

Chapter Eight

Emerson Carlisle massaged his temples. On the computer screen was an unattering picture of Marilyn partying in a club her face practically glowing from the alcohol in her system. Her dress was extremely short, barely covering her. Over the years she appeared more and more in the gossip columns and it was getting harder to ignore. Worse it was beginning to affect business.

Carlisle Enterprises was a family business, not unlike the DaLairs, Prescotts and Stantons. Investors looked to Emerson and his family to gauge the vitality of the company. Marilyn's binge partying was not viewed favorably and he had no other children or grandchildren so the company's future also had an unfavorable outlook especially compared to the DaLairs who had seen an incredible spike in investors and interest since Julius's wedding and birth of his third child.

As if the pictures themselves were not enough of an insult there were the comments that followed. He paged down the comment section with considerable ire.

What a skank!

Does she have no self-respect!

Talk about a cheap w***e!

For a bottle of tequila this too can be yours for the night boys! Don't all you bid at once!

Can you just imagine how many diseases she's carrying?

Look on the bright side. She's probably barren so there is zero chance of her breeding. Thank God! Can you imagine what hell-spawn she would unleash into the world?

Emerson shook with fury at the comments directed toward his daughter but there wasn't much he could do about it. His lawyers already informed him free speech ensured people could say what they pleased especially online. Even if he succeeded in shutting down one site there were hundreds of others. He also couldn't argue considering the pictures posted of her. Where did he go wrong?

"Sir, a man from the Eagle is here."

Emerson hesitated. The Eagle was one of the larger gossip magazines. In fact he was on their website now. He really didn't feel like talking to anyone associated with it but this might be a chance to clear the air and maybe salvage his daughter's reputation.

"Show him in."

Emerson waited as moments later a young man was shown in. His visitor was dressed rather messily: cargo pants,annel shirt and scuffed, leather jacket. Yet the look on his face was anything but humble. Seeing the corporate mogul he smirked and didn't look the least bit intimidated as he strode up to the desk.

Offering a hand he smiled, "Mister Carlisle."

Emerson didn't move merely stared at the offered hand. With a sigh he gestured for the man to take a seat.

Smile fading the man cleared his throat and sat down but didn't lose the arrogance of a salesman. There was something about his condence that irritated Emerson. This person was far below him and should have been intimidated at the very least. Yet the man was relaxed sitting back in his seat and bringing a leg up to rest on the opposite knee.

"Exactly how can I help you?" Emerson asked.

"It's not about you helping me. It's about what I can do for you," the man replied sounding even more like a salesman.

Emerson raised an eyebrow. He wasn't one to be easily hooked and he certainly wasn't going to be taken in by carnival barker.

"I hear you've been having family issues," the man said earning a glare. "There's a lot of ugly rumors around your daughter...and no other heirs to insure your company's future either."

"Get to the point."

"A picture is worth a thousand words but how about a video?"

The man took out his phone and selected a video saved on it. Handing it to Emerson he sat back as the familiar melody of Beethoven's Für Elise issued out. Emerson reluctantly accepted the phone expecting a compromising video of Marilyn but sucked in a breath by what he saw instead.

On the small screen was a young girl seated at a piano. Her green eyes were partially closed as she swayed to the melody she played. It was as if she was one with the music. It poured out of her heart inviting everyone in. He had only seen one other play like this.

"What is this?" Emerson looked up at the man his aloof façade crumbling.

"It is the girl who should have won the All Borough's Music Competition," the man said. "Her last name might be different but she looks and plays an awful lot like someone you tried to erase, Avalynn Carlisle."

Emerson inched at the name he had struck from the family records. Avalynn had been a quiet and docile child, pure and innocent. Or so he had thought. Ten years ago scandal crushed his opinion revealing her to be the worst conniving liar he had ever seen. He had such high hopes for her but he couldn't believe she would betray him like she did. Could this be...was this really...

"Name," Emerson repeated.

"Carter. It's not really that different from Carlisle if you think about it."

"What proof do you have?"

"This isn't enough?" the man genuinely looked puzzled.

Anyone who saw the girl's performance would agree with him. On top of that brown hair and green eyes wasn't exactly a common combination but it was known as hereditary traits of the Carlisle family. Though his hair was graying Emerson passed the unique features to both of his daughters. Not to mention the fact that Carter was certainly derived from Carlisle.

Although, now that he thought about it, no one else had drawn his same conclusions. The girl had been a late entry when the winner had all but been decided. Her talent took many by surprise as was the fact she was clearly blind. Several people pitied her but she hadn't asked for pity. She let her music speak for her which no one else had done.

Perhaps ten years was too long to stir the memory of everyone else. Scandal tended to eclipse talent though personally the man didn't put much stock in rumor and gossip despite his occupation. Avalynn Carlisle never once graced the gossip pages unlike her sister who seemed content to be a spectacle. She was sweet, rened and often overshadowed. Perhaps that was why they had forgotten her supreme musical talent.

"Just what sort of proof do you want?" the man asked.

"A picture of her mother at the very least. Preferably together...and her name."

The man considered this. He understood the other's need for caution. Controversy swirled around his cherished daughter. If he was to suddenly announce the return of his shunned daughter, let alone granddaughter, it would be quite the shock to the elite world he lived in. It could make or break his company if not done correctly.

But if this proved his salvation Emerson would reward the person who made it possible handsomely. That was the reason why he hadn't offered the story to his editor. The money the magazine could offer simply didn't compare to having Carlisle owe him a favor.

"Fine. I'll get you pictures and a name. I'll throw in their address too."

"Two days," Emerson said. His patience would not last longer than that despite his intent to step carefully.

Nodding the man took his phone back before departing. It wasn't the immediate answer he wanted but more information meant he could ask for more money.

Once the man had left Emerson sat back in his chair with the memory of the child's performance swimming in his mind. Ten years ago he turned his back on his daughter. He had no choice. The girl had betrayed him. Marilyn told him everything. She had no reason to lie about her only sister. He would have expected her to lie to protect her sister. Furious he kicked Ava out without a second thought and cut her off completely.

He expected her to come crawling back begging for mercy and forgiveness. Instead she disappeared. After six months he grew tired of her stubborn pride and sent his men to drag her back but they found no trace of her. It was as if Avalynn Carlisle dropped off the face of the world.

Emerson nally understood he didn't know anything about his daughter. He didn't know her friends or who she might turn to. He simply had nowhere to start looking for her. She had always been quiet and obedient. Never had he suspected the strength residing in her. Could it be she had actually decided to raise her child on her own rather than seeking her family's aid? Was she trying to punish him by inviting more scandal? He simply didn't understand what was going on in her mind.

Leaning forward he tapped his intercom.

"Mister Carlisle?" his secretary quickly answered.

"Have Connor come to my oce."

"Right away sir."

Emerson stood and moved to the window overlooking the city. This time he would nd her...this time she would act like the studious daughter she was meant to play or he would make her regret it. Either way his granddaughter would certainly comply. He didn't know what kind of life they had been living but there was no way his granddaughter would turn down the chance for a better one.

He was sure of it.