type of life they wanted to give their child...and protect it from. A life without secrets, lies, and slavery.

## Chapter 7

Sia gasped as she opened her eyes to the bright, shining sun. She was awakened by the wet stroking between her legs. When she looked down to see what was going on, she was stunned to find Carrington's bobbing head of dark hair. Her hair covered her shoulders, shielding the bruises he left on her neck last night. Something came over them last night. Sexual desire was at a high, and no one orgasm seemed to be enough. Carrington left his scent all over her, washing away Jordon's for good.

The handsome man lifted his head and smiled genuinely at her. "Wake up, sleepy head," he said, and then returned to his morning breakfast.

Sia sucked in her breath and ran her fingers through her lover's hair as he slowly but thoroughly dragged his tongue through her pussy.

Carrington smiled to himself as he lifted his head and teased her clit with the tip of his tongue.

Sia giggled impishly to herself. "Are you playing with me?"

"Mmhm." He continued to tease her.

Sia's smile faded as she closed her eyes. "Keep doing it. It feels good."

She sighed with satisfaction as Carrington opened and closed his mouth on her cunt. She was sexually aroused and sensitive to the touch of his tender lips. He was spoiling her rotten.

"Mmm..." She moaned, spreading her legs wider.

Carrington grasped her hips and pulled her into him more, grasping her tender ass cheeks as he thoroughly licked her with his

tongue. He surged his tongue inside her hole and lapped her walls until she quivered with pleasure. Sia moaned as she crushed his face into her pussy, rolling her hips forward to the rhythm of his tongue.

“Ah!” she sobbed. “Ah! Ah! Ah...”

Carrington brought his lips to her clit and began to suck her. He sucked her hard, declaring his undying love for her.

Sia closed her eyes tight and squeezed the sheets, bracing herself for the big release. Her mouth fell agape, and her sobbing became louder.

“Carrington!”

He sucked her until the powerful sensation finally made her wail in desperation.

“Carrington!”

Sia writhed beneath him, and her knees began to shake uncontrollably. She felt weak and vulnerable under his control, helplessly bucking against his face as he fucked her passionately with his mouth.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington slowly pulled away from her clit before planting a soft, wet kiss on it. He eagerly inhaled her scent and then slid his tongue through her sopping pussy again, wetting it with his own personal brand of lubricant. He indulged in her cream, constantly breathing in the sweet smell of her womanly aroma. He stroked her again and again with his tongue, holding her firm with his strong masculine hands.

\* \* \* \*

Sia inhaled...and exhaled...as she took in his constant stroking. She felt another orgasm approaching. Carrington went from tasting her to swirling his forefinger around her sensitive clit. He whirled it

around...and then stopped...whirled it around...and then stopped.

“Oh, baby,” she whined. “Baby, you’re torturing me!”

Carrington continued to perform his painstaking process. She knew he was getting revenge on her for torturing him on the days and nights she’d made love to him previously.

“Baby, let me come!” she whined. “*Please* let me come!”

Carrington continued to tease her. When she reached for his hand, he slapped her hand and then pushed it away.

“Carrington, *please*,” she begged.

He didn’t listen.

“Carrington!”

He ignored her.

Sia arched her back. Her clit was throbbing with buildup and tension.

“*Pa-leeeeease!*” she squealed.

After another moment, Carrington finally had mercy on her and sucked her until she came.

Sia shut her eyes and arched her back. She screamed his name and arched her feet. Carrington was sucking her clit like a man desperate for the last drop of water. The overwhelming sensation felt like thunder and lightning acting as one, striking her several times in the clit as she shook violently with ecstasy.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington found pleasure in her torment of bliss and was completely hard after performing thorough oral sex on her. He unashamedly came to his knees. He pierced her eyes with his as he grabbed her by her thighs and held them at his side, keeping her pelvis lifted off the bed. His dick felt heavy, and his swollen head oozed his semen. He bit down on his lower lip and slid his way inside.

Sia hissed. She was clutching the sheets beneath her.

“That’s right, deep inside.” He began to move his hips back and

forth at a slow and steady pace.

“Carrington.”

“Oh yes...Feel me, you naughty little minx.” He grunted, grinding her deeply.

“Awe!” She sobbed. “Oh, Carrington! Carrington!”

\* \* \* \*

Sia’s pussy throbbed with agony. He was stretching her tiny hole wide. The sensation he was creating inside of her gave her a painful pleasure and left her craving more. Damn, he knew how to make love.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington’s eyes rolled back. The head of his fully erect cock was tingling, and pressure was building in his shaft. Sia was tight as hell, and her pussy was just as hot as ever.

“Sia,” he grunted. “God, you feel good.” He continued to rock her with his hips. “Say my name,” he demanded.

“Carrington.”

“Say my name.”

“Carrington!”

“Say my name!”

“Carrington!”

He fucked her harder and faster. “Oh, give me that pussy. Give me that sweet *pussy*.”

Sia continued to make desperate sounds as she panted for air.

\* \* \* \*

“Mmmm...” Carrington groaned, and his face flushed red as he grimaced. Sia squealed and squeezed him with her internal muscles. They crumbled simultaneously, and in that moment, their souls

became one. Sia grasped Carrington's wrists, holding onto him for dear life as she writhed against his dick. Devastating pleasure overwhelmed her throbbing cunt while electrifying sensations took over her body.

Carrington leaned forward, lowering her pelvis as he kissed her lips hard. He kept himself buried as deep as her body would allow. She trembled in his embrace. Sweat covered their bodies, and their body heat warmed the air, filling the room with a scent only they could produce.

Sia slipped her tongue into Carrington's mouth. He responded immediately, stroking her tongue with his as their orgasm slowly subsided. He moaned against her lips and locked his buttocks as the last wave of pleasure left his pulsing cock. He quivered, and then released the tension in his ass. He buried his face in her neck. Nothing but their heavy breathing filled the warm room.

\* \* \* \*

"Baby," Sia said after a moment.

"Hmm?" Carrington lifted his head as he slowly pulled out of her.

Sia moaned as she closed her eyes and clenched her internal muscles until he was completely out of her.

"You're not shy at all anymore," Carrington said as he laid on his side, propping his head up.

Sia opened her eyes and shook her head. "You make me *so* horny," she whispered. She sat up and faced him Indian style.

Carrington's gaze fell in the juncture of her thighs. His eyes quickly flew to hers when she snapped her fingers.

"My eyes are up here."

"I can't help it, you're so pretty."

Sia rolled her eyes. "Anyway." She chuckled when Carrington shot her that "Oh, no, you didn't" facial expression. She'd never get over how cute his imitations of her were. "Stop." She giggled again.



“I’m serious, Carrington—Ah!” She squealed when he grabbed her and laid her on her back. “Carrington!” She squirmed as he tickled her inner thighs.

Sia was extremely ticklish there. Carrington found that out on accident one night when they were in Boston. He was trying to be romantic by giving her a full-body massage, but it wound up being a disaster because she wouldn’t stop laughing when his fingers went to work.

“Carrington!” she cried again.

Carrington chuckled to himself.

“*Baby!*”

Carrington released her and then smiled genuinely. Sia smiled back, admiring the dimple in his cheek.

“You’re such a tickle monster,” she said, and then sat up to kiss him.

“And you’re my little teddy bear.” He reached forward and pulled her into him, planting several kisses on her mouth as she giggled with delight.

Carrington glanced at the digital clock on her nightstand and gave her a little squeeze.

“Crap! What time is it?” Sia jumped up.

“Six forty-five.”

“Oh my God...”

“Why? What’s wrong?” Carrington asked.

“There’s something I have to tell you. I’m not alone in my room.” She struggled to slip her bottoms on.

Carrington tensed. “Who’s in there with you?”

“The Cranes sent that man, that very young man, down here with me.”

Carrington shifted uncomfortably. “Okay.”

“You actually know this guy. His name is Taylor. We met him at the bar. He also lives across the street from me.”

"I remember. So, why is it such a problem that you're here with me?"

"I didn't tell him I was leaving. I left while he was taking a shower. I didn't even bother to leave a note."

Carrington scowled. "What is he, your keeper?"

"No, but he is my partner. If I'm missing for too long and he doesn't know where I am, he might report it to CAA. I don't want them searching for me."

"Do you think he's already made the phone call?"

"I don't know." She pulled her shirt over her head.

"Why don't you call the room?"

"And if he asks where I was?"

"Tell him it's none of his damn business."

"Good one." She ran her fingers through her messy hair as she frantically dialed the number to the room. "Damn it." She slammed the phone down.

"What?"

"No answer." She quickly slipped on her socks and boots.

"Hold on, I'm coming with you."

"No. If you're seen with me, that'll only add to suspicion."

"Well, then, I won't walk so close to you. I'm not letting you go out there alone. It isn't safe." He climbed out of bed and threw his clothes on in record time.

\* \* \* \*

Sia struggled to get her key through the lock of the door. She wondered if Taylor was up yet.

"Need some help?"

She jumped. "What the heck? You just pop up out of nowhere." She focused on jimmying the lock again.

"It's better than *disappearing*."

Sia didn't reply.

“Are we silent now?”

“I don’t have to tell you where I’m going or when I’m coming back. You’re not my damn keeper.” She got the door open.

“Well, considering that we’re partners on a mission that is pretty much a matter of life and death...”

“We’re not partners until New Year’s Eve. That’s two nights from tonight, which is why I can’t understand the reason for the Cranes putting us in the same room so early.”

“Cheaper?”

“A crappy motel would have been cheaper.” Sia walked down the hall and made a beeline for her bedroom, closing the door behind her.

Her hair had grown tremendously, reaching the middle of her back. It was dark and full with loose curls. Sia stood on the scale in her bathroom. She’d gained three more pounds. She turned to face the mirror after stepping off. She framed her belly with her hands and smiled to herself. It was a little pudgier and rounder than the month before. She was beautiful and just knew her baby would be, too.

\* \* \* \*

Taylor peeped down the hall. Sia’s door was closed. He quietly closed his door again and began to talk on his cell phone.

“Yes, I’m here with her right now,” he muttered into the phone.

“And you can’t leave her side?”

“No, it’s against the rules, and if old douche bag finds out, he’ll either question me or fire me on the spot, and you know we can’t afford either of those options at this point.”

“Yeah, you’ve got me there.” There was silence for a moment as the person thought on the other end. “Is there any way you could slip away without anyone knowing?”

“Not likely.”

The person sighed. “Look, you’ve got to think of a way to get out.”

"I've already found a solution."

"What?"

"Tell Sia why I'm here."

"What? Taylor, are you crazy? You know she's engaged to—"

"Not anymore she's not. Her fiancé died almost seven months ago."

"But she's having his baby. Surely, Frank is going to take care of her and that baby. I'm telling you, she's in good with the Cranes. You expose us and you're dead, one way...or another."

Taylor pinched the flesh between his eyes and exhaled deeply. "Would you be quiet and listen? The baby isn't Jake's."

The person gasped on the other end. "Whose is it?"

"I don't know yet."

"Has she or Frank mentioned anything?"

"No. I'm not even sure if the Cranes are aware. Hell, I hadn't even noticed until I saw her without her clothes on."

"You saw her without her clothes? How? Taylor, what the hell is going on down there?"

"Calm down. It was an accident." Taylor ran his hand across his crown of silky waves. "Bottom line, if the baby is Jake's, she lives. If it's Carrington's, she dies. I know that for a fact."

"So what the hell does that have to do with us?"

"I'm going to *tell* you," he gritted. "Sia is in a dilemma right now. At this point, she's in a lose-lose situation. It's either lose her life or lose Carrington...who probably is her life."

"*This* is where we come in. If the baby turns out to be Carrington's, I'll promise to alter the DNA results before the Cranes see them so that she lives. But *only* if she promises to team up with us."

"And that's when you'll spill the beans about your true identity."

"Now you're thinking." Taylor smiled.

"Question."

"I'm listening."

“What if the baby *is* Jake’s?”

Taylor sighed. “I’ll have to find another bargain to make with her.”

“This is a risky game you’re playing.”

“But it’s the only solution.”

“Well, be careful.”

“I always am.”

“Talk with you soon.”

“Bye.”

Taylor turned to face the door. The only risk was Sia’s life. If she didn’t agree to compromise, he’d have no choice but to let her die. One way or another, the Cranes wanted her blood. Things were becoming a little more complicated, and she knew too much for her own good. If the Cranes were anything like he’d heard, Sia was sure to die on this mission.

Taylor sighed and rubbed the hair at his nape. He was running out of time. He wasn’t so much concerned about his life as he was Sia’s. He wanted desperately to save her life, but in order to do that, he had to risk it, too. If Sia did ever breathe a word to anyone about who he was, PSA, not him, but Hector’s men, would come after her...and *he* would be next.

*The ball is in your court, Sia. It’s either do or die.*

\* \* \* \*

Sia glanced up from her book. “Come in,” she said, and then placed her book beside her, sitting up straight.

Taylor walked in, wearing that million-dollar smile she loved. “Am I interrupting?”

“Oh, no.” She waved him over. “Make yourself comfortable, Zac.”

He sat on the edge of her bed and held her gaze for a moment. “How are you?”

"I'm fine." Sia smiled warmly.

"Good." He took a deep breath and then cleared his throat. "Okay, Sia, it's no secret as to why we're both here."

She sat straighter.

He moistened his lips. "The point I'm trying to make here is both of us have lied about who we are."

Sia was all ears.

"The thing is, I can help you, but I'll need your help in return."

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about the baby, your involvement with the Cranes, and your relationship with Carrington."

"How the hell do you know about all this?"

"I have my ways."

"Well, fill me in."

"Sia, calm down—"

"Hell no, I'm not going to *calm* down! Who are you?"

"If you listen, I will tell you."

She shifted in her seat. He had her undivided attention.

"My name is Taylor Ustinov. I work for Hector Petrov. I went over to the US in hopes of exposing the Cranes and stopping them."

"From what?"

"Ruining more lives. They stole valuable information from PSA, and we're trying to get it back."

"And how are you supposed to help me?"

"I know you want to put an end to all of this, too."

"What if I told you I already had this taken care of?"

"I'd say we're more powerful as an army."

She gnawed on her jaw as she considered what he was saying. "Wait...Hold on..." She thought for a moment. "How did you get past the Cranes?"

"I was born in the US, so moving back to the states wasn't a problem."

“But surely they did a background check. I mean hiring in the CAA isn’t something that’s taken lightly.”

“I have friends in high places.” He smiled and pointed a finger at her.

Sia exhaled. “How do I even know you’re who you say you are?”

“Do you honestly think I would lie about being affiliated with Hector? This isn’t a game, little girl—”

“That doesn’t tell me anything but to make assumptions about you.”

Taylor took a deep breath. “All right, I’ll let you in on a little secret. No one, not even Hector, knows this.”

“Oh God, there’s more?”

Taylor chuckled. “You have no idea.” He sucked in a breath and then blew out. “Okay, this might freak you out, but it’s the only way I can convince you.”

“All right...”

“What color have my eyes been this entire time?”

It had just occurred to Sia. The entire time they were talking his eyes hadn’t changed once. “Brown.”

“Ask me something you know couldn’t possibly be true if I said yes or no. If I’m telling the truth my eyes will remain brown. If I’m lying, they’ll turn blue.”

Sia frowned. “Okaaay...” This guy *was* strange. She got her act together and then thought for a moment. “Are you a woman?”

“Yes.” His eyes went from dark brown to baby blue.

Sia smiled. “Wait, you might be telling the truth.”

Taylor chuckled. “Trust me. That was definitely a lie.”

“Are you a man?”

“Yes.” His eyes became brown again.

Sia’s eyes grew wide. “What the f—”

“I can’t believe you were about to use that word!” He gasped. “There is a child in this room!” He pointed to her belly.

Sia laughed. He was strange but funny, facial expressions and all.

“All right, let me try again.” She thought of something else. “Are you straight?”

He sighed. “Really, Sia?”

Sia smiled impishly.

“Yes.” His eyes remained brown.

“Do you think I’m pretty?”

“Yes. Sia, I think you’re *beautiful*.” Brown.

She smiled. “Are you a giraffe?”

“Yes.” Blue.

“Do you like food?”

“Yes.” Brown.

“Do you lay chicken eggs?”

“All the time.” Blue.

“Do you have three eyes and four arms?”

“I sure do.” His eyes remained blue.

“Tell me the truth. Are you looking me in the eye?”

“Yes.” His eyes became brown again.

Sia slapped him across the face hard.

“What the hell?” He snapped.

“Did that piss you off?”

“Hell yeah!” His eyes remained brown.

“I’m sorry. I had to do it.”

“Well, I hope you trust me now.”

“Almost.”

“*Almost*? You physically abuse me and you *almost* believe me?”

“Here are the million dollar questions, Sonny.” She squinted her eyes and glared at him while rubbing her hands together. “Do you really work for Hector Petrov?”

“Yes.” His eyes remained brown.

“Are you really going to help me if I agree to team up with you?”

“Yes.” His eyes remained brown.

“How?”



He drew in a deep breath. "I apologize in advance for prying, but I need to know."

"Okay."

"Who fathered your child?"

"Carrington."

He nodded. "Sia, do you know what the Cranes will do to you if they find out?"

"They already have. Jordon knows."

"Sia."

"But it's okay. It's okay, Taylor. Carrington's going to help me, and now you will, too."

\* \* \* \*

He gazed at her with dove eyes. *Baby...If you were mine, I swear they'd never touch you.*

"You'll still help, right?" she urged.

"Of course, Sia."

"Okay." She nodded. "Okay. Tay?"

"Yes?"

"How dangerous is this?" Her face showed a little fear.

He stared at her for a moment, wishing he could lie his way out. "Very."

Sia sighed and ran her hand across the crown of her head. "If I agree to help you, will you promise me one more thing?"

"That depends."

"We *all* come out of this alive. You, me, Carrington, and my baby."

Taylor hesitated before answering. "Everything will work out for the better."

Her voice broke. "Promise me." She was searching for the truth. She knew now that it lay deep within his eyes.

"I'll do everything I can, Sia."

“No, you’ll do more. You’ll do more than that. *Please*, Tay!”  
He reached out to stroke her cheek. “You have my word.”

## Chapter 8

It was Christmas morning, and Taylor was still sleeping. Poor guy, he'd spent hours working all day yesterday. Sia left the bathroom door open. She'd convinced herself that she was simply worried about it becoming too warm, but her heart knew better. Taylor was tall, strong, and attractive. He had the ability to make any woman melt, in love or not. The tile in the bathroom was beautiful, and the candles she'd lit gave the area a golden glow.

Sia was feeling tense and thought a warm bath should do the trick. She climbed into the Jacuzzi, kneeling slowly. The water was hot, and the soap bubbles instantly clung to her tingling, pale flesh. The overall scent in the master bathroom was heavenly, and she basked in it. She leaned until she was lying on her back and then propped both of her knees up. She closed her eyes and began to imagine Carrington lying beneath her with Taylor at her feet. What she'd give to have them holding her at that moment.

Sia adjusted her hips so that she could be a little more comfortable. The water swooshed and blocked out the sound of Taylor opening his bedroom door.

\* \* \* \*

Taylor had just woken up and wore nothing but his dark green pajama bottoms. He could smell the incense of Sia's candles in his room. Instinctively, he followed the smell. It led him straight to the master bathroom.

Sia was lying still with her eyes closed. She was covered with bubbles, and her pretty, brown hair lay plastered to her arms. Her face was damp, and her well-defined, caramel thighs glistened in the candlelight. Taylor marveled at her beauty. She looked like an angel from heaven, delicate, vulnerable, and absolutely stunning.

Sia opened her eyes. She tensed at the sight of him.

"You're beautiful," he rasped.

"What are you doing in here?"

He took a step closer and then kneeled at the Jacuzzi. "Last time I checked, we're both staying here."

"Get out. You have to leave."

"Why?"

Sia sat up and covered her full breasts with her hands. "Because we can't do this. It's wrong."

"Oh, come off it. You know as well as I do that you wanted me to see you."

"What?"

"You purposely left the door open so that I would walk by and find you lying in here naked."

"That's absurd! You were sleeping!"

"But you hoped I wouldn't be for long." Taylor stood and placed his hands on his hips.

"You're full of yourself." Sia laid back down.

He laughed impishly.

As if on cue, a knock came at the door. "I wonder who that could be," Taylor muttered, and then headed out.

\* \* \* \*

The knock came again. Taylor headed over to the door with a cocksure grin. When he opened it, his smile faded.

"I need to speak to Sia," Carrington demanded.

"What, did you follow her all the way here to Russia?"

“What?” Carrington stepped up to his challenger, daring to strike him with his bare hands.

“What’s going on out here?” Sia was adjusting the belt on her robe.

Carrington glanced past Taylor and then forced his way around him, brushing his shoulder against his. “Hey, babe.” He wrapped his arms around Sia and then planted a passionate kiss on her lips.

Taylor shifted uncomfortably and glanced away.

“Um, you can stay if you like—”

“I don’t need you to tell me—”

“But we’ll probably be a little loud. Just a heads up.” Carrington’s glare was hot as fire and as cold as ice.

Sia swallowed and narrowed her gaze to the ground.

Taylor glanced from Carrington’s face to hers. He said nothing more before storming out.

Carrington turned to face Sia again. “Are you okay?”

“Are *you* okay?” she asked with raised eyebrows. She frowned. “What happened to your head?”

There was a bloody scratch on his eyebrow.

“It’s nothing. Just a little scratch. I’ll be fine.”

“It doesn’t look like a little scratch.”

“It’s just a little cut. It’ll heal.” Carrington brought her hand down and kissed it.

She continued to stare at his head. “Sit on the couch, I’ll be right back.” She started down the hall.

“I’m fine!” Carrington called after her. “Really!” By the time he sat down, Sia was back with a first aid kit.

She placed the white box on the couch beside him and began to rummage through it for supplies. When she found what she needed, she pulled Carrington’s baby hairs back with her hand and proceeded to clean his cut with a small piece of cloth she held with the other.

Carrington made a noise and gently squeezed her waist with his hands.

"I'm sorry," Sia whispered, continuing to dab his head gently.

"It's not your fault." He winced.

"How'd you get it, anyway?"

"Uh..." He hesitated as he tried to think of a lie. "What?"

"Don't you lie to me."

"I slipped on some ice running across the street." It wasn't exactly a lie.

Sia set the used piece of cloth down and then grabbed another one. She wet it with alcohol again, and then continued her process of cleaning out his cut. Carrington closed his eyes tight and gritted his teeth.

"Ugh, poor baby," Sia whispered. "Honey, I think you might need stitches."

"No," he gasped. "It's not that bad."

Sia shook her head. *Just like a man*. She balled up the used cloth and then reached for two thin white strips. "Tilt your head back for me," she said softly. He obeyed her. Sia laid the strips on his head and then reached for the medical tape. She tore off two pieces and then tapered the two thin strips down onto his eyebrow. She finger-combed his short bangs back. She framed his face with her hands and gazed at him for a moment.

"Good as new," she grinned.

"Thanks, Doc." Carrington smiled back softly and then gave her hips a little wiggle.

Sia leaned in and planted a soft kiss on his lips.

"You're so beautiful," Carrington muttered against her mouth.

Sia lifted her head as she ran her fingers through his hair. She took another step closer. Carrington nestled his face between her breasts before turning to kiss her left one. He kissed it again...and again. He opened his mouth around it and sucked her through the silky fabric. Sia arched into his mouth. Her nipple was hardening, straining against the warmth of his tongue.

Carrington reached up and peeled her robe open. He leaned in and pecked her nipple softly as he opened her robe all the way. He wrapped his arms around her waist and then sucked on her hard little bud.

Sia furrowed her brow, and she whimpered as he sucked harder. She clutched his hair as he slid his hands down her torso.

Carrington released her wet, sharpened button and moved on to her right breast, drawing her nipple into his mouth until it, too, was nice and hard. He placed a hand on her hip and then brought the other between her thighs. He pushed his palm up and cupped her warm mound.

\* \* \* \*

Sia spread her legs wider when Carrington slipped his middle finger inside her pussy. She gasped and arched into him when he began to grind the heel of his palm against her clit. He waved his finger back and forth inside her. She closed her eyes and then locked her buttocks to increase the pleasure. Blood flowed to her pelvic area, and she could feel her climax nearing sooner than usual.

Sia's breathing grew ragged, and her heart began to pound. She arched into her lover's hand even more and squeezed her ass cheeks harder. She whimpered as Carrington increased the pressure and speed of his hand.

"Oh God...Oh God...Oh God," she whispered, anticipating the big release. She was desperate for an orgasm.

Carrington pushed his finger up farther. It was his silent way of telling her what he was going to do with his cock.

"Huh!" Sia threw her head back and rode his finger. She closed her thighs on his hand and clutched his hair, begging him to continue stroking her G-spot.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington's nostril flared and his dick became hard as stone. Her pussy was swelling around his finger. That had happened before when they made love last night. She'd come all over his face and inside his mouth. He sighed with pleasure at the memory. He'd cherished every moment of it.

"Babe, don't come yet," he urged.

Sia looked into his eyes. She held a pained expression on her face. "I don't know if I can hold off."

"Babe, please." He slowly pulled his finger out of her hole and covered her sweet mound with his hand.

\* \* \* \*

Sia panted heavily, pressing his hand against her pussy as she willed herself to calm down. It was a minute before the feeling slowly dissipated.

Carrington quickly stripped out of his garments. His shirt, pants, and undergarment quickly covered the floor. He didn't bother to remove his shoes or socks. He sat back against the couch naked from the legs up, and then pulled Sia into him. "Get on," he said. He gripped her hips with both hands and then positioned her hips so that her pussy hovered over his penis. He laughed impishly. "You're juices are going to be drenched all over my dick by the time we're done, you naughty little minx." He reached up with one hand and combed his fingers through her hair. "You'll be screaming in no time."

She opened her mouth on his and then stroked his tongue with hers. She removed her robe from her body completely and then lowered herself to slowly brush the lips of her pussy against his swollen head.

Carrington's breathing grew ragged, and he began to moan. He slid his hands across her ass cheeks and gripped her firmly.



Sia parted her legs even more as she lowered herself on top of him.

Their tongues glided and stroked, whirling around as Sia and Carrington slowly fucked each other. Their hips thrust forward and backward in unison.

“Mmm,” Sia moaned against his mouth as he pressed her against him. The motion forced her legs to open wider.

Carrington broke their kiss and aimed for the right side of her neck. “Mm, mm, mm...” He grunted repeatedly as he sucked her glistening flesh.

Sia framed Carrington’s head with her hands and then looked to her left, in the direction of the door. She watched with anticipation as it quietly opened. Her heart sank, and her blood rushed. Taylor had walked in, surely but quietly. Sia shifted her hands to Carrington’s shoulders. She fucked him deeper and moved her hips faster as she held Taylor’s gaze.

Her mouth was agape, and her sobs were strident. Making love to Carrington was always mind blowing, but having an audience simply added to the thrill.

\* \* \* \*

Taylor’s blood rushed straight to his cock, and the bulge in his pants increased in size. He quietly closed the door and then leaned against the wall beside it. He reached for the zipper of his pants...and then pulled his cock out. He spit on his hand and stroked his cock hard, watching with infatuation as Sia fucked Carrington on the couch. Her cries were loud, and her pretty tits flopped as she rode his dick. Her gaze burned him, and the look of pleasure on her face made him want to come right there.

Taylor panted heavily as he pumped his cock faster.

“Finish with me,” Sia sobbed. “Finish with me!”

Taylor bit down hard and suppressed a groan.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington roared aloud and arched into her as her pussy clamped down and her juices came gushing out, spilling all over him and on the couch.

“Aw!” she hissed. “Aw, aw, *aw*!” She threw her head back. Her sodden walls were widening with her arousal, and electrifying sensations worked endlessly within her pussy. “Oh my *God*! Ah! Ah! Ah!” She closed her eyes tight and strained her hips forward as the feeling went on. She was tense all over, but her pelvic muscles were going crazy with spasmodic movement.

\* \* \* \*

Semen spurted out of Taylor’s long, thick cock. He convulsed beneath his hand as he kept his eyes glued on Sia. They were finishing together.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington glanced over to his left and found Taylor standing there against the door with lust in his eyes. He sent a wry smile and then turned to face Sia again. He wasn’t done yet. He continued to fuck her mercilessly as he enjoyed the feeling of her pussy pulsing against his sensitive cock. She was nice and wet, just the way he liked her. He sucked in his breath, bracing himself for what was about to come gushing from his dick. The feeling was strong as ever and intensifying by the moment. He closed his eyes and thrust forward one more time before he finally surrendered. He roared in agony. It was like fire and sperm had become one, bursting from his pulsing dick like bullets in a fully loaded gun.

Carrington squeezed her hips with his strong hands as he closed his eyes tight. He squeezed his buttocks hard. The release of semen was a feeling beyond words, and it left him high on ecstasy. He groaned aloud and arched his hips into her more. Her pussy was hot and hugging his dick like a snake suffocating its prey.

Carrington bit his bottom lip and closed his eyes as the last of her spasms tapped his penis.

Nothing but the sound of their gasps filled the air.

“Mmm...” Sia sighed. She was still quivering from her orgasm. She closed her eyes for a moment and then leaned her head against Carrington’s.

Carrington looked up and planted a kiss on her mouth. He sucked the top of her lip, and she sucked the bottom of his.

She pulled away, and they glanced to the left. Taylor was gone.

## Chapter 9

“It’s about time!” Rachel allowed Taylor to come inside her tiny apartment and then secured the lock behind them. “What took you so long? I’ve been leaving you voicemails all morning!”

Taylor made his way over to the couch and collapsed. He was wearing a suit and tie.

“Well?” Rachel folded her arms

Taylor framed his forehead with the arc of his hand and then rubbed his fingers back and forth for a moment. “Where do you think I was? Haven’t you looked out the window or watched the news? Traffic is a bitch out there. Everyone’s out shopping for that stupid party.”

“The sun hasn’t even risen yet.”

He raised his eyebrows at her. “Honey, this is *Russia*. *Rush*-uh.”

Rachel pursed her lips and nodded in agreement. “So, have you spoken with Sia?”

“Not since yesterday.” The memory of her flirting with him with her eyes as she rode Carrington yesterday filled his mind. Taylor walked across the living room and made his way into the kitchen.

Rachel followed him.

He grabbed a glass and filled it with tap water. He leaned against the counter as he drank the cold water.

“What’s going to happen after tonight?”

Taylor shrugged.

“What do you mean you don’t know?”

Taylor placed the glass down on the countertop and then rubbed his temples. “I mean, I can’t predict the future.”

“You could predict the future a couple of days ago.”

Taylor stood up straight and walked out of the kitchen. “Jesus, Rachel, straighten up. That expression looks ridiculous on your face.”

She followed him out. “She knows our secret. Piss her off and we’re done.”

“I’m the one you should be worried about pissing off, not her. Did you even hack in and get the codes?”

Rachel momentarily excused herself from the room. She was back in a flash with a silver thumb drive and a solemn look on her face. “You think you’re agitated now, just wait until you see what’s on this hard drive.”

\* \* \* \*

Sia woke to the brightness of the sun peering through the crack of the drapes hanging in her room. She glanced at the digital clock on the nightstand beside her bed. It was seven thirty. She placed a hand on her forehead, inhaled deeply, and then yawned as she closed her eyes to stretch. A knock came at the door, and as if on cue, her cell phone rang. It was Jordon. The knock came again.

“Yeah!” she shouted.

Taylor opened the door, and the delicious smell of pancakes soared through her room. It was the day of the mission. Carrington had to leave early. He had the most important role of the night.

“I made pancakes.”

Sia frowned and looked down at her lap. Jordon had left a voicemail. “Oh, really? I didn’t notice.”

Taylor leaned against her doorpost. He was still wearing his shirt and tie. “Oh, really? Sinuses kicking in already?”

Sia made a mocking noise and then rolled her eyes. She wanted to hate him even more. He was growing on her, and in a way that frightened her. She wanted to loathe him, but only because he managed to arouse her in such a powerful way.

“So, do you want any?”

“I don’t know, I have to check for poison first,” she chided.

“There are a lot of things I’d love to do to you right now, and trust me, poisoning isn’t one of them.”

Sia didn’t reply.

Taylor held her gaze as he approached her.

She sucked in her breath, and her heart fell into the pit of her stomach.

He straddled her legs with one of his and kept the other on the floor. He leaned forward and kept one hand on the bed while he framed her jaw line with the other.

“Don’t.” Sia’s voice was low and demanding.

“Why not?” he rasped, glancing at her lips and then back up to her eyes. “You know you want me to.”

She pulled away. “You’re so far off base it sickens me.”

“That’s not what you said yesterday.”

“I was making love to Carrington.”

“But your eyes were on me. They danced like fire as you moved your body for *me*. Admit it, Sia. You want me just as bad.”

“I was only looking at you because you were watching me from the corner like a lovesick—”

He hushed her with a kiss. “If you were mine, you’d be sore afterwards *every* time.”

She released a shuddering, frustrated sigh as she eyed his full lips. She raised her eyes and met his gaze again. She shifted and sat up tall. “Leave. Me. *Alone*.” Her voice was low yet commanding. But her words were empty of meaning.

Taylor sat back and moistened his lips, widening the gap between them. “All right. If that’s what you want,” he said softly.

“Are you done?” she chided, hating herself for pushing him away.

“No,” he snapped. “I’m not done.”

Sia remained silent.

“Look, Sia, this wasn’t supposed to happen.”

“What wasn’t?”

Taylor swallowed and stared at the ground for a moment. “Carrington isn’t who you think he is.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I’m talking about the mission. About the disk. He isn’t who he says he is, Sia.”

His eyes remained brown, but Sia still refused to believe him.

“You’re lying to me.”

“I’m lying to you? I’m ly—” he scoffed. “Okay.”

Sia watched him closely. His eyes hadn’t turned blue once.

Taylor reached into the inside of his pants pocket and pulled out the thumb drive. He chucked it at her, daring her to go look at it.

“What is this? How did you get it?”

“I told you I had access.” He stood to his feet.

“Go ahead, look at it.”

“With what?” She roared. “How the hell am I supposed to look at this without a fucking computer?” She was infuriated. “You know what—” She chucked it back at him. “Take this piece of shit. I know Carrington, and he is *not* who you’re saying he is.”

Taylor moistened his lips and sighed with frustration.

“And to think, I *trusted* you.”

Taylor said nothing more as he gazed at Sia. “You can’t say I never told you,” he muttered and then left the room.

## Chapter 10

Carrington stood before the mirror as he adjusted his black bow tie. The night was still young, and he had plenty on his mind. His eyes were a blistering gray-violet, and his hair was neatly moussed. He looked dashing in his black tuxedo and smelled of cologne. He gave himself a final once-over before grabbing his keys and heading for the door of his cozy room.

\* \* \* \*

Sia framed her belly with her hands. She closed her eyes and took in a deep inhalation as she remembered the moments she shared with Carrington. Every single one was meant for their own private pleasures. They were bound like cement to the ground and sworn in by their own blazing love. Sia sighed. His smile was warm, always warm, and his eyes were the softest violet she had ever seen.

Sia opened her eyes and studied her belly as she roamed her fingers over its perfectly round shape. She smiled softly, enjoying the feel of her precious baby kick. Her black dress flared out in the front, camouflaging her new motherly shape, and her sparkling accessories enhanced the beauty of her features without competing with her lovely long gown. She adjusted her short blonde wig. It was going to be a long night.

\* \* \* \*

Taylor adjusted his bow tie. His blood boiled with fury, and his



loins trembled with passion. He'd never played a game that made him a winner and a loser at the same time. So much was at stake, and he had everything to lose. He smoothed his hand across his glossy waves, giving himself one final look in the mirror before turning to head out of the door...probably for the last time.

\* \* \* \*

Frank and Margaret Crane laughed and danced elegantly in the middle of the dance floor. They were shadowed by other couples, twirling every now and then, swaying from side to side to the music. Margaret was a beautiful middle-aged woman. She wore a strapless dress, revealing cleavage and a beautiful hourglass figure. Her silver crown was evidence that she'd aged naturally and beautifully.

\* \* \* \*

Taylor was the second of the trio to arrive. He scoped the first floor of the five-star hotel with his big, lime-green eyes. That was one thing he didn't reveal to Sia. When he lied, his eyes were blue, but when he was sad, they were green.

A stubborn scowl lay unyielding across his handsome face. *How could Sia accuse him of lying to her like that?* He was not lying to her about Carrington. He was not lying to her about having her best interest. He *never* lied about that.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington held his gun across his brawny chest as he looked over the railed banister. His nostrils flared. *I'm going to make it all go away, Sia. I don't care what I have to do.*

\* \* \* \*

Rachel Bennett sat in a corner by herself, drinking delicious champagne. Everyone seemed to be having a good time, and no one noticed her over by the window. It was perfect. The fewer people who recognized her, the better. She took a sip of her champagne as a slow, steady tear fell down her cheek. Sia was her childhood friend, but Taylor was her devoted partner in PSA. He saved her from the wrath of the blood-sucking Cranes, repaying her debt through a counterfeit death recently, shortly after Jake died.

Rachel swallowed a sob. She loved Sia, God knew she did, but sparing her friend pain meant creating her own, and she just wasn't ready to face hell for what she'd done. Rachel closed her eyes, and two more tears came streaming down. *Please, God, if you're listening, forgive me for what I've done...and for what I'm about to do. I love Sia, but Carrington must die.*

\* \* \* \*

Sia's heart sank. She'd just walked through the door and was standing in the middle of the noisy lobby. Music filled her ears as the sound waves whipped through the area like hyper ghost riders. There he was, tall, dark, and handsome, standing on the second floor near the banister, looking dashing in his black tuxedo. His violet-gray eyes were like precious jewels sparkling from a distance, and when they landed on hers, she felt her stomach churn.

Carrington kept his eyes on her, never once turning away.

Sia glanced away for a moment and then returned his gaze. She smiled meekly and gave a little wave.

He smiled wryly and then broke their gaze, putting an end to their silent communication.

Sia directed her attention to the corridor beneath the stairs. Her heart pounded with disturbance, and the lion in her wanted to pull the gun out from beneath the strap of her boot. He was walking her

way...

"Hi, beautiful." Jordon smiled warmly.

"You came."

"Well, I did RSVP."

"Since when did you ever become a man of your word?"

A wicked grin touched his paled face. Evil bled through his icy blue eyes, reaching out to touch the softness of Sia's flesh as it dared to lure her in. "I can't believe *you're* here."

"You don't believe anything truthful."

"I believe that you're a selfish bitch."

"Could have fooled me."

"You know what they say about people who make assumptions..."

"Assumptions, my ass."

"You gave me every reason to believe that you weren't coming."

"I gave you every reason to believe I wasn't coming back to *you*."

Jordon's glare was ice cold...and then another wickedly demented smile kissed his mouth. "You were *always* mine."

She scoffed. "Only in your world."

He took another step closer. "Is that why it was so easy for me to get into your bed and under your sexy little nightgown?" He wrapped his arms around her and gave her a tight bear hug before she could protest. "Mmm..." He closed his eyes and tightened his grip. "You smell lovely."

Sia sucked in her breath. "Stop it," she demanded in a whisper.

"Or what?" he dared while holding her captive in his embrace. His eyes were blazing, and his pupils increased in size.

Sia glanced around. "People are watching," she muttered. She hated being close to him, much less touched by him.

"People are always watching."

"Why are you doing this?"

"Let's go somewhere in private."

"You didn't answer my question."

“You don’t answer mine.”

“You never ask. That was always your damn problem. You gave more orders than a family of ten in a restaurant.”

Jordon didn’t reply to her statement. He simply held her gaze with a stern expression splayed over his face.

“Why are you doing this? Why are you *really* here?”

He sighed as he stood up straighter. He moistened his lips and looked over her head. “I came to talk.”

“About?” She was annoyed.

“If you had answered your phone earlier, you would know.”

“Sucks for you—”

“*Us*,” he hissed. “I came to talk about us.”

“There is no *us*.”

Jordon chuckled impishly as he briefly cupped her chin. He widened the gap between them, leaving Sia in the middle of the floor to bask in the underlying meaning of his threatening words.

\* \* \* \*

Fire burned Carrington’s soul as he watched Jordon walk away after taunting Sia. If there was anything he hated more than seeing his baby hurt, it was seeing that ass-wipe parade around like nothing was at stake.

*With God as my witness, I will avenge. Tonight, I’m taking back what’s mine.*

\* \* \* \*

“So...” Taylor shrugged. “You get here okay? Any trouble with traffic?”

Rachel shook her head. “Everything was fine.”

He nodded. “How’s everyone back at home?”

“They’re fine. A little shaken up, but they’re fine. They’re worried

about you.”

“How’s my mother?”

Rachel hesitated before answering.

“Rachel.” He watched her closely. “Tell me.”

“She’s still in and out of consciousness.”

“What did the doctors say?”

“The likelihood of her coming out the coma is slim to none.”

Taylor nodded and rubbed the hair at his nape. He desperately fought back tears. “I swear to—”

“I know. I know.”

The Cranes were going to pay for everything they’d done. Taylor’s nostrils flared as he exhaled deeply. He glanced at his watch. “Okay, it’s eleven thirty. Do you remember where your station is?”

“I sure do.”

“I’m going to shut off all of the lights when the clock strikes midnight. Remember to let your phone ring three times before you fire at Carrington. As soon as you do that, make a break for the front door. Ethan will be standing right out front. Hand him this.” Taylor took a step closer and pulled out a pistol from his breast pocket before handing it to Rachel to place inside her purse.

“Are you ready?”

“Yes.” Rachel nodded.

Taylor took a step forward. He cupped her chin and then gave her a meaningful hug. He kissed her cheek with great sincerity and then stepped back. “I’ll be speaking with PRA out back. Bye until then.”

\* \* \* \*

Sia stared into the mirror at the woman in disguise. She felt reassured with her gun secured in the strap around her thigh. The light blush on her cheeks enhanced the beauty of her pretty eyes, and the diamond earrings she wore sparkled. Their glimmer danced on the marble tile of the plush bathroom as they dangled from her ears.

Innocence was what she plead for, but not until justice was served. She patted her thigh with a wry smile on her on face. She wasn't a killer, God knew she wasn't, but she wasn't giving up without a fight. She was taking back what was hers. She was taking back her life.

\* \* \* \*

"All right, everyone, we have exactly two minutes before the New Year begins!" Margaret announced into the microphone. Frank was holding her slender hand and standing at her side. "Everyone grab a glass and prepare for the countdown!"

Everyone scrambled to get a glass of champagne. Margaret grabbed Frank's hand, and they made their way behind the bar. Margaret trusted her husband with her life. Thirty-five years of marriage and she was still crazy about him.

"Happy New Year, darling," Frank muttered into her ear and then kissed her cheek tenderly.

She smiled and turned to face him. She watched him with eyes filled with love before shouting, "Same to you!"

"What?" Frank shouted and leaned in closer.

"I said same to—"

He stopped her with a kiss and wrapped his arms around her waist. "I love you," he muttered in her ear and then kissed her lips again.

\* \* \* \*

Sia glanced at the clock on the wall to her right and then looked up at Carrington, who was still standing on the second floor by the banister. It was almost time.

\* \* \* \*

Taylor rubbed his hands together and then flicked on the light switch after closing the door behind him. Everyone was busy socializing in the ballroom, making it that much easier for him to slip past them and into the basement. He eyed the old wooden frame hanging on the brick wall as he made his way down the old wooden stairs, holding his pistol down at his side.

\* \* \* \*

Sia made her way up the stairs. She joined Carrington on the second floor. She wanted to be in his arms one more time before the strike of midnight and the wakening of turmoil.

He looked breathtakingly handsome, dressed in black from head to toe. His violet-gray eyes were searing with determination. He welcomed Sia with a warm smile and hug. She hugged him back and closed her eyes as she rested her head against his chest.

“You ready?” he muttered.

Sia looked up at him and nodded. “I’m as ready as I’ll ever be.”

Carrington remained silent for a moment as he studied her with his eyes.

Sia held her breath.

He was slicing her to the core, loving her with his eyes in his effort to read her.

“Carrington?”

He pulled her into him, hugged her tight, and then pecked her crown tenderly. “Don’t be afraid,” he whispered. “Everything is going to be okay.”

Sia closed her eyes and melted in his arms. She loved him *so* much.

“We won’t be shedding innocent blood tonight,” he muttered in her ear. When she pulled back to read his face, he tightened his grip around her waist and held her against him. “Don’t ask questions babe. Just give me the signal, and I’ll take care of the rest.”

“Carrington, how is this supposed to work?”

“Shh. Just trust me baby. Just trust me.”

“But Carrington-

He hushed her with a kiss. “Stick to the plan and I will take care of the rest. I’ve figured it all out. The timing is perfect. Trust me. *Trust me.*”

\* \* \* \*

Rachel scoped the ballroom with her eyes as she stood by the door in the foyer. Her heart pounded profoundly between her breasts as she waited anxiously for Taylor’s call. She sighed sadly.

*Everyone looks so happy and at peace. So many hearts are going to be shattered tonight. No one is going to be the same.*

\* \* \* \*

“Is everyone where they’re supposed to be?” Frank paged Carrington. They were communicating through the walkie-talkie.

“Yes sir, everyone’s ready and secure.” Carrington was looking over the banister. It was only a matter of time until the alarm sounded. He was waiting for Sia to stand near Hector so that he could spot him.

\* \* \* \*

Sia swayed her hips as she made her way over to her lover for the night. She was deaf to the laughter and blind to the chipper expressions plastered on the guest’s faces. She inhaled slowly...and exhaled.

\* \* \* \*



Frank returned to his wife. The bar was surrounded by anxious guests, eager to enter a new year.

\* \* \* \*

Sia gently placed her dainty hand on Hector's broad shoulder. She circled around him and flashed him a saucy smile as she leaned in close to his aging body. Her heart was pounding violently in her chest. It was as if drums were rolling in competition to the crowd's roaring.

\* \* \* \*

Frank stood attentively, waiting for Hector's form to become visible to his eye.

\* \* \* \*

Sia pressed her ass against Hector's cock as she interlaced her fingers with his. She crawled in her skin in disgust as she stared straight ahead, waiting for the opportunity to signal Carrington.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington placed his hand on the trigger and held both eyes open. He had played the game well. He was waiting for the signal. It was crucial that he succeed with one shot.

As soon as Sia gave him the okay, he was going to fire at *Frank*, not Hector. Never again would he kill an innocent man. Carrington moistened his lips and exhaled deeply. *That's right, Frank, Karma is a bitch. I told you I would beat you at your own game.*

\* \* \* \*

Sia closed her eyes and exhaled deeply against Hector's body. She had played the game well, and she had played the game right. She trusted Carrington, trusted him with her life.

\* \* \* \*

Rachel stood in the hallway by the stairwell of the foyer with her arms folded. She stood silently and very still as she listened to the oblivious party animals parade around as though they hadn't a single care in the world.

\* \* \* \*

"Ah! Yes," Taylor whispered to himself. He found the switch. He smiled with perverse pleasure as he imagined Carrington pleading for mercy before drawing his final breath.

\* \* \* \*

"Okay, everyone, it's time!" Margaret announced.

"Ten! Nine! Eight..." Everyone counted in unison and grabbed their significant others.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington spotted Sia. She'd signaled him. The rock on her finger called him to attention as it flashed the laser at his chest, flashing from her finger as she persisted in groping the back of Hector's head.

\* \* \* \*

Taylor pulled out his cell phone and dialed Rachel's number.

\* \* \* \*

Rachel stiffened when she felt her cell phone vibrate in the breast part of her dress. *Let it ring three times, fire at Carrington, and then make a break for the front door.*

\* \* \* \*

After three rings, Taylor hung up his phone and pulled the switch down.

\* \* \* \*

"Two...One! Happy New Year!" Everyone shouted and kissed their loved one.

Frank hugged Margaret and then kissed her with elation.

Horns were blown, and the alarm was sounded. Margaret ignored the noise, assuming it was a part of the New Year celebration.

Suddenly, all of the lights went out and glass went flying everywhere. Women screamed hysterically, and headlights lit the room.

\* \* \* \*

Sia broke away from the man she'd been fooling around with. A man she knew then could not be Hector Petrov.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington ducked and dodged the flying bullets.

\* \* \* \*

Margaret screamed to the top of her lungs as she fell to her dying husband's side.

\* \* \* \*

A shot gun was fired, stealing the lives of the nearest targets in range.

## Chapter 11

“Rachel, are you out?” Taylor yelled into his cell.

“Yes, but I can’t find Ethan!”

“What?” he roared. “He was supposed to be waiting for you at the door!”

“I know, but I don’t see him! Taylor, the assassins are inside! Sia ran right past me, but I don’t think she saw me!”

“What about Carrington?”

“He hit the floor after I fired the gun. I think I nailed him, but with all the chaos I’m not sure if I hit or missed. Taylor, I’m so sorry!”

“Okay, calm down.” Taylor placed a hand on his head. “Rachel, where are you right now?”

“I’m in front of the house! I can hear everyone screaming!”

“Why are you in front of the house? Get away from there before someone sees you!”

“But what about Ethan? I still have the gun—”

“I’ll worry about Ethan, you just go!”

Rachel hung up her phone and took off running in her black pumps towards the parking lot. She was running so fast she barely even noticed that the cold snow was meshing against her bare toes. When she saw her red jeep, she ran even faster, forgetting about the ice on the cobble-stoned sidewalk. She slipped and scraped her knee.

“Fuck!” she yelled, struggling to her feet. When she was stable, she took off again and never looked back.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington raced down the stairs with his gun at his side, hoping to find Sia. Alive.

There was an unsettling roaring coming from the crowd. The pounding of their footsteps released a sound louder than thunder as it challenged the sound of the ringing alarm.

Carrington's heart sank. "Sia!" he called. "Sia!" He sighed in relief. Thank God, she saw him. "Do you have extra bullets?" He wanted to make sure she was fully prepared.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In my boot."

He nodded. "All right. I'm gonna find a safe place and get you out of here! It isn't safe for you or the baby!" He was competing with the strident sound of chaos.

"Carrington, something went wrong! That wasn't Hector I was hugging!"

Carrington frowned.

"It was someone else! I think it might have been a setup!"

Carrington leaned into her ear. "I wouldn't put it past him! Hector isn't going down without a fight!" He grasped Sia's left arm. "Look, Sia, let me get you out of here!"

She pulled away. "No! I'm not leaving you!"

"Sia, don't argue with me! This isn't safe for you or the baby!"

"I'm not going anywhere without you by my side!"

"Sia!"

"No!" She leaned in and grasped his sides. "Not without you," she gritted.

Carrington sighed with frustration. There was no way in hell he was going to allow her to risk her own life, let alone his child's. Especially because he wasn't quite sure if he'd make it out alive. "Come on." He grabbed her arm and started towards the door.

"But, Carrington—"

“It isn’t safe!”

“I’m not leaving you alone!”

“Sia, stop arguing with me!”

“Carrington!” she cried. Her eyes watered, and she began to cry.

“Sia!” Carrington roared as he looked back at her. He pulled her small frame into him. “Baby, don’t resist me. Do as I say, and you’ll be all right.”

Sia reluctantly hushed and didn’t argue further as he brought her over to the front door. She gasped, and their eyes grew wide as they quickly turned to run in the opposite direction. They bolted upstairs. It was like a movie. Everything seemed to be happening so fast, while Sia and her love seemed to be moving in slow motion. She followed his lead, and they ran as fast as their bodies would allow.

“Ah!” Sia squealed. She’d dodged a bullet by inches.

The action caused a gap to come between her and Carrington. But only for a moment. Carrington was standing by her side again. “Come with me!” he said.

“Okay,” Sia said softly as she nodded.

“Do exactly as I tell you.” Carrington pierced her with a hard, demanding stare. “I mean it, Sia.”

“Okay,” she answered, a little more defiantly but still softly.

He grabbed her hand, and they both ran toward the secret stairwell in the back of the hotel.

\* \* \* \*

Taylor roamed through the barren ballroom of broken glass. The room was empty, and the lights were still off. Russians hid away at every corner, searching for their opponents. Taylor whirled around when a firm hand grasped his shoulder.

“Be careful, they’ll see you.”

He sighed in relief. It was one of the Russians. He was wearing a face mask, so Taylor didn’t know exactly whom he was talking to.

“Where are the others?” Taylor whispered.

“Out back, and two are in the front. I’m the only one who stayed inside.”

“Which one are you?”

The Russian pulled his mask off. “Ethan.”

“Ethan!” Taylor demanded in a whisper. “What the fuck? Why weren’t you outside—”

The blond-haired man’s blue eyes grew wide when he glanced at the staircase behind Taylor. He grabbed Taylor’s arm, and both of them bolted down the hall leading to the basement.

\* \* \* \*

*Someone’s in here.* Carrington held his gun close to his chest as he made his way into the ballroom. He walked slowly and looked around. The tiled floor was covered in broken glass. He crept through the room like a thief in the night, glancing over his shoulder ever so often as he made his way over to the shattered sliding doors. Sia and their baby were still at the front of his mind. He tried as best he could to push them to the back, but he couldn’t shake the feeling that something terrible was going to happen. He told himself that the chill he felt creeping up his spine was simply from the cold Russian winter, but he couldn’t fathom how the brisk kiss of nature’s breath could touch his soul. He tensed and looked over to his right. He saw something.

Carrington gnawed on his jaw as he contemplated investigating or simply turning around. Suddenly that chill became overpowering, and Carrington wondered if that chill he felt was a whisper from death, luring him into his grave. He swallowed and gripped his gun. He prayed to God. Prayed that Sia would be all right. He prayed that she’d always be taken care of, and that his family would come to love her regardless of what they felt. He’d included Sia on his living will the day after he murdered Jake. He’d sworn to beat the Cranes at their



own game, even if he had to die trying.

He glanced over his shoulder as he made his way down the hall. He looked to his left and saw nothing but a dark empty space of broken glass and broken hearts. Tonight was a night of evil beseeched and mayhem unleashed. No one would ever be the same after this party.

Carrington froze. He thought the feeling of victory would make him smile. He thought it might even make the entire night worthwhile. Never in his wildest dreams had he expected to feel remorse for any of the Cranes. He said a silent prayer for Frank and Margaret, leaving their lifeless bodies to rot on the cold tile for a possible eternity.

Carrington did his best to remain invisible and calm, but he was too worried about Sia and his baby. They were his world. They were his life. He sacrificed a hell of a lot to be with them. He couldn't lose them. Not now, not ever. He made his way down the corridor quietly and carefully. The cool air made its way through the broken windows and brushed against his taut flesh, combing through his thick brown hair.

When he reached the door to the basement, he stopped. A flicker peeped through the bottom crease of the door before the space became pitch black again. Someone was in that basement.

\* \* \* \*

Rachel roamed the barren lobby with her sky blue eyes as she cautiously made her way back into the hotel. All of the lights were out, but the light of the full moon gazed heavily upon the destroyed building.

Rachel tensed. She'd accidentally stepped on a piece of broken glass. She glanced around to see if anyone had heard her. The coast was clear. She looked up at the stairwell, following its trail with her eyes until she saw the empty space. She worked up the nerve to go

upstairs and investigate. She clutched onto the gun at her side and then slowly made her way up the staircase, taking one step at a time.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington gripped his gun and held it firmly at his side. He'd opened the basement door. He took another step closer and then looked from his left to his right before heading down the stairs. The lights were off in the basement, but evil was visible everywhere. The air was cold, and the feeling was uncomfortable. Carrington pointed his gun away from his chest when he reached the final step. He flicked the switch on the wall and sparks flew. It was like a firecracker was stuck in the wall and ready to explode at any second.

\* \* \* \*

Sia stood in the middle of the hall with her gun pressed against her heart. *I'm sorry, Carrington, but I can't just hide away knowing that you're in danger. I won't let you do this alone. I won't.* She took deep inhalations and listened for movement. She slowly made her way down the hall towards the stairwell.

\* \* \* \*

Rachel scanned the area with her eyes. Her breathing came in hushed whispers. So far, she'd found nothing. No sign of danger. No sign of fear, except her own.

She continued to take deep inhalations as she made her way towards the corridor. Just as she turned her back to make sure no one was behind her, she felt a sharp pang in the back of her head and was forced to the tiled floor before she could react.

\* \* \* \*

The basement was bright again, and Carrington could see everything. He scanned the room with his eyes and then fired the moment he saw a tall figure bolt from a far corner. The strong male dodged the bullet, and Carrington fired again. He dodged the bullet again and then turned around and fired at Carrington. Carrington ducked in time but was soon bombarded by an unexpected strong kick in his head. He fell helplessly to the ground. His gun was knocked out of his hand, and he was kicked a second time, this time in his gut. He curled into a ball out of reflex before trying to rise up again. His opponent struck him in the head again and knocked him to the ground. This time Carrington didn't move.

"Get up and raise your hands," Taylor gritted, pointing his pistol at the bronze mystique.

Carrington obeyed him. Blood ran from his head, and a bruise rested just below his temple.

"Turn around," Taylor ordered.

Carrington turned his back to him as he was told.

Taylor lowered his gun and began to pat Carrington down. As soon as he reached his back pocket, Carrington whipped around and pounded the back of his head with his fist. Taylor fell to the ground, giving Carrington a greater advantage. He kicked Taylor's gun out of his hand and went to go pick it up, but Taylor was too fast. He grabbed Carrington's ankle and yanked him to the hard concrete floor. The two strong men wrestled until they both had possession of the pistol. Though both held it firm, only one had his finger on the trigger. Both grunted and struggled to point the pistol at the other.

\* \* \* \*

"Get up."

Rachel could barely move. Her head was throbbing, and her vision was blurry.

“Get up!” her opponent demanded.

Rachel reached for her gun as she rose.

“Drop the gun.”

She dropped it and stood up straight.

“Turn around, you stupid bitch.”

She turned around and, for the first time, stood face-to-face with the woman who dared to challenge her.

“Sia?” she gasped

“Rachel?” Sia’s eyes were wide with bewilderment. “What are you doing here?”

Rachel narrowed her gaze and didn’t answer.

“Rachel?”

“I’m sorry, Sia.” Rachel quickly pulled out her gun and fired.

Sia flinched, and her heart hammered violently in her chest. She missed.

Rachel dashed past her, sprinting down the passageway as she made a break for the back door.

Sia ran after her, firing her gun at the one she’d always loved like a sister.

\* \* \* \*

Taylor’s glare was cold and deadly. “Game over,” he said, smiling with wicked pleasure as Ethan held Carrington in place.

Ethan stood behind Carrington with one arm wrapped around his neck and the other gripping his wrists behind his back.

Carrington drew his eyebrows together as he glared back at Taylor. “Excuse me?”

“You heard me, you son of a bitch.”

“What do you mean by *game over*? No one’s playing games.”

“Oh, cut the bullshit, you son of a bitch!”

“What the hell are you talking about?” Carrington was utterly confused and wishing he had his gun.

“You and Frank both.” Taylor pointed the gun at Carrington’s head. He lowered the gun and took another step. He stood just close enough to be able to hiss into Carrington’s ear. “But it’s no worries. Frank is dead.”

Carrington swallowed and took in a deep breath.

Taylor chuckled. “Oh, you should have seen the look on his wife’s face as she pleaded for his life. The image was a precious one. One that I will cherish forever. The Cranes getting what they finally deserve. A life for a life.” He leaned in closer. “And you’ll be next.”

Carrington watched him closely.

“How does it feel to know that your sweet Sia will be mourning over your lifeless body?”

Carrington scowled and released a low growl.

“No worries. I’ll step in and comfort her. Soon enough she’ll be saying my name and forgetting yours.” A perverse grin spread across Taylor’s face. “Did you really think Hector wasn’t going to find out? Did you really think we were going to go down without a fight?”

Carrington swallowed.

“Now do you know who I am, you son of a bitch?”

He remained silent.

“I’m talking to you!”

“Why are you here?”

Taylor chuckled. “Damn, you’re not as sharp as they say after all. I thought you would’ve figured it out by now, asshole. Tell me, lowlife. Was it worth it?”

“More than your life.”

“Wrong answer.”

\* \* \* \*

Sia and Rachel flinched. A gun went off. Both of them turned around and sprinted through the corridor. They flinched again.

“We’ve got to get down there,” Rachel muttered. She looked over

her shoulder and cringed again.

“Don’t move!”

“We need to get down there! Someone could be seriously hurt!”

A gun was fired a third time.

“Sia, come on! What if it’s Taylor or *Carrington*? One of them could be on the floor dying as we speak!”

Sia considered what Rachel was saying. She knew she was right. They had to get down there and check it out. “Come on,” she muttered. “Hurry up.”

When they reached the stairs, Rachel pretended to fall and then quickly grabbed Sia by the ankles before yanking her down, causing the small woman to fall on her back and drop her gun.

“You bitch!” Sia grunted.

Rachel climbed on top of her and reached for her gun. Sia pulled her by the ankles as she was getting up and yanked her hard, causing Rachel to lose her balance and fall a few steps down. Rachel quickly recovered and grabbed Sia by the top of her dress as she was reaching for the gun. Sia screamed, and both tumbled down the flight of stairs, stopping just before they hit the cold, hard tile.

Rachel remained on top of Sia. She wrapped her hands around the pregnant woman’s neck and strangled her. Sia’s wig fell off, and her gorgeous brown hair was revealed.

Sia continued to fight her off.

Rachel banged Sia’s head against the bottom stair and would have strangled her to death if a bullet hadn’t gone soaring past her head. She squealed and ducked before releasing Sia.

Sia scrambled to her knees, grabbed the gun that had tumbled down the stairs with them, and opened fire. She missed once but nailed the second and third time. She watched with a bleeding heart as Rachel collapsed at the head of the stairs.

Sia dropped the gun. Her breath was becoming faint, and her vision was blurred. Her head began to spin, and her life flashed before her eyes. She collapsed onto the cold, brisk floor, holding her belly as

she whispered a meaningful prayer for her baby and drifted off.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington lay in the back seat of the Russian's car. He was bleeding profusely in the head and lapsing in and out of consciousness. Ethan looked through his rearview mirror from time to time to check up on him. He drove carefully, being sure to keep an eye out for any lurking cops. He exchanged glances with his partner before turning to focus on the road again.

## Chapter 12

It was a high-pitched staccato sound. It sounded like the pulse of a machine. Arrhythmic, steady, and constant. Sia slowly opened her eyes.

“How are you feeling?”

She scowled and began to look around.

“You’re at the hospital. Don’t worry, everything will be fine,” Taylor soothed. He was sitting beside her as she laid in the bed.

Sia placed her hands on her belly. “How is my baby?”

Taylor looked at the doctor and waited for him to answer.

Sia sat up on the bed. “*How* is my baby?” Sia demanded, looking at the doctor.

“*She’s* fine. However, I want to keep a close eye on you and your baby for the night. You suffered a pretty hard fall tonight. It’s a miracle you two are still alive. An absolute miracle. Count your blessings, young lady. Next time you may not be so lucky.”

\* \* \* \*

Ethan and Peter were partners, keeping watch of Sia Foxworth. Everything was going well and according to plan, until three days ago. That’s when everything had gone awry. Ethan had been standing at his post, outside near the pole in front of the hotel in which Sia and Carrington were staying. Carrington had come up from behind him. He stood beside him, waiting for the light to turn green at the crosswalk. The two exchanged wry glances and cynical words. The next thing he knew they were wrestling on the sidewalk with an



audience. Carrington had gotten a hold of his ID in the midst of the fight. Peter, another one of PSA's Russians, came running over from behind. He used his stick as a weapon and struck Carrington on the head. The two men took off soon after. Ethan didn't know how long Carrington had been lying on the ground, but it was apparent he'd lived through that encounter.

Ethan glanced through the rearview mirror again. *Let's see if he lives through this one.*

He rubbed the crown of his head. He wasn't quite sure if Carrington or Sia had figured out that Petrov's Russian Assassins had been staying under the same roof as them and that they'd been watching their every move, but they were bound to put two and two together at some point. PSA would have to act, and they would have to act fast.

He turned off his headlights. Carrington remained quiet and appeared to be unconscious again in the backseat. Ethan and Peter watched him for a moment before getting out of the car.

"You grab his legs, I'll get his arms," Ethan said.

Peter opened the back door on the right side of the car. "Come around on this side. I'll pull him out."

The snow was heavy, and the ice was thick. The wind howled like a mother wailing over her lost child, and the naked trees danced like fire being fed by air.

Ethan helped Peter hoist Carrington up. They decided to carry him, each of his arms around their strong shoulders.

"This way." Ethan led.

The two men walked over to a large steel door. There was a chain with a lock on it. They were in the back of the building. Ethan pulled out a set of keys and then opened the lock.

They carried Carrington into the dark, cold building with Ethan walking in first. Peter closed the heavy door. The sound of him closing them off from the outside world was deafening and profound. Carrington stood limp against the men.

Ethan and Peter threw him to the ground. Nothing but the loud, disturbing sounds of Carrington, grunting from the power of their strength overtaking him, filled the air. Their fists bruised his flesh in great effort to damage his internal organs, and they growled with sickening pleasure as his blood covered their knuckles.

## Chapter 13

Carrington sat shirtless with his hands barred behind his back against the cold, iron chair. His breathing came slow and steady. His feet were tied down, and the chains around his wrists sliced the top layer of his skin as they held him in place. Bruises and welts covered his arms, chest, and back like tattoos. Blood dripped from the corner of his bottom lip. His right eye was swollen and bruised from the beating he'd endured.

Carrington roamed the room with his eyes. He saw nothing but the shadows of the trees cast by the break of dawn peeping through the barred window. He sighed sadly as he said a quiet prayer for Sia and his baby. He missed them dearly and wanted them back. He was sure that the two Russians who'd beaten him brutally had left him there to die, but he figured they'd come back to clean up their mess, and when they did, he'd be ready. Nothing but death could keep him from his family. Nothing but death could stop him from fighting.

\* \* \* \*

Sia placed the last of her belongings inside of her luggage. She glanced over her shoulder. Taylor was standing behind her.

"Hey," he said softly.

"Hey." Her voice was even softer.

"Leaving so soon?"

She didn't respond.

Taylor moistened his lips and made his way over to her. "Si?"

She flashed him a cold glare and then started to walk away.

“*Sia*.” He quickly grabbed her arm and gazed at her. He watched her closely with worried eyes. “*Talk* to me.”

“And say what?” she roared. “What, Taylor? What am I supposed to say?”

“Tell me what you’re thinking. Tell me what you want.”

“I want Carrington! I want to go back home! I want my fucking life back!” She wiped away a tear. “Where is he, Taylor?”

He remained silent.

She pushed his chest with her small, dainty hands. “Huh? Where is Carrington?” she demanded. “Where is he?” She began to pound on his chest, fighting him with more than her words. “Where is he?” she screamed at the top of her lungs.

Taylor wrapped his strong arms around her and hugged her tight. “Shh...” he soothed. “Shh...We’ll find him. Don’t worry, *Sia*. We’ll find him.”

“Why does it have to be this way?”

“Because I am loyal to my country, and I love my family too much to allow an outsider to destroy them.”

“But why are we fighting over this? Why are *you* guys fighting over this? Why does it have to be a fucking competition? Why can’t we all just work together?” She lifted her head and looked deep into his eyes. “We’re all good people, Taylor.”

He shook his head sadly. “*Sia*, Carrington is not who you think he is.”

“Why do you keep saying that, Taylor, why?” She squirmed and then pushed him off her.

“I saw the file on the hard drive,” he said softly.

“What hard drive?”

“The one I showed you the other day. *Sia*, Rachel hacked the Crane system and got a hold of the codes. We know who’s behind all of this.”

*Sia* shook her head and pushed him off. “Taylor, Taylor, *Taylor*.”

“*What?*”

“You’re a brilliant man, but you are so naïve.”

He was confused.

“The Cranes are savvier than that. Sweetheart, I’ve been involved with this family for a long time. As much as I hate them, I will agree with them on this. Personal information is safer when handled the old-fashioned way. People didn’t have to worry about hackers getting into their computers back then because nothing was ever filed online.” Jordon had *always* told her that. “The file you want isn’t the file you have. Whatever you saw is a bullshit stunt and a fabrication by the Cranes.”

“How do you know?”

“I know the Cranes. If anyone discovers information about them, it’s because the Cranes literally allowed it to happen.”

“But how, Sia? How can you be so sure?”

“Where’s the thumb drive?”

“One of the Russians has it.”

“Okay, well did you see the symbol ingrained at the bottom of it?”

As if on cue, Taylor’s cell phone rang. He motioned for Sia to hold for a minute before answering.

“Hello?”

“Taylor, it’s Ethan. The system’s been hacked.”

Taylor looked at Sia with worried eyes.

“What?” she asked.

“He said the system’s been hacked.”

“That’s what I was trying to tell you. The Cranes set us up. The hard drive has a virus on it.”

\* \* \* \*

Taylor was the first to come barging into the room on the top floor. Sia was on his tail. Ethan glanced over his shoulder. He held a look of bewilderment.

“Our system’s been hacked!” he exclaimed.

“Where’s the thumb drive?” Taylor asked.

“It’s in the computer,” Ethan replied.

“Take it out!” Taylor performed the action before Ethan could move. He covered his head with his hands and then roared as he threw the disk across the room. “Damn it!”

Ethan was speechless. He didn’t know what the hell to say.

“What exactly did you see on the disk?” Sia asked.

“A picture of a man named Care...ring—”

“Carrington! I know who you’re talking about. This was a setup by the Cranes! He’s innocent!”

Ethan frowned. “What?”

“The Cranes set us up! You’ve got the wrong man!” She looked at Taylor for help. “Taylor, tell him. Tell him that Carrington’s innocent. Tell him that he wasn’t behind the break in!”

“She knows your name?” Ethan asked.

Taylor nodded.

“Are you crazy?”

“No. I’m not, okay? We can trust her.”

“How? She’s one of...*them*. How do we know she’s not setting *us* up to save her boyfriend?”

“How do you know he’s my boyfriend?” Sia was scowling.

Ethan looked away and immediately drew back. He’d slipped up.

“Look. Sia, Ethan, calm down, all right. You guys can trust each other.”

“What makes you so sure?” Ethan asked. He was still skeptical.

“I’ll explain it later.” Taylor ran his hand across his glossy waves.

“Where’s Carrington?”

Sia perked up when he asked this.

“The Russians have him.”

Her heart sank. “Where?” she demanded.

Ethan was hesitant in answering.

“Where?” Taylor snapped.

Ethan opened his mouth to speak. He spoke in a foreign language.

Taylor nodded. “When did they leave?”

Ethan continued to speak in his foreign tongue.

“All right. Sia, let’s go.”

They bolted out of the room and made a beeline for the exit door.

\* \* \* \*

Peter was accompanied by two other Russians. He pushed Carrington ahead of him. He controlled him with the metal chains, walking him like a prisoner guilty of malice. One of the other Russians pressed the mouth of his machine gun against Carrington’s naked back. The cold, pallid snow fell like rain as it melted at contact with Carrington’s warm flesh.

\* \* \* \*

“Hurry, Taylor!” Sia urged as she looked frantically out of the window.

“I’m driving as fast as I can Sia,” he soothed.

\* \* \* \*

“Ah!” Carrington hissed.

One of the Russians yelled something in their native tongue and wacked his back with the whip again.

Carrington trembled as he bared the cold of the Russian winter.

\* \* \* \*

Taylor turned the steering wheel and maneuvered the car to the right.

“Is this it?” Sia asked with anticipation.

“This is it.”

\* \* \* \*

Carrington knelt to his knees in submission with his hands chained behind his back. He continued to stare straight ahead. Seeing not the frozen lake, not his open grave, but his family. His child and the woman he yearned to call his bride.

*God, if you'll grant any of the wishes I've made up until now, let it be to keep Sia safe. Let it be to keep my baby safe...*

\* \* \* \*

"There he is!" Sia cried. "There's Carrington!" She raced out of the car and sprinted towards the man she loved.

"Sia!" Taylor called after her. "Hold on!"

\* \* \* \*

Peter raised his gun to Carrington's head.

\* \* \* \*

"No!" Sia screamed. "Don't!" She ran as fast as her little feet would carry her.

"Sia, *stop*!" Taylor cried as he ran after her. He reached into his breast pocket and pulled out his gun and pointed it at the man he'd come to love like a brother as he watched him from the distance.

\* \* \* \*

Carrington closed his eyes slowly and then opened them. His violet eyes were blistering with rage.



\* \* \* \*

“Noooo!” Sia roared.

\* \* \* \*

Fire came soaring from the lethal weapon, putting an end to all confusion and a life full of sin. Taylor would always love Peter like a brother.

## Epilogue

The sudden deaths remained a mystery to all except for the ones responsible. Three deaths, and they had all happened within the same timeframe. It was as though there was a curse lurking around, and Karma had finally caught wind of it. Jordan was finally at the mercy of their feet.

The lovely fragrance of flowers filled Sia's nostrils, and the sun shined brightly upon her while she held her baby in her arms. The soft spring breeze of warm Hawaiian weather kissed their tender flesh and cradled them as they stood along the shoreline.

Sia glanced over her shoulder and flashed a smile. It was a smile of victory, a smile of contentment, and the chance to finally have the life she had always dreamed of. She looked from one set of violet eyes to a pair of dark brown ones. Carrington and Taylor made their way over to her, walking with cocksure smiles and their heads held high.

Carrington wrapped his arms around Sia, kissed the crown of her head, and then the crown of his seven-week-old daughter. "She's incredibly blessed to have a mother like you. She has your hair."

"And she has your eyes, those *precious* violet-gray eyes."

Carrington smiled as he tucked his finger in his baby's little hand. She squeezed his finger and never let go. She was definitely daddy's little girl.

Taylor gave Sia a gentle hug and kiss on the cheek. "You deserve everything you've got. These two are very lucky to have you," he said in reference to her daughter and Carrington. "Cheers to a new family, a new *friendship*, a brand new start, and many happy years to come."

Sia fixed her eyes on Taylor and smiled. “Cheers to *that*.”

The trio chuckled in unison. They celebrated their brand new life with many hopes, plans, and great optimism. Cheers to a new life.

A life without turmoil.

A life without secrets.

A life without lies.

A life...

Without the Cranes.

\* \* \* \*

Jordon stood from a far distance, smiling impishly to himself as he watched the trio bask in their ambiance of pure delusion. He smiled smugly to himself as he fixed his icy blue eyes on the woman he'd longed to call his bride and on the infant she held close to her breast. *Enjoy your time now, Carrington and Taylor. This game is far from over...*

# THE END

**ASHLEYBROOKEEROTICROMANCE.ORG**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Apart from reading and writing erotic romance, Ashley enjoys dancing, doing girly activities (playing with makeup, going shopping, curling her hair, etc). She also has a passion for missionary work. She values life, morals, and expression of sexuality—something she believes is one of the greatest gifts given to mankind especially because it is the reason we are all here today. Ashley is a firm believer in possibility and believes even the stillest of waters run deep.

### *Also by Ashley Brooke*

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