



She's perfect for Daddy

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Category: Romance, Billionaire Romance

Description: A widowed CEO.

A teacher.

Two little twin girls and a plan to have a mother.

After the death of his wife, Thomas decided to close his heart forever. The CEO of Lennox & Associates went out with different women just to satisfy his needs, yet he wasn't willing to get deeply involved. The father of twin daughters, he reserved his love only for them.

Helena Price has always loved children and dedicated her life to teaching them. She became a nursery school teacher, dividing her time between the little pupils and her elderly grandmother, but she doesn't think about romance.

The girls, Anne and Mary, dream of having a mother and have created a plan to unite them, but they are too naive to understand the mysteries of the heart.

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Prologue

Little Mary finished her drawing and nudged her twin sister, who was sitting next to her at the kindergarten table.

“Look!”

“You,huh?” Anne tilted her head, looking at her.

“I drew a picture.”

On a sheet of paper, drawn with crayons in a way that suited the little four-year-old girl. There were shapeless lines, but they made perfect sense to her.

“Is it Mom?” Anne, her twin sister, wanted to know.

Mary shook her head no.

“It's Aunt Helena.”

The two girls raised their heads and looked for the teacher, who was in the corner of the room, helping another student use the crayons.

“If shewasour mother?” Mary asked her sister.

“Don't you have a boyfriend?”

“I’ve never seen it.”

The twins had a great love for their teacher, who was undoubtedly the most important female presence in their lives. They had no strong memories of their mother, who had died when they were babies, leaving only their father, who never remarried or had a girlfriend.

They observed the other children at school and the life they had, and they also wanted to have a family. However, whenever they talked to their father about it, he remained silent. They were too young to understand the nuances of adult relationships, but they came up with a plan.

The teacher seemed perfect for Dad, but not everything would be so easy.

Chapter one

A few days later...

I made her get on all fours in front of me and grabbed her hair as I thrust into her with the sight of her round ass colliding with my pelvis amid the increasingly intense movements of my body.

She moaned softly as my skin sweated against hers.

I gave in to the desperate need to cum and ejaculated inside the condom, inhaling deeply until my heartbeat normalized.

I rolled out of bed and picked up my wallet, which I had left on the bedside table. I counted out a few notes and put them on the mattress.

“You don’t have to wait for me to come out of the bathroom.”

“Why don't you spend more time with me here in bed?” The prostitute sprawled out on the sheet, showing off her full breasts to attract my attention.

“I have an appointment now.”

“Leave the appointment for later.”

“I can't,” I said in a firm, unquestioning tone. It was late afternoon, and soon, my daughters would be leaving school.

Since my driver had asked for that week off for a family trip, I didn't trust anyone else to pick up my girls.

“Are you sure?” He ran his hand down his body, insinuating himself to me, showing that he wanted us to start again.

“Yes. Take your things, get dressed, and leave.”

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“Okay.” He swallowed dryly and sat down on the bed completely ungracefully. “Are we going to see each other again?”

“No, I didn't.” I indicated the money so that she would stop asking inconvenient questions and leave.

In recent years, my physical needs were satisfied by paid women. I didn't have a steady affair with any of them. A stranger and a quick fuck were all I needed. After losing Daphne, I didn't want anyone else in my life. All that pain, anguish, and emptiness that had taken over my heart were feelings I wouldn't deal with again.

I went to the bathroom and took a quick shower, getting rid of the smell of sex and sweat. After putting on my suit, I returned to the bedroom, and the prostitute was no longer there—better that way.

I fixed my cufflinks and tie in front of the mirror before going down to the hotel lobby, where I had booked a room for that quick meeting.

The valet was already waiting for me and handed me my car key.

I left, driving to the nursery school where my daughters were studying.

I had to stop a little way off because there were many other parents' cars in the driveway. It wasn't often that I went there. Usually, Mylon did it for me, and all I had to do was attend the parents' meetings.

I went to the entrance and realized that other people were watching me. I didn't care; I

would just take the twins and go home.

As soon as I arrived at the entrance, I saw several children passing by and meeting parents and guardians who were waiting for them.

I counted several, but none of them were mine.

I moved closer to the entrance and caught the eye of the woman responsible for delivering the children.

“Where are Mary and Anne Lennox?”

“The twins?”

“That's right.”

“With Professor Helena.”

“Can you get them for me?”

“You are...” He squinted, taking a closer look at me.

“Their father?”

“Of course! Mr. Thomas Lennox.”

“It's usually my driver who comes to pick them up, but he's on vacation; it was necessary for me to come.”

“I understand.”

“Then get them for me.”

“The teacher should have brought them by now. Something must have happened.”

“Can you check?”

“Yes, sir.”

I crossed my arms and stood in the doorway, waiting while the woman closed the gate and went into the school to look for my daughters. It took a few minutes for her to return.

“Mary seems to be feeling unwell; the teacher is with them.”

“Feeling sick?!” I went into a state of alert, thinking about what could have happened to my daughter. “And you didn’t tell me or say anything?”

“It seems to have just started.”

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“Where are my daughters? I want to see them.”

“Please come with me.” The woman let me through the gate, and I followed her inside the colorful building with its many drawings reminiscent of a child's play universe.

We entered a room, and I saw Mary lying on one of the desks, her head down and her eyes closed. Her sister was nearby, as was a woman I remembered seeing a few times.

“What's going on with her?” I asked in a harsh tone.

“About ten minutes ago, she started complaining of a headache.” The woman turned to me. She was young, probably no more than twenty-two or twenty-five years old. Her hair was brown and fell in waves around her triangular face.

“Mary.” I crouched down next to her, and my daughter raised her arms, putting them around my neck.

“Daddy...” His voice was weak and sly.

“What's wrong?”

“I'm sick.”

“I'm taking her to the doctor.” I checked her temperature by placing my hand on her forehead but found nothing suspicious.

“You don't have to.”

“Aren't you sick?”

“Helena will look after me.” She stretched out her arm to try and reach the teacher but couldn't.

“Mary, I...” The woman scowled as she looked at me. “Your father is going to take you and see how you are.”

“But I want you.”

“I can't go, princess.”

“Why not?” he whined.

“Mary, we have to go.” I closed my face with a stern expression. My heart was squeezing at the thought that she might have been ill, but she wouldn't stand being picked on.

“Helena...”

“We'll see you again tomorrow if you're better.”

“Please...”

“Come on, Mary.” I picked her up, and my daughter began to whimper. “Anne?”

I turned to my other daughter who grabbed the teacher's hand, trying to pull her along with me.

“Anne.”

“Vamu, Helena.”

“Go with your father.”

“Anne...” I squeezed my eyes shut, and the girl finally let go of the teacher's hand and approached me.

I followed them out of the school and took them to the car. I held Mary with one arm and used my other hand to open the back door. I settled her in the car seat and put my hand on her forehead. There was no sign of fever, but I was still worried.

“How are you feeling, child?”

“I'm fine now.” She fidgeted as if she was upset.

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“Are you sure? Where does it hurt in your head?”

Anne started tugging at the hem of my jacket until I was looking at her.

“What's wrong?”

“Let's go home.”

“First, we'll go to the hospital to see what's wrong with your sister.”

Anne crossed her arms and seemed irritated by the situation. I put her in the other car seat and drove to the hospital that was closest to our house. I'd been dealing with both on my own since they were babies, and it had never been easy, no matter how many resources I had.

I gave them my best, but sometimes, I still felt I was failing. It probably would have been a lot easier if their mother hadn't been torn away from us, but I avoided thinking about it so as not to mourn.

I stopped at the emergency room and picked up my daughters. I held Mary on my lap and Anne's hand. Soon, one of the on-duty doctors took us to a room to see her.

“How are you, young lady?” He closed the office door and approached Mary, whom I had placed on the stretcher.

“I'm fine now.”

“I was told that she complained of a headache at the end of the lesson, and when I arrived at school, she looked very down.”

“Did they give her medication?”

“They didn't tell me anything.”

“Have you taken any medicine?” He turned to my daughter, hoping she would remember to tell him.

Mary just shook her head no.

“I'm just going to examine you.”

“That's good.”

The doctor made Mary open her mouth, checked her throat and her head, probably in search of a bruise, and found nothing. He listened to her chest and checked her temperature before turning to me.

“Look, Dad, she seems fine. Apparently, there's nothing to worry about. No fever or throat infection, but I'll ask you to keep an eye on her and come back here if anything comes up.”

“And the headache?”

“There could be any number of causes, from playing to exposure to the sun. If her complaints become constant, you can come back, and we'll do a CT scan to identify a possible cause, but I believe your daughter is healthy and has nothing to worry about.”

“How nice!” I let out a sigh of relief.

The twins were my most precious possession, and the thought of something happening to them made me desperate.

“Let's go home, girls.” I took Mary from the stretcher and held out my hand for Anne to come with me.

“I want a lollipop,” Anne asked as we walked back to the car.

“Only after dinner.”

“Ah, Dad!”

“Candy is bad for your teeth.”

She pouted, but I was used to dealing with that little face and had acquired a firm hand over the years.

I put them in the car and leaned towards Mary again.

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“And your head, child? Is it still hurting?”

She just said no.

“Promise you'll tell me if it hurts again?”

“Plometo.”

I kissed him on the forehead and drove home.

Chapter two

I opened the door to the small apartment in Queens and put the key on a piece of furniture in the hallway. My shoulders felt so heavy that I moved them until they cracked and sighed with small relief.

“Helena...” a low, hoarse voice whispered from the living room, and I spotted my grandmother sitting in her usual armchair. She rarely left the place, and I had the feeling that she had already put down roots.

It had been just the two of us for so long that I couldn't remember if it had ever been any different.

My mother was the kind of woman who fit the definition of a problem girl. She got involved with the wrong men and had inappropriate affairs all the time. She got pregnant at sixteen and didn't even know who my father was, leaving my grandmother, a widowed woman with some motor difficulties, to look after me. I

couldn't complain about that; she had done the best she could and everything I was, I owed to her love and care. My mother was always disappearing into the world, and when she returned, it was only to bring more trouble. It sounded awful on my part, but I preferred it when she was away to when I had to scrape together my savings to pay bail or get her out of trouble.

That day marked two months since I'd heard from her, but I wasn't worried. She'd been missing for longer, living with some guy in some corner of the country, but at some point, she always came back needing help.

“Hello, Grandma!” I leaned towards her and kissed her cheek.

“Hi, darling. You look tired.”

“I'm fine; I just need a shower.”

“How was your day?”

“Nothing different except for the fact that one of my students fell ill.”

“Oh, dear! What was wrong with her?”

“He complained of a headache and left with his father.”

“I hope she's all right.”

“Yes...”

“What happened?” I caught a hint in the air that there was something else I hadn't mentioned.

“She wanted me to go home with her, to look after her.”

“These children love you very much, but I bet their mother is taking good care of them now.”

“She doesn't have a mother.”

“What do you mean?” My grandmother frowned, wrinkling it even more as she processed the information I had thrown at her.

“Their mother died.”

“Theirs?”

“Yes, they're twins.”

“What a tragedy!”

“That's right.”

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“But their father must be a good man.” My grandmother was always trying to see the best side of everything.

“I don't know, I hope so, but the truth is that I rarely see him. It's a school for more fortunate children, so it's common for drivers or nannies to come and pick them up.”

“I see.”

“Have you eaten?”

“I've been waiting for you so we could do this together.”

“Grandma!”

“It's not as if it's taken too long. There's still time.” He took my hand and stroked it lovingly in such a way that I couldn't protest any longer.

“Okay! I'll see what's in the freezer and heat something up for us.”

My grandmother just smiled and went back to paying attention to a program about animals that was on the television.

I went into the kitchen and decided to prepare a stew with chicken pieces and some ingredients I found in the fridge. After eating, I could take a shower and rest for a while before thinking about the lesson I had to prepare for the next day.

While I was cooking, my mind wandered to Mary several times. I was worried about

my little pupil, and I hoped it was nothing serious. I would see her the next day, and I would know for sure.

Chapter three

I opened my laptop on the living room table and leaned over it. One of our biggest clients, a huge drinks distributor, was facing a class action lawsuit that we couldn't afford to lose. There was a lot at stake, including the name of Lennox & Associates, so we didn't want to take it too seriously.

I needed to think of a good settlement that would benefit my client and not lose him too much money. The aim was to prevent the case from going to trial and creating an even more negative image.

New York used to be a big stage, and people loved to turn everything into a spectacle, especially the media...

“Dad!”

I turned away, my thoughts interrupted, when I realized that a small hand was tugging at the hem of my shirt.

“What is it, Mary?” I examined my daughter for any sign of unease.

Other people, especially my family, had trouble differentiating between the twins, but I knew them so well that I knew exactly which one they were.

“Come with me...”

“I'm busy, child.”

“Read a story?”

“Didn't Genevieve read it to you?”

“I want you...” She squeezed her eyes shut in a pleading expression that knew how to convince me.

“Okay!”

I could spend a few minutes with her and then go back to work.

“Let's go to bed.” I picked her up. “Where's your sister?”

“Mirroring history.”

“Okay.”

I went into their room and saw Anne sitting on the bed. She came over to me carrying a book as I settled her sister down. They both came closer, and each laid their head on one of my legs. I kissed each of them on the forehead before opening the fairytale book.

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“Once upon a time...” I started to tell the story until I was interrupted by Anne.

“Dad?”

“What's wrong?”

“Is Aunt Helena a princess?”

“Helena?” I squeezed my eyes shut at the thought of the name. I couldn't immediately associate the image with a person. “Which Helena?”

“Plofesola.”

“Ah! She's not a princess.”

“Why?”

“Princesses are the daughters of kings, and I imagine that's not the case with your teacher.”

“But we're princesses.”

“When we call you princesses, it's just an endearment. It doesn't mean you're a real princess.”

“No?” Anne pressed her lips together as if she were upset by the information I had given them.

“You're both beautiful, and I love you both very much.” I kissed each of you on the forehead.

“Is Helena beautiful?”

I had no idea what could have prompted them to ask me that, but I said no because I didn't think it was appropriate to talk about that kind of subject with my daughters.

“Don't you want me to continue the story?”

They said yes.

“So let's go.” I resumed reading, saying the sentences slowly so that they could understand, and they soon fell asleep.

I tucked each of them into their beds and covered them up so that I could get back to my work.

Chapter four

I arrived at school very early, before the students, as was my custom every day. I had a good night's sleep and was well-rested when I took the bus to Manhattan. I had even considered moving to a place closer to work, but the rents there were absurd and couldn't be afforded on my salary. For the time being, we would stay in Queens, which would allow me to save a little money and even plan for the future.

I was a good student at school, which enabled me to get a scholarship to Columbia to study pedagogy. I've always loved children, and the chance to work with them was a dream for me.

“Good morning, Helena!” said hello to Sarah, another teacher and friend who worked

with children a little older than my class of four.

“Good morning!”

“What do you say we go out on Friday? I heard there's going to be a really nice concert, and I can get us some tickets.”

“I'm staying with my grandmother.”

“Oh, I can't believe it!”

“These noisy concerts aren't usually my thing.” I grimaced, and Sarah started laughing.

“How do you expect to get a boyfriend if you only spend your weekends with your grandmother?”

“Her company is very pleasant.” I snorted, and she laughed.

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“If no one eats it, the earth will, dear.” He winked at me.

“Sarah! The children...”

“They haven't even arrived...” She didn't even have time to finish her sentence because our children began to invade the corridor, running toward their classrooms. “We'll continue this subject later.” She grabbed one of the students and stopped him before he fell and hurt himself.

I opened the door to the room, and soon, my student appeared, followed by the twins Mary and Anne, who came towards me. They wrapped their arms around my waist, and I stroked their shoulder-length hair.

“It's good to see you both.” I crouched down so that my eyes were level with theirs. “How are you feeling today, Mary?”

“I'm fine.”

“I'm very happy to hear that.” I stroked her chubby cheek, and she smiled at me.

Those two were very cute, and I loved being able to see them every day, as well as my other pupils. I had a class of ten children, and I dedicated myself to them as if I had total responsibility for what they would become one day.

“Profesora...” Anne tugged at the hem of my blouse.

“What is it, little one?”

“Why isn't my father a king?”

I widened my eyes in surprise at his question. Sometimes, those little minds got me into a few tight spots, and I had to think for a while to understand the situation.

“Because his father is not the son of another king.”

“Ah!” She squinted, thinking about it, but seemed to accept my answer.

“Is he handsome?” Mary asked me, and I didn't react again.

“Yes, he's handsome.” It was inevitable that my mind wouldn't be filled with images of the man I'd seen the day before. The haughty bearing, the perfectly-cut goatee, and the expensive, well-tailored suit. Surely, he was snobbish and rich like the fathers of the other children at that school. Under no circumstances should I have been thinking about his beauty, but I couldn't help it. He was a widower who was at least ten years older than me, in addition to the other strong discrepancies. “Because you're both beautiful.” I put my finger on the tip of each of their noses to reverse the situation. “Only someone beautiful could make twins like that.”

They looked at each other and giggled, surely happy with my answer, and at least for the time being, they didn't ask me any more questions.

“Let's go into the living room.” I put my hands on each of their backs. “I've prepared several activities for today.”

They nodded and went to their seats, joining the other students.

Chapter five

I walked through the glass doors of the law firm that belonged to my family and were

I had become chairman after my father's retirement. Some of the staff, who were distracted, stopped to look at me but quickly returned to their work when they saw my serious expression.

I only stopped walking when I reached the desk of my secretary, who stood up quickly and shook her head as she looked at me.

“Good morning, Mr. Lennox.”

“Violet, I need you to schedule a meeting with the president of Atlatics now, if possible in the morning. I have a proposal that I want to discuss with him before presenting it to the class action lawyers. Tell him it's very important that we get around the situation and prevent it from going to trial. None of us wants to attract even more negative media to the case.”

“Yes, sir...”

“If there is any news, please let me know immediately.”

“If...” She didn't even finish speaking before I opened the door and walked into my living room.

I wasn't expecting to find anyone there, but soon I saw a woman in an impeccable suit, as well as her dark hair. She placed her heels on the floor and stood up as soon as she saw me enter.

I turned to Violet with a scolding expression.

“You should have told me she was here.”

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“I tried it.”

I nodded and motioned for my secretary to step aside before slamming the door.

“To what do I owe the honor of this visit, promoter?”

“You missed Sunday lunch.” He crossed his arms and gave me an even tighter look.

“I had to analyze a few cases.”

“Mom missed the girls.”

“They're fine.”

“Family is important to them, Thom even more so after losing their mother.”

“Do you think I'm not good for my daughters?”

“That's not what I'm saying; I know you do the best you can.”

“What do you want, Deborah? I don't suppose you left your office just to come here and question my absence at a family lunch- something you could very well have done over the phone.”

“This case... The people who got intoxicated.”

“I'm just doing my job, sister.”

“Those responsible must be punished...”

“We're going to propose a very good settlement for the victims; there's no need to worry about that. They will be well compensated for what happened.”

“It's more than just giving money to families...”

“We can't correct what has been done. That's why you went to the prosecutor's office, and I'm still defending millionaires. But think about it, Deby, if my clients go to jail, nothing will change in the lives of the victims, but money can guarantee comfort and much more.”

“All for the money.”

“You know.” I shrugged.

“When will I be able to take my nieces for a walk?” She changed the subject, realizing that I would be unyielding.

It wasn't her case. There was no reason to get involved, especially when each of us was defending a point of view.

“At the weekend, but you won't be filling their heads.”

“As if I would do that.” He shrugged, feigning innocence. “Are you going to visit our parents this weekend?”

“I don't know if I'll have time to go to the suburbs.”

“That's what those fancy, expensive cars you buy with the millions you earn here are for.”

“You could be working with me. It's not too late to leave the prosecutor's office and come here.”

“I belong there.”

“Okay.” It was my turn to shrug.

I heard a knock on the door just before my secretary came in.

“Sir, the client who asked to meet you is on his way; he says he'll be there in ten minutes.”

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“Prepare the meeting room.”

She nodded and closed the door.

“Well...” My younger sister let out a deep sigh. “I think I'd better go before the security guards take me away.”

“You know that would never happen.”

“I have my doubts.” She leaned towards me and kissed my cheek. “See you later, Thom.”

“See you, Deby.”

“Send the twins a kiss for me.”

“No problem.”

My sister left my office, and I checked some information on my computer in a document folder before heading to the meeting room on the floor.

After crossing a long corridor, I spotted my client sitting behind an oval table. I entered the room, closing the glass door and he raised his head and looked at me.

“I won't be arrested, will I?”

“No, Mr. Werner, but you'll have to act exactly as I said. The contamination of the

liquor stock was just an accident.”

“Yes, it was... Of course, it was!”

“So let's act accordingly, and I have a proposal so that the situation doesn't go to trial.” I straightened my jacket and pulled up a chair in front of the man, settling into it.

Chapter six

“Teacher!” One of my little pupils held out her hand, calling for me, and I walked towards her, leaning down next to her.

“What is it, Anne?”

“I drew a picture.”

“Can I see?”

She smiled at me, nodding her head, and handed me a sheet of paper. The drawing was very childish, with the characters in the shape of toothpicks, but she had made a proportion that I thought corresponded to real people.

“Who are those?” I pointed to the drawing.

“Me, Mary, Dad, and you.”

“Me?” I was surprised.

Generally, the children drew more of the family; sometimes, I was in their representations but never together with the parents.

“Yes, you.”

“How pretty I looked.” I stroked her hair.

Anne's smile widened at my compliment, and I seized the moment to try to understand why she had drawn me together with her father and sister. I pulled out one of the small chairs made to their size and settled down next to them.

“Why did you draw that picture, Anne?”

“You don'tlike it?”

“Of course, I liked it, but why did you put me with your father and sister?”

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“You could spring with us.”

“Live with you?” I was completely surprised by her statement, and I wasn't expecting anything like that.

“É!”

“But I already have a house.”

“Ours is beautiful.”

“I imagine it's very beautiful, but I have a family, and I live with them.”

“Let's be a family.”

“Oh, no, dear. Our family is our parents, grandparents, uncles, cousins...”

“You said Dad was handsome.”

“He is, but...” It was in the middle of the sentence that I realized what she might have been implying with all those childish thoughts.

I knew that she and her sister had lost their mother in a tragic car accident when they were just months old. Somehow, they could have been transferring to me a presence that was certainly lacking. As much as I loved those two little ones as much as my other students, I couldn't imagine that such behavior could be healthy for them. I didn't want them to get hurt or create some kind of mistaken image of me.

“Mary and Anne.” They raised their little blue eyes when they heard me call and stared at me. “Come here with me.” I took their little hands and brought them to the reading corner of the room, near where the cupboard with the backpacks and lunchboxes was.

They stood with their arms swinging at their sides, looking at me as they tried to understand why I had kept them away from the rest of the class.

“You're both very special girls.” I touched the tip of each of their noses. “I love you both very much, and I love being your teacher, but I'm not your mommy.”

“It's not!” replied Mary with conviction. “Dad said that now, our mother is an angel in heaven.”

“That's right! I'm here to help you both, but I'm just the teacher.”

“She said Daddy washandsome.” Anne crossed her arms, challenging me with her gaze.

“He is.”

“So...”

“Surely, at some point, he will have someone who will be very lucky to be part of your lives.”

“You...”

“Oh, Mary.” I stroked her cheek. “I didn't.”

“Why?”

“The right person will fall in love with your dad, and they'll be very happy.”

“But...”

“Look, girls,” I put my hand on each of their shoulders, “I'm very honored to know that you have such affection for me, but I'm just your teacher. Are you all right?”

They stared at me for a moment until they nodded.

“Who wants to choose the book we're going to read today?”

“Me!” Anne raised her hand and ran to the bookcase.

“Children, come to the reading corner.” I turned to the other students, waiting for them to get up and join us.

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They soon gathered in a circle, and I sat down in front of them to read a book of fairytale stories that Anne had chosen. They were her favorites. I spent so much time with those children that I understood each of them very well, but that didn't mean I could replace the role of a mother.

When the lesson was over, I helped them all pick up their backpacks and lunchboxes to leave the school. I accompanied them to the exit, where Holly handed them over to their parents and checked their permission slips.

Timothy, another of my students, grabbed one of my hands and pulled me along until I reached the door- that's when I saw him. He was just another father like all the others. I shouldn't have noticed him, but after the conversation with the man's daughters, it was impossible to stop my eyes from wandering over his profile.

He was tall, with broad shoulders, dark hair cut low, perfectly aligned, and a goatee that looked like it had been drawn by the best of artists. His image, as well as his expensive suit, were impeccable, as if even a strand of hair out of place was unacceptable. I didn't see him often, but his expression was so serious that I imagined a man like that was forbidden to smile.

I wondered if he wore that closed expression even when he was alone with his daughters and thought that it might be even harder for them to cope with the lack of a mother and affection. Little girls like that should have the basic right to a happy life.

“Bye, Helena!” Mary waved to me as she took her father's hand.

“See you later.” I waved back, and that was the moment the man noticed me.

He didn't say a word; he just stared at me for a fraction of a second, which was enough to make my legs wobble and affect my breathing.

I stood still as they left and disappeared from view as if the whole situation was just a strange mirage in my head.

“Is everything all right, Helena?” Holly asked me when she realized that I was staring completely into nothingness.

“Yes.” I blinked a few times. “Do you need me for something?”

“You can go home.”

“Thank you.”

I went back inside the school and got my things to go to the subway.

I sat on one of the benches waiting for the train and reached into my bag for my cell phone. There were no messages or notifications, even after a whole day without touching it. I couldn't brag about being the most popular person of all; the few friends I had made in high school and college had drifted away over time. With my routine boiled down to home and work, I didn't have any opportunities to make new ones. But I wanted to be a good teacher, and I needed to look after my grandmother.

I was distracted and ended up opening a search engine, only to realize I had typed in the name of the twins' father: Thomas Lennox. The man came from a traditional law family in New York City. He was now thirty-six years old and running the business he had inherited. The eldest son of three brothers, he was the CEO of Lennox & Associates and known as the devil's advocate. The man had an impeccable career and seemed to win every case he was involved in.

I swallowed, thinking how cruel and unbeatable he could be.

Currently, his biggest case involved Atantics, a drinks distributor being sued by customers who had consumed a batch contaminated with a chemical used in the maintenance of refrigerators.

It seemed that the twins' father had quite a bomb on his hands, but given his track record, I assumed that he would do well.

Deep down, I felt a little sorry for them at the thought of having to live with a guy like that without a mother to protect them.

I got off at a station closer to my house and still had to wait for a bus to take me to the apartment where I lived with my grandmother. Although it was more isolated from my work, it had a reasonable amount of space and two bedrooms that provided us with a little more comfort.

Living there, I managed to make my salary cover the month's expenses and the cost of her health insurance and medication. After taking such good care of myself, I felt that my grandmother was my responsibility.

I let out a deep sigh and let my shoulders slump as I opened the living room door and entered the small room.

“Hi, Grandma!”

“Helena.” She turned to me from the sofa and gave me a smile. “Did you have a good day?”

“Yes.” I left the key on a piece of furniture and put my bag in a corner next to it.

I didn't realize how sore my back was until I got rid of all the weight.

“What about your student? The one who had a headache yesterday.”

“She was fine today.”

He talks about them so much that I feel like I know them too.

“That's good.”

“I've made some tea. Would you like some?”

“Oh, Grandma! I told you not to touch the stove; you could burn yourself. Hot water is always dangerous.”

“It's not because I've gotten old that I can't even make a cup of tea.”

I twisted my lips, keeping my expression tight, and she continued to stare at me as if I hadn't done anything.

“Promise me you'll be careful?” I crossed my arms.

“I'm always careful.”

“I hope so. I'll take the tea, but first, I'm going to take a hot bath; my back is killing me.”

“Those small chairs aren't proportionate for someone your size.”

“But they are perfect for my students, and they are the priority.”

“How are you going to teach them if you're not well?”

“I'm fine, Grandma.” I went up to her and left a kiss on her cheek before heading down the corridor to my room.

I thought that after a shower and a good dose of rest, I'd be feeling brand new.

Chapter seven

I got my daughters out of the car and held hands with each of them, guiding the two bouncy girls to the entrance of my parents' mansion. After their retirement, they moved into a large house with a huge garden, far away from the hustle and bustle of Manhattan.

I loved civilization- the lights and the rhythm of the cars- I couldn't stay away from it all for so long. But I didn't know how I would feel when the years passed, and I reached their age.

Daphne liked the big house, the yard, and especially the space for the girls to run around and have fun. But with my corporate life and all the firm's commitments, she had to surrender to the penthouse amid the chaos.

“Ah, my loves!” My mother cracked a huge smile as soon as she saw her granddaughters.

“Grandma!” They ran towards her before I could stop them, afraid they might hurt themselves on the small staircase that led to the front door.

“Anne, Mary!” My mother kissed each of them on the forehead before hugging them even tighter.

“Thank you for staying with them tonight. The nanny had a sore throat, and I was afraid it might be contagious.”

“It's always such a pleasure to be with my granddaughters.” My mother stroked their heads, and the girls looked at me with sparkling eyes and an excited look.

“No stuffing yourselves with cake and going to bed late.”

“Oh, Daddy...” they started to whine.

“Did you hear that?” This time, my expression turned to my mother.

“What's the point of grandma's house if it's not fun?”

“They need limits.”

“You do that very well, my son. As serious and determined as your own father, but there's more to life than that.”

“I'm just trying to do my best for them.”

“I know you have, even though it's a heavy burden to carry alone.”

“It's not as if I had a choice.”

“Yes, you do, my son. You know that.”

“As far as I know, there's no way to bring Daphne back.”

“She didn't...”

“Then the matter is closed.”

“Ah, Thomas...”

“I have to go, or I'll end up being late for tonight's appointment.” I knelt so that I was at eye level with my daughters and made them look at me. “I want you to behave, respect Grandma, and don't drink too much liquid after eight o'clock at night, or you'll end up wetting the bed. Did you hear that?”

They shook their heads, nodding.

“Now, come and give me a kiss.”

My twins came closer, and each gave one of my cheeks a kiss before pulling away and going back to their grandmother.

“Tomorrow morning, I'll pick them up to go to school.”

“And the driver?”

“He's coming back this weekend from a trip with his family.”

“I get it.” My mother put her hands on the girls' shoulders. “You can leave them with me, and they'll behave, won't they, my little angels?”

The girls nodded.

“See you tomorrow, daughters.”

“See you, Dad,” they said in chorus.

As much as I knew they would be safe and that my mother would take as good care of them as she had of me, deep down, if it were up to me alone, I would never leave their side. I was afraid. Even though the accident that had taken their mother was in no way my fault, I still felt responsible. They were all I had left and the most important thing to me. The thought of something happening made my chest ache.

I got back into my car as they entered the house and drove to the event space, which was in a building overlooking the Statue of Liberty. The well-lit and luxurious venue showcased the fortune of the diamond company responsible for the event to its most esteemed clients. This wasn't the case for me, as I hadn't bought jewelry, especially women's jewelry, for a long time. However, I was there to do business, and I wanted to meet the CEO in person and convince him that my law firm would be the best one to serve him.

Practicing in various sectors and defending the most important people in New York, Lennox and Associates had built a reputation that went back generations, my father before me and my grandfather before him. We were big lawyers who were paid millions by big corporations.

My two brothers and I had graduated from Harvard with honors, following the family

history. All the associates working at the firm had to have this great university on their CV. However, even though the path was clear, Tyler and Deborah chose a different path.

My brother went into the judiciary and became one of the judges of the state of New York, while she became a prosecutor, leaving me to take care of the family business.

I liked what I did- the man I was in court and out of court since many matters were resolved without escalating. I didn't lose cases because I was ruthless, but I also weighed up the risks very carefully before getting involved. My fame preceded me and further enhanced the reputation of my firm.

I had about fifty other lawyers working for me, associates who dealt with all kinds of matters and were hand-picked by myself or those I had confidence in.

“Good evening, sir...” The doorman looked at me as I approached the entrance with the stream of guests.

“Lennox, Thomas Lennox.”

“Of course!” he quickly recognized my name on the list. “Welcome.”

I nodded and entered the room.

The décor reflected the company's luxury, starting with the chandeliers at the entrance, which were large, extravagant, and sparkled so much that they almost blinded anyone who looked directly at them for too long.

My ten-thousand-dollar suit was certainly not the most expensive item among the guests' outfits.

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A waiter passed me and held out a tray with several glasses of champagne. The base was transparent, and the inside contained several small shiny stones that I assumed were diamonds.

I shook my head in denial. When it came to business, I always liked to be as sober as possible.

I approached the host of the party, who was surrounded by several people, but he gave me a broad smile when he recognized me.

“Thomas Lennox!”

“Sebastian Liev.”

“It's a pleasure to be in front of the most respected lawyer in New York.”

“Not so much.”

“False modesty doesn't work on me.” He chuckled and took a sip of champagne.

“I've been working hard.”

“That's the least your customers expect from you.”

“Of course.” He moved his head from side to side and looked over my shoulder as if looking for someone. “Didn't you come with someone?”

“I usually walk alone.”

“What's good should be used.” He ran his hand around a tall blonde woman with a model's body, wearing a tiny, shiny tube top. Given the astronomical age difference between the two, he thought it unlikely that she was a wife.

“I don't like mixing work with pleasure.”

“Helps reduce stress.”

“But sometimes, it makes us lose focus.”

“I can tell you're a very determined man.”

“Always.” I put my hands in my pants pockets and puffed out my chest.

“Is that why you think I should hire your firm?”

“Besides being the best in New York.”

“They say that Pirson and Spencer have been winning big cases.”

“Winning cases is something anyone can do.”

“You're right about that.” He intensified his smile while keeping his eyes fixed on me. “I like you, Thomas, but let's have some fun. This is a party, after all.” He gestured for the waiter to approach us, and I had no choice but to accept a drink, which I intended to sip slowly.

Chapter eight

I had slept badly. As much as I told myself I didn't know why, I was thinking too much about the Lennox twins. Anne had only drawn a picture, which, in a way, was no big deal, but I wondered what it would be like for them to have to deal with missing their mother. As much as the other students had crazy wigs for parents, they still had them.

There was no point in comparing them to me; my mother was alive, lost, probably on drugs with some addict, but she was still somewhere. As bad as she had been for me, I couldn't help wondering what it would be like if I never saw her again.

This absence of their mother, for such little girls, was heartbreaking. Even though I was just a teacher, I couldn't not care. However, it was quite possible that in the near future, they would have a stepmother. A handsome, wealthy man like Thomas Lennox must have had plenty of candidates. At some point, he would end up choosing one of them.

“Good morning, Helena!”

“Good morning, Holly.” I smiled at her as we entered the school.

“How is your grandmother?”

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“Good. Even though I want to leave the house less and less.”

“I understand; my mother doesn't think about anything other than watching television after she retired.”

“There are interesting programs,” I tried to be optimistic.

“Not the ones she watches.” My coworker laughed.

I shrugged and headed for my classroom, preparing the place before the students arrived. I had organized some more playful activities the day before that I hoped would keep them busy and make them have fun, as well as stimulate their motor skills and reasoning.

I loved my job. Being with those little ones was undoubtedly the best part of my day. I had never regretted the professional choice I had made, even if it didn't bring the same prestige as other jobs. Seeing those little angels develop every day was very rewarding.

Sometimes I thought about what it would be like to have children of my own, but going home from work every day and leaving zero time for flirting, it was unlikely that I would find a husband.

Maybe a handsome, super-interesting guy would sit next to me on the subway, commenting on the launch of an author I admired or telling me about his plans to live in a house with a backyard. I laughed to myself as I thought how silly it was to imagine such a situation.

“Helena!”

I was startled when little arms wrapped around my waist.

“Hi, Michael!” I stroked my little pupil's head.

“Hey!”

“How did you spend the night?”

“I dreamt it.”

“Did you dream it?”

He nodded.

“With what?”

“Tihad aponi.”

“That you had a pony?”

“É!”

“Wow, was it nice?”

“It was.”

“Have you ever ridden a pony?”

“I walked. Dadtook meon the trip.”

“When did you go on a trip?” I used to repeat the sentences or ask questions with the context to help them understand the words better, thus improving their pronunciation, which was still very childish. “Where did you go?”

He squeezed his eyes shut, thinking and pressed his lips together until he seemed to give up.

“I don't remember.”

“It's all right.” I caressed his shoulder. “You can tell me later. Now, go sit in your seat and wait for the rest of your colleagues to arrive.”

“Yes!”

Gradually, the room filled up with familiar faces, but the twins were slow to appear. I was worried, almost thinking they wouldn't come until Holly appeared, guiding them into the room.

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“Were they late?”

“The father said the traffic was bad.”

Dad...

The mental image of the man shouldn't have caused me such mental turmoil, but I hoped it would pass soon.

“Okay. Go and sit down.” I indicated their chair.

“Are you all right?” Holly asked me as if she had noticed something.

“Why wouldn't I be?”

“I don't know, you seem a bit strange.”

“I'm fine.”

“If you're saying.”

“I'm going to start my lesson.” I grabbed the door handle as an indication for us to finish the subject.

“See you later.” She waved.

“See you!” I locked it from the outside and turned to the children. “Shall we start the

lesson?"

"Wow!" They cheered.

Chapter nine

At least in theory, I didn't deal with murderers, psychopaths, or any kind of thug who needed to go to jail. Lennox stayed far away from cases involving the death penalty. For example, in some situations, it was impossible to escape a trial, especially when the parties couldn't reach an agreement.

When I went in front of the judge, I was always willing to do everything possible to argue and build an indisputable case in favor of my client; that was my main purpose.

On that particular day, some of the associates were sitting in court, watching me defend a technology company against a case of breach of confidentiality and industrial espionage. An employee who had been fired under these precepts was alleging manipulation of the facts to compromise him. I was there to prove the company's case.

After calling him to the stand, I was sure he wasn't ready to deal with me, as one by one, his arguments fell apart.

"How did part of the program's code end up in your personal email on October 28?"

"I don't know..." He shuddered.

"You don't know, or you didn't send it?"

"Of course, I didn't send it."

“You've just said that no one else has access to it.”

“They must have hacked me.”

“Should they, or is that a statement?”

“Objection, judge!” The defense lawyer stood up.

“Your Honor.” I turned to the highest authority in the courtroom. “I'm just trying to understand what happened. My client believes he has been wronged by an employee who denies what happened, and we need to check the facts so we can reach a verdict.”

“Objection denied.”

The defense lawyer snorted.

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“I'll repeat the question, Mr. Brown. Are you sure you've been hacked, or is that just an assumption?”

“I... I don't know.”

“I need to remind you that you are under oath, and lying is perjury, which could land you in prison.”

He swallowed, turning even paler. That was going to be an easy case. I couldn't wait to get it over with so I could pick up my daughters.

“I'm going to ask you a question in a different way, and I hope you can answer me the truth according to your oath. Mr. Brown, did you send the code to your personal email?”

“Yes... yes.” He was forced to admit it.

“Witness dismissed.” I straightened my suit and returned to my chair next to my client.

That trial might not have had its final decree yet, but like all my other cases, I wouldn't lose.

After we were dismissed, I walked down the court corridor to the nearest exit where I had left my car.

“Look who's here.” I was surprised by a voice behind me and spun around to face

him.

“Tyler.” I smiled at my brother, dressed in his judge's outfit, who was probably leaving a court hearing.

“I thought I'd forgotten the way to this place.”

“My memory is good.”

He laughed and came closer to give me a hug.

“It seems like forever since I've seen him.”

“It's not as if I've disappeared.”

“You haven't been to our parents' house for a long time.”

“I was there yesterday. I went to take the twins so mom could keep an eye on them because I didn't have a babysitter. Besides, it's not like you're there all the time.”

“Life has gotten busy.”

“I can imagine.”

“And how are my favorite nieces?”

“Growing up.”

“I bet they miss me.”

“They don't even remember who their uncle is.”

He laughed debauchedly.

“I have to go.”

“We'll meet again sometime.”

I nodded and continued down the corridor. It wasn't as if we weren't close or didn't like each other, but life and routine meant that my brothers and I saw each other less and less, especially after I became a widower and had to take care of two little girls.

The traffic was hellish at the end of the day, and it took me much longer than usual to get to their school. It was more than half an hour after the school start time when I parked the car at the entrance, which was empty. The other parents had probably already picked up their children.

I rushed to the closed door and knocked.

It took a while for someone to come and open it.

“Mr. Lennox.”

“I've come to pick up my daughters.”

“It's late.”

“The traffic didn't cooperate with me today,” I grumbled. “I just want to get the girls home soon.”

“I'll call them,” the woman said before going back inside the school, leaving the door half-open so that I could see through.

She made her way to the entrance of the building, passing through a small courtyard, and disappeared from sight after passing through a door. I felt uneasy, even though she had only been gone for a few seconds.

He looked from side to side, growing impatient as time passed.

After I checked my watch and realized that the woman had been inside for almost ten minutes and hadn't come with my daughters, I got worried.

“Hi!” I pushed open the gate and took a step forward. “Where are my twins?”

The corridor was empty and there was no sign of anyone until I heard a woman calling from one of the doors.

“Mary!... Anne!”

I walked in and bumped into the primary school teacher who was supposed to be responsible for both of them.

“Where are they?” My tone was harsher.

“Mr. Lennox!” She seemed to be startled by my presence, but I wasn't worried about it.

“The twins.”

“I...” She held her breath.

“Can't you speak?” I imagined that because of the expensive tuition at this place, the teachers would be better educated.

She gritted her teeth, showing that she was irritated by my offense, but I could sound a lot worse if I didn't answer what I had asked.

“Where are my daughters?”

“I'm looking for them.”

“Looking?” That word was so absurd that it took me a while to come to terms with it.

“I gave them to Holly along with the rest of the class, and they were supposed to be waiting on the bench in the courtyard.”

“And why aren't they there?”

“I don't know, sir.”

“That's not the answer I expect.” I clenched my fists, huffing. A growing fury was welling up inside me at the possibility that something might have happened to them.

“The twins should be safe here.”

“But they are.”

“So where are they?” I was losing control.

“Sir, I know it's not what you'd like to hear, but they haven't left school. They're somewhere.”

“Anywhere? Do you have any idea what I can do with this hole if something happens to my girls? Do you know who I am?”

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“Yes, Mr. Thomas Lennox. I know very well who you are.” I was surprised when she puffed out her chest and faced me as if she wasn't afraid of me at all.

“Then you should think again instead of telling me you don't know where my daughters are.”

“I have to be honest no matter who you are.”

“How could they have lost two children?”

“We haven't lost them.”

“So where are they?”

“I'll find them.” She walked past me, almost bumping into my shoulder, and headed down the corridor.

I went back in the hope that the teacher could take me to my daughters. They were the most important thing to me, and I wouldn't allow anything to happen to my little ones. After losing their mother, I had to try even harder to protect them to the best of my ability.

“Mary!” I shouted.

“Anne!” called out the teacher. “Where are you girls?”

“I've come for you.”

I turned around when I heard a giggle and saw them running from one door to the other.

Little kids!

I chased after them and caught them by the collar before they hid behind a bookcase in the playroom.

“What do you think you're doing?” I stared at them seriously.

“Playing.” Mary tilted her head and gave me a smile as if there was nothing wrong with her attitude, which had made me desperate.

“Is that any way to play?”

“Hide and seek, Daddy,” Anne replied.

“Ah, girls!” The teacher came running and knelt down next to me, hugging them both as if she was really worried about their disappearance. “Don't do that anymore, okay?”

“But...” They twisted their lips.

“When Aunt Holly says you have to wait at the bank, you wait.”

The two girls ended up nodding.

“Let's go home.” I held out my hands to them, hoping they would come with me.

“No, Dad...” Mary muttered.

“How could we not?”

“Let's play with Helena.” Anne jumped up and down excitedly.

“No. He needs to go home, and so do you.”

“Pufavô”

I just shook my head no. I was serious and would have a talk with them about what had happened.

“Go with your father, girls.” Encouraged the teacher. “We can play another day; that's enough for today.”

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“Is that enough?” Mary repeated.

“That's enough. You need to go home.”

They both stared at the teacher for a while until they gave up insisting, held my hand, and stared at the door.

“Where are your backpacks and lunchboxes?” I asked when I realized they didn't have them.

“On the bench.” Anne took my hand and let her lead me to the place where they had abandoned their belongings.

“You two can't do this anymore.” I strapped Mary into the car seat before doing the same to the other.

“We were playing, Dad.” Anne made an innocent face that would have convinced me in another moment, but just thinking about the distress their little disappearance had caused me made me lose my composure again.

“It's not a joke you should play.”

“Why?”

“It worried me. Something could have happened to you. Bad things happen to taken girls.”

They shrank back, afraid of what I had said.

“Will you promise to behave?”

They nodded.

“So let's go home.” I checked that they were securely fastened before turning around and taking the wheel.

I couldn't possibly lose them.

Chapter ten

“Do you know who I am?” I mumbled to myself, trying to imitate the male voice. “Idiot, starched, in an expensive suit... He might as well shove that thousand-dollar tie up his...”

“What's that, my child?” Grandma was startled by the words that escaped my mouth. “Why are you talking like that?”

“The twins' father misaligned my chakras today.”

“Why?”

“I'd better leave it there.” I took off my bag and put it in the corner of a piece of furniture.

“Now I want to know.”

“I didn't know you were a gossip, Mrs. Abigail.”

“I'm worried about what's stressing you out.”

“It's nothing; it'll pass.”

“But it's not over yet.”

I went to the sofa in the living room and threw my legs up, placing them on the coffee table before venting to my grandmother, recounting what had happened from the disappearance of the girls to the appearance of their arrogant father.

“He was an asshole!”

“Wasn't it?”

“But the man's daughters have disappeared. I'd say anything if it were up to me.”

“Grandma...”

“You need to understand his side.”

“I understand.”

“Is that so?”

“The fact that you're a widower with two young daughters is not an excuse to deal with the situation like an asshole.”

“Everyone reacts as they can.”

My grandmother's speech wasn't enough to convince me. I understood that he might be worried about the girls; I was desperate when I couldn't find them, but that was no reason to come with:Do you know who I am?"to my side.

I still thought he could swallow that tie.

“I'm going to take a shower.”

“Then you could order us a pizza.”

“Pizza, Grandma? It's not healthy at all.”

“Oh, I can't take this health food anymore.”

“It's for your health.”

“I'm fine.” He twisted his lips.

“That's not what the doctor said at the last appointment.”

“He doesn't know anything.”

“That's absurd, Grandma.”

“So you're ordering a pizza?”

“How about a salad?”

“No salad.”

I shook my head in the negative and went to get my cell phone. I ordered a pizza and then went into my room; I'd probably finish my shower before he arrived.

I stood in the shower for a while, letting the hot water relax my muscles, and my mind filled with images of the arrogant Mr. Lennox. It was a fact that we came from different worlds. He was born into a golden family, went to the best schools, and never knew what it was like to study as if his life depended on it to get a scholarship at a good university.

That didn't make him better than me or the other way around.

I just hoped that those cute girls I adored so much wouldn't end up as a father at some point, which was quite likely, considering everything they would have. At least I was trying to do my bit for them, which I wasn't sure would continue after that day.

It was just a naive child's prank, but it was enough to make us desperate. My career was my last concern. If anything happened to them, I would never forgive myself. I had concern and responsibility for every one of my students, no matter how much that asshole father thought I didn't.

When I got back to my room, wrapped in a towel, I saw my cell phone vibrating, and the notifications caught my attention. I thought it might be the pizza app since no one was texting me. However, to my surprise, it was an old classmate from college. Jennifer had studied with me at Columbia but had moved back to Colorado after graduating.

Jennifer:

Hi, Helena! How are you?

It's been a long time.

Helena:

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I'm fine, aren't you?

It's been a long time.

Jennifer:

I'm fine. I came to New York for a workshop. Do you know that educator who writes books about the fun way to teach?

Helena:

Marcos Turner?

Jennifer:

That's right! There will be a lecture and workshop with him this weekend. Are you going?

Helena:

I didn't even know, lol.

Jennifer:

What world were you in?

Helena:

Mine.

Jennifer:

It's always like that. lol.

Helena:

Do they still have tickets?

Jennifer:

I don't think so.

Helena:

Then we'll have to take a rain check.

Jennifer:

But I want to see you. How about Saturday night?

Helena:

You know I don't like clubbing.

Jennifer:

Just one day won't kill.

Helena:

How about a coffee?

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Jennifer:

I bet you don't have a boyfriend yet.

Helena:

Do you think interesting guys don't drink coffee?

Jennifer:

Here.

Helena:

Hey!

Jennifer:

So you're dating?

Helena:

That's not what I said.

Jennifer:

I knew it! Let's go! You need to have fun and kiss on the mouth.

Helena:

You're still the same person you were at university.

Jennifer:

I'm not the only one.

Helena:

I have to look after my grandmother.

Jennifer:

It can be looked after for a few hours.

Helena:

Do I have until the weekend to reply?

Jennifer:

Yes.

Helena:

Thank you.

Jennifer:

But I won't take no for an answer.

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Helena:

You're terrible.

Jennifer:

You'll thank me.

Helena:

We'll see.

I was about to throw myself on the bed when I heard the intercom ring and had to run to change and answer the pizza delivery man.

I hoped Jennifer was right and we could really enjoy an evening together.

Chapter eleven

"It's time for bed." I looked at the girls who were in the living room playing with building blocks and led the way to the bedroom.

"Ah, Dad..."

"You two haven't behaved well today."

"We were just joking." Anne tried to defend them, and I tightened my expression even

more.

“It was very serious, and I was very worried. You two are my girls, and I don't want you to disappear.” I took each of them in my arms, one on each side, and crossed the corridor to the room where they were sleeping. I put each of them to bed before continuing the conversation. “Imagine if Daddy disappeared and you never saw me again?”

“You can't disappear!”

They both got out of bed and came running to hug my waist.

“I'm not going to disappear.” I leaned over to kiss the top of each of their heads. “That's just how they made me feel.”

“Hide and seek, huh?” Mary raised her head and stared at me.

“Yes! No jokes like that. Did you hear that?”

They both stared at me for a moment until they nodded.

“Now go to bed.” I made them return to their mattresses. “It's past your bedtime.”

“Good night, Dad!”

“Good night, my little ones.” I smiled at each of them, watching them settle into bed before I turned out the light and closed the door.

I took advantage of the fact that I was in the corridor and made my way to my room. I sat on the edge of the bed and took a deep breath. It had been an exhausting day, with the right to court and a father's distress. As much as I knew they weren't doing it on

purpose, sometimes those two killed me. I loved them more than anything; I wouldn't give them up for anything, but that didn't make it any easier to deal with alone.

The presence of my family, the support of my parents, and especially all my money didn't change the fact that the responsibility for them was entirely mine, and I was very afraid of failing.

I fell backward onto the mattress and stared at the ceiling.

“Ah, Daphne, it would be so much easier if you were here.”

I turned sideways until my eyes found a picture frame with a photo of my late wife. She was pregnant, in her final months and with a huge belly.

I remembered as if it were yesterday when we were in the ultrasound room, and the doctor told us we were having twins. It was a fright and a joy at the same time. Even though Daphne was a twin, which greatly increased the chances, I had never seen her sister, so most of the time, I forgot about it.

I had met her at Harvard when she was a young psychology freshman who bumped into a senior and asked him to help her find her building. After that day, I never wanted to leave her side, convincing her to marry me and move to New York, where I would work in the family office.

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What I didn't expect at the time was to lose her in such a tragic and brutal way. After burying a part of myself, I had sworn that I would never have my heart shattered like that again.

It had been years since I had lost her, and in that time, I had met some interesting women, especially others who had attracted me physically, but all I wanted from them was sex. I wouldn't have another one in my life or in my daughters'.

I stopped thinking when I felt my cell phone vibrating in my pocket.

Who could it be at that hour?

I thought about ignoring it, but another message that came in shortly afterward at least aroused my curiosity.

Deborah:

Hi, brother!

How are you?

Thomas:

Good.

Deborah:

Are you sure?

Thomas:

Apart from the scare the twins gave me today, I have.

Deborah:

My little pests, lol.

What did they do?

Thomas:

Playing hide and seek without telling anyone.

Deborah:

Poor things, they're too small to understand.

Thomas:

Let me suffer.

Deborah:

It's part of being a father.

Thomas:

Yes.

Deborah:

I could find another mother for them.

Thomas:

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As if that were possible.

Deborah:

You understood me.

Thomas:

I can't just put another woman in Daphne's place.

Deborah:

Can't or won't?

Thomas:

Both of them.

Deborah:

Time will pass, and you will grow old.

Thomas:

It happens to everyone.

Deborah:

I just don't want you to regret anything.

Thomas:

I'm not going.

Deborah:

Okay!

There's a new nightclub opening this weekend, and I'd love you to go with me.

Thomas:

You know I don't like that kind of environment.

Deborah:

Please... How long has it been since we went out?

Thomas:

It was never a frequent habit.

Deborah:

Thom.

Thomas:

Only if I can get the nanny to stay with the girls.

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Deborah:

We'll manage.

Thomas:

I confirm with you. I need to work now.

Deborah:

You need other things in life to do.

Thomas:

I do. I look after my daughters.

Deborah:

You understood me.

Thomas:

See you later, sister.

Deborah:

Until.

I tossed my cell phone aside and flopped onto the mattress. All I needed was my sister picking on me.

I couldn't imagine how going to a crowded place full of drunk young people would help me feel better. Considering that she was a promoter, she should also look for more suitable places.

Chapter twelve

I applied a little more lipstick when I realized that my lips were dry and leathery, then straightened my wavy hair and left the bathroom. My grandmother was in the same place as always, in the living room, and took a good look at me.

“Wow, you look so beautiful.”

“Are you sure?” I scowled as I ran my hands over the skirt of an old denim dress that lay folded and crumpled at the bottom of my closet. Since I hardly ever went out, I only wore my teacher's clothes and stayed at home without worrying about the rest.

“Of course!”

“I don't know if it's a good idea to go clubbing with Jennifer. There's...”

“Darling,” my grandmother interrupted me before I could start a speech and cite all the reasons not to go, “you're young, you're beautiful, and you still have a lot to enjoy.”

“But you...”

“I'll be fine here with my TV companion.”

“If you feel hungry?”

“My legs still work enough for me to go to the kitchen and get something from the fridge.”

“You could fall.”

“Are you giving me a hard time?”

“Of course not!”

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“Then go and enjoy yourself, miss. I'll be fine.”

“Promise you'll call me if anything happens.” The neighbor across the street...

“Hurry up, Helena!” You've lost patience with me.

“All right!” I leaned over and kissed him on the cheek.

I took the address Jennifer had given me and calculated the subway route to get there. I didn't have a car, and considering New York's traffic, that wasn't much of an advantage. Public transportation always got me where I needed to go.

It was almost eight o'clock on Saturday evening when I pulled up in front of the establishment. There was a queue and two truculent security guards at the door. I soon found myself thinking that it would be much better to be at home preparing lessons for my students than on this strange adventure.

I was about to turn around and make up some excuse to send a message and say I couldn't make it. Who knows, maybe if I coughed on the audio and invented a terrible cold, Jennifer wouldn't be upset by my failure. However, before I could run out of that place, I felt a hand on my arm and someone pulling me close.

“Helena!”

“Jenn.” I returned the hug.

“It seems like I saw you yesterday, but it's been so long.” She stepped back to take a

closer look at me. “You haven't changed a bit, or hardly at all...” She giggled. “You're prettier.”

“Thank you.” I was a little embarrassed. “You look very pretty too.”

I noticed her hair in long braids and her black skin even more glowing than I remembered. Jennifer had always been one of the most beautiful women I'd ever met, and I still thought so.

“Come here!” She pulled me by the wrist. “I want to introduce you to some people. Old friends and others I met at the workshop.” She pointed to a group behind her. “Summer, Hopper, Julius, and Ulysses.”

“Hi, guys!”

“Hey, Helena.” As one of them said my name, I assumed that Jennifer had already introduced me.

“Let's get in line.” She took my arm and dragged me away.

As we were simple people without any privileges, it took about half an hour before we finally managed to get in. The sound was loud, and the smoke coming from a machine under the DJ's stage gave the place a ghostly air and made people look deformed. I didn't have any sight problems, but I could see in that place how people with short-sightedness could see.

Then I remembered why I didn't like environments like that. Crashing music, cramped space, people rubbing against each other, and nowhere in sight to sit.

“Do you want to...” Jennifer's voice disappeared amid the noise.

“What?”

“Would you like something to drink?” She tilted her head to bring her mouth close to my ear.

“A bottle of water?”

“How about something a bit stronger?”

“Water is fine for now.”

“I'd forgotten what you were like.” She burst out laughing, and when she turned her head away, I could no longer hear what she was saying.

I noticed the group that had come with her. They were already moving to the beat of the music and seemed much more excited about the atmosphere around us than I was. My grandmother was right; maybe I should just cheer up a bit more and let the fun infect me.

I forced a smile and shook my shoulders from side to side as Jennifer leaned over the counter. From the time she spent talking to the guy who was serving her, I imagined she was flirting with him.

“Here's your water.”

“Thank you.” I opened the bottle cap and took a sip.

“I got you a shot of tequila.” Julius handed me a glass, and I stared at it for several minutes.

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“If you don't want it, I will.” Summer giggled, and I handed her the glass.

“Thank you.” You took it all in one go.

I could even say that I wasn't really trying, but it was becoming increasingly clear that this wasn't the environment for me.

Time went by, and the others were distracted and relaxed by the sound and, above all, the drink. I had already lost count of how many shots and drinks each of them had consumed.

“You're very beautiful.” Julius approached me, putting his hand around my waist.

“Oh, thank you!” I was completely taken aback.

“Do you have a boyfriend?”

“No, but...” I immediately regretted that thoughtless answer.

“I'd love to be.” He grinned at me, bringing his other hand up to my face.

“I think you've had a bit too much to drink.” I dodged, turning in the other direction, but he didn't let go.

“I'm fine!”

“Apparently not.”

“Come and dance with me.” He pulled me closer to the dance floor.

“I don't want to dance.”

“Just loosen up a bit.”

“I'm terrible at it.”

“Let me help you.”

“Let go!” I tried to pull his hand away from my waist, but he squeezed even harder, to the point of causing me pain. “Ouch!”

“You came here to have fun, so let's have fun.”

“Stop it, please...”

I looked from one side to the other, hoping that someone would be able to help me escape from this uncomfortable situation, but Jennifer was too busy with her tongue in another guy's mouth to notice what was happening to me.

Julius tilted his head in my direction, but before he could put his mouth to mine, I turned my face, and he sniffed my neck.

“You smell so good.” He moved his mouth up to my ear.

“Get away!” I tried to put my hands on his shoulders, but the tall, muscular guy was much stronger than me.

“Oh, my!”

I was ready to bite his mouth or do anything to get him to let me go, but before I needed to take drastic action, someone pulled him by the shoulder and pulled him away from me.

“Didn't you hear what the girl said?”

“What do you think you're doing?” Julius growled at the guy.

“Preventing you from committing something crazy that could land you in jail.”

Julius seemed to get even angrier, and from the way he leaned toward the guy, I thought he might start a fight. However, the little bit of rationality he still had in him stopped him. Snorting, he turned his back and walked away.

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It was at that moment that my savior turned to me, and the lights and smoke didn't prevent me from distinguishing his face. Those deep blue eyes and well-drawn goatee were not something I expected to find in the crowded space of a nightclub.

“Mr. Lennox?”

“Are you all right?”

I just shook my head yes.

“Great! Watch out for drunks. Some can use drunkenness as an excuse to avoid a no.”

“O-ob-thank you.” She was still stuttering as if she couldn't pronounce a complete sentence.

After my encounters and the stressful moments I had spent with that man, I would never have imagined that he would be the one to defend me against a guy who couldn't understand boundaries.

“What's going on here?” A woman approached him and placed her hand with its red-painted nails on the man's shoulder, emphasizing an intimacy that I admit made me even more uncomfortable.

She was beautiful and tall, with long, dark hair that was very well-groomed. Red lipstick highlighted her lips, and a long black dress with a side slit made her look very sexy and enviable.

Thomas looked deep into my eyes before answering.

“Nothing.”

“I ordered us a drink; let's go and get it.”

“All right.” He agreed, leaving with her.

I stood still, as if frozen, while they disappeared into the crowd as if they were figments of my mind.

Chapter thirteen

“She's pretty,” Deborah commented as she handed me a glass.

“Her who?” I played dumb.

“The woman you were talking to.”

“Ah! She's just a cheeky little teacher.” I took a sip.

“Teacher?” My sister seemed even more curious, and I realized what a dangerous path I could have taken.

“This is a bad place to talk.”

“Don't run away from me, Thom...” She came up behind me and grabbed my shoulder, making me turn to face her again, and I realized that agreeing to go out with my sister had been a bad idea. I should have been at home, enjoying time with my daughters and not having my ears blasted by loud electronic music.

“I'm not running away.”

“I know him very well.”

“She's the twins' teacher and responsible for the hide-and-seek scare. If she had kept an eye on my little girls as she is paid to do, this wouldn't have happened.”

“Hmm...” She bit her lower lip.

“What?”

“Nothing!” He shrugged.

I was too used to dealing with games of lies, half-truths, and manipulation to fall for it.

“Deby?” I narrowed my eyes.

“And you went to save her?”

“I only realized that the idiot wasn't taking no for an answer.”

“For those who say Thomas Lennox isn't a gentleman, take a look...”

“It was no big deal.”

“If you're talking.”

“I think I'd better go.”

“But we've only just arrived.” She twisted her lips, showing her dissatisfaction.

“If I go now, I can put my daughters to bed.”

“You know they'll be fine with the nanny, don't you?”

“I'm all they have.”

“You're wrong, Thom. I and the rest of the family are here for you and for them.”

“Everyone has commitments.”

“Don't you realize that you're the one who's keeping us apart?”

I was going to argue with her; the words were on the tip of my tongue, but I had to

swallow them because, deep down, I knew my sister was right.

“Would you like me to give you a lift?” I changed the subject.

“Are you kidding? I'm not leaving now. I'll take a cab later.”

“Okay.”

Before I could turn my back, my sister called me again:

“Tell my nieces I'll be spending the day with them on Sunday.”

“But...” I stopped my protest. “All right, then.”

I nodded to her, left the glass on a table, and left.

My car was in a parking space at the nightclub, and the valet handed me the key. That brief experience had shown that environments like that weren't for me, as my temples were throbbing when I settled into the leather seat. Going home and staying with my girls was the best thing I could do for myself.

What was that teacher doing there? It was inevitable not to think about her as I left the building. I hadn't expected a kindergarten teacher to be able to go to places like that. But what she did outside of work was none of my business as long as she didn't influence my daughters or the other students.

Despite the cheap and somewhat crumpled clothes, she looked different from what I remembered, more beautiful. It wasn't a justification, but it might have attracted the idiot who didn't know how to accept rejection.

I had to turn on the windshield wipers because I was surprised by the rain. When I

left the house, I didn't even think it would happen, but passing rainstorms were common.

I pushed the thoughts aside and focused on driving until I had to stop at a traffic light near the corner of the establishment. I turned on the window defogger and looked out.

It was her!

I should have just continued on my way without doing anything, but it was raining, and the woman had no umbrella and was getting wet.

It's not your problem, Thomas.

I pressed on the accelerator when the light opened, but the rain got heavier and I gave the arrow, pulling the car over near the curb.

I opened the door, and she was startled.

“Get in!”

“Mr. Lennox!” He widened his eyes.

“Get in.”

She tilted her head and alternated her gaze between me and the leather seat.

“You'll get your car wet.”

“It's already getting wet while the door is open, and I can't stand here, or I'll end up getting a fine.”

“But...”

“Are you going in or not?” I gave an ultimatum when someone honked behind me.

She looked at the other driver impatiently and eventually got in. She closed the door and cringed, shivering as the icy wind touched her wet skin. I turned off the air conditioning and left only the window defogger on.

“Thank you.”

“Where are you going?”

“I'm going back home.”

“Okay.”

“I was trying to get to the metro station. Can you drop me off?”

“I'll take her home.”

“It's far...”

“How far?”

“I live in Queens.”

I just wanted to get home soon and be with my daughters, which is probably why I didn't leave their teacher at the nearest place. Despite the air conditioning being switched off, the woman was still shivering and flapping her jaws. I turned it on again, increasing the temperature as hot as I could feel in my blazer.

“Put the address here.” I opened the GPS panel on the media monitor for her to type.

“You don't have to take me.”

“Would you rather I opened the door and threw you back out into the rain?”

“No.” She swallowed, becoming even more disconcerted.

“I imagined it.”

I didn't need to speak again for her to register the address and let the system calculate the best route.

We sat in silence, but every now and then, I turned my attention away from the traffic to look at her. Her makeup was smudged by the rain, but it wasn't enough to stop me from realizing how beautiful she was, especially when we weren't arguing.

It was possible that she was about ten years younger than me. Her delicate hands wrapped around her slender arms, and her nails were painted with a light, peeling polish on some of her fingers.

I had already been involved with younger women; usually, the pink books were full of them. The sex was easy, no questions asked, and the next thing I knew, my eyes were on her thighs. She closed her leg by reflex, and I looked away.

The young woman was my daughters' teacher, and I was supposed to avoid any involvement with them so as not to get into any trouble. But no, it was just the man who was hitting on her, and I thought little of it that day.

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Soon, the GPS indicated that we had arrived at the address; it was the entrance to a small residential building without any luxury or ostentatious façade like the one I lived in.

“This is it. Thanks for the ride.”

“Hold on.” I grabbed her hand before she opened her belt and left.

“What's wrong?” I noticed his breathing quicken, but he didn't look away from me.

“How much do you want?”

“What?” He frowned.

“To spend a night with me.”

“You're not serious.”

“Hello. Just give me a price.”

She shook her head no and gritted her teeth, showing all her fury, pulled her hand back and hit my cheek. I wasn't expecting the slap when it echoed inside the vehicle.

“I can't believe you can be such an asshole.” She opened the car door and jumped out.

“Everyone has a price.”

She growled, as if I had set off a rabid dog, and slammed the door as hard as she could. My thousand-dollar imported car wasn't a refrigerator, but I didn't have time to complain because she ran inside the building.

I realized it wasn't a good idea to go after it.

Chapter fourteen

I was wet, huffing, and very angry when I entered the house and slammed the living room door, almost ripping it off its hinges.

“My child, what happened?” Grandma rolled over on the sofa to look at me.

“When someone asks me out, you won't let me accept.”

“Why not?”

“It was a terrible idea.”

“What happened?”

“I need to take a shower.” I went into the hallway. My grandmother was left without an answer, but I wasn't willing to talk about it at the moment. If I got too angry, I could end up saying something that would surprise the only important person in my life.

I went into the bathroom, threw my wet clothes on the floor, and got into the shower. Even the hot water wasn't enough to dampen my spirits. How could two such beautiful, kind, and intelligent twins be the fruit of that asshole's sperm?

I still couldn't believe what had happened just a few minutes ago in that car that

extolled the guy's extravagance. After saving me from the drunken Julius, I was beginning to think that Thomas Lennox wasn't the idiot I'd seen him to be, but then he ruined everything as quickly as possible.

What could he have imagined that he would ask me how much I wanted? I was a nursery school teacher, not a prostitute. Thomas, even thinking about it made me very angry.

That terrible incident was a great reminder to stay away from men. I hadn't made a mistake in devoting myself exclusively to children. They did deserve my love and attention.

After my shower, I went to my room, put on my pajamas, and threw myself on the bed. My bag was wet, so I reached for my cell phone to get it out.

There were several messages from Jennifer that I didn't want to answer.

Jennifer:

Where are you?

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I've looked everywhere.

Julius said you'd left.

I can't believe he escaped without even saying goodbye.

Helena:

Your drunk friend almost kissed me by force.

Jennifer:

Who's Julius? Julius?

Helena:

Himself.

Jennifer:

I didn't know. Are you all right?

Helena:

I am now.

Jennifer:

Where did he go?

Helena:

I'm home now.

Jennifer:

Friend, I'm sorry about that.

Helena:

Let it go.

Jennifer:

Do you want me to go with you to the police or something?

Helena:

You don't have to. Nothing really happened. I'm fine now.

Jennifer:

Are you sure?

Helena:

I do.

I stared at my cell phone, sure that I was telling a lie, but I wasn't going to go into

details, especially since my imbalance no longer had to do with Julius but with everything that had happened since.

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Helena:

I just need to sleep now.

Jennifer:

If you need anything, just let me know.

Helena:

Thank you.

I threw my cell phone aside and stopped messaging her.

I closed my eyes, but soon regretted it, as my mind was filled with images of Thomas Lennox. The more I tried not to think about him, the more intensely the images seemed to be driven towards my mind.

Cretin, idiot, asshole...

“Helena?”

I stood up when I heard a knock on the door from my grandmother and found her standing in the hallway, holding a simple sandwich with a few slices of salami, cheese, lettuce and tomato.

“I thought you might be hungry.”

“Oh, Grandma, you needn't have bothered.”

“Of course, I needed it.”

“You've looked after me so much.”

“It's not like you haven't done everything in return.”

I smiled at her and accepted the plate from her hands.

“What do you say we go into the living room and watch a movie?”

“Grandma...”

“It's Saturday. You can sleep late tomorrow.”

“You're right.” I gave a half-smile and let her put her hand on my shoulder to guide me.

We stayed together, but my grandmother didn't insist on knowing what had happened. She knew me well enough to know that if I wanted to, at some point, I would open up, but this wasn't it. I just wanted to forget that bad night.

Chapter fifteen

When I got home, I saw the nanny sitting in the living room, doing a crossword puzzle in an old magazine. She looked up and adjusted the pair of glasses that were slipping down her nose.

“You're early, Mr. Lennox.”

“I had a few setbacks.”

“But is everything all right?” He showed a tone of concern.

“Yes. Where are my daughters?”

“I’ve just put them to bed.”

I was going to question her, but first, I checked the time on my wristwatch and realized that it was already past the time I had agreed to put them to bed.

“Right.”

“Do you need anything? Some tea? Hot milk.”

I said no.

“You can go home.”

“Are you sure?” It was her turn to check her watch.

“I'm back, and I'll keep an eye on my daughters.”

“All right.” She got up and went to get her things.

I walked to the girls' room and before I entered, I heard the nanny saying goodbye and closing the front door.

I didn't turn on the light for fear of waking them; I just watched them in their beds. They were sleeping calmly and soundly. I liked seeing them like that, without any worries. It was the reason I put all my effort into them. I had to stay strong for them.

If I had lost Daphne in other conditions, without our daughters there, it was quite possible that I wouldn't have been able to stand on my own two feet. My mother used to repeat an old saying that she had heard from others before her: God wrote crooked lines right. It sounded sarcastic and even cruel, but it was the truth.

Anne stirred. I thought she was going to wake up, and I moved closer, but she soon

became calm again. It could only have been a dream.

I closed the door and went to my room. I took off my blazer and put it on the armchair near the entrance.

I could have had other ambitions for that evening, but it left me with a bitter taste.

I soon realized how stupid it had been to offer money to their teacher; it would only make the situation between the two of us even more awkward. Fortunately, the following week, Mylon would pick the girls up from school again, and we wouldn't have to meet again. I just hoped that the woman would keep a low profile and not mention it to anyone.

Chapter sixteen

“Where are my most beautiful nieces in the world?”

“Auntie, Deby!” The girls got up from the carpet in the living room where they were playing and came running when I opened the living room door for my sister.

“Be careful not to hurt yourselves.” I tried to stop them, but it was too late because they were soon clinging to Deborah's thighs.

“Look who came with me.” She moved her head back and made me and the girls notice the rest of the family coming down the corridor.

“Uncle Ty!”

“Grandpa, Grandma!”

The twins walked up to them without even waiting for them to enter.

“Why didn't you tell me that the family lunch was going to be at my house?” I frowned as I faced my sister.

“To run the risk of you making up an excuse?”

“I haven't prepared anything.”

“Relax.” He patted me on the shoulder. “I ordered it from a restaurant, and should be delivered in a few minutes. All you have to do is pay the delivery man.”

“Why me?”

“He's the host, that's all.”

I shook my head but ended up laughing. As much as I liked my solitude, having my family around was great for my daughters.

“Come on in.” I opened the door wider and gestured for them to go through.

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“Who's the plane?” Tyler picked Mary up, and she stretched out her little arms, making noises as my brother spun her from side to side, as if she were flying.

“I want some too!” Anne pulled down his pants.

“Come here to Grandpa's,” called my father.

He picked up the other little girl and played with her until her old arms could no longer support her weight.

Everyone went into the living room, and Tyler put Mary down on the sofa.

“My granddaughters are the cutest thing in the world.” My mother sighed as she stopped next to me, watching the two of them.

“Yes, they are,” I agreed, even though it wasn't a question.

“How are you, son?” He put his hand on my shoulder, drawing my attention to himself.

“Great.”

“Are you sure?”

“Why wouldn't I be?”

“I know it's hard for you to look after both of them on your own. You've been

fighting an uphill battle since Daphne left us.”

“I have more resources than many single parents around the country.”

“Life isn't just about money.”

“But it solves all the problems.”

“Not all of them, my son.”

“Most of them, and that's enough for now.”

“You know we're here, don't you?”

“I know.” I smiled at her. “Deborah won't let me forget.”

“She's a good sister.”

“Only sometimes...” I stopped talking when I saw my sister kneel next to my daughters and put her finger to her lips, signaling for them to keep it a secret.

They nodded in agreement, and I came closer to analyze what was going on.

“What was that all about?” I looked at the three of them with a serious expression.

“I gave them each a candy.”

“Deborah!”

“But we agreed that they wouldn't eat until after lunch, didn't we, girls?”

They nodded.

“You're terrible.”

“I'm just trying to be the nice aunt.” She shrugged as she stood up.

“You won't succeed by spoiling my daughters.”

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“Has anyone ever told you that you don't have to be so boring?”

“I'm not boring.”

“I would review these concepts if I were you.”

I was about to say something, but the intercom started ringing and distracted my attention.

“It must be our lunch,” he said as he turned to the door. “Ty, go with Thom to get the door.”

“Why me?”

“Those strong arms of yours must be good for something.”

“I'm usually served, not the other way around.”

“It's a good thing we're not in court, isn't it?”

My brother shook his head in the negative and looked from side to side before finally getting up and walking with me to the door. As soon as I opened it, I noticed that the delivery man had already arrived. He gave us the bags, and I paid for the orders.

My mother helped me set the table, plates, cutlery, and glasses for everyone. As soon as we called them to eat, the twins were the first to come. And I imagined that the sweet my sister had offered might be an extra motivation.

After lunch, they went to play with my parents while I poured myself and Tyler a shot of whiskey. Deborah preferred to open a bottle of wine she had chosen from my small cellar.

“To Lennox!” Tyler raised his glass, and we made a small toast.

“To us!” Deborah joined in.

I took a sip while alternating my gaze between them and the window that showed the tall buildings of New York City.

Apart from my time in Boston while studying at Harvard, my whole life had been built there. I couldn't see myself anywhere other than that city with its skyscrapers, large corporations, and the hectic life of the residents who were always on the run.

“Have you seen the woman from yesterday again?” Deborah brought up something I didn't want to discuss at the moment.

“What woman?” Tyler seemed interested, and I looked at our sister, suspecting that she had done it on purpose.

“The twins' teacher, who Thom saved from a pervert yesterday at the nightclub we went to together.”

“I didn't know you'd got a girlfriend,” said my brother, squinting to get a better look at me.

“It's because I haven't tidied up.” I snorted.

“So who is she?”

“Nobody important.”

“But it could be.” Deborah put her hopes where they didn't belong.

“Why keep just one when you can have them all?” Tyler chuckled as he gave me a mischievous look.

“Hey, shut up!” Deborah slapped his stomach with her hand and almost made him spill his drink.

“I'm telling the truth.”

“You're an idiot, Ty, but Thomas didn't used to be like that.”

“Those were different times,” I said thoughtfully.

“Uncle!” The twins came running and grabbed my brother's legs.

“What is it, little ones?”

“Vion!”

“Vrummm!”

“But I can only do it with one at a time.” He looked at them both, and they nodded.

Taking it in turns could help them learn to wait their turn.

Tyler downed the rest of the whisky in a few gulps and handed the glass to me, slamming it down before taking one of my daughters in his arms and running off with her through the huge living room of my apartment.

“He's better with children than you think.” Deborah watched Tyler play with the girls.

“Maybe he's just an uncle.”

“I think he'll be a good father too.”

“For that, you need to stop with a woman.” I reached out to leave the empty glass on the tray.

“He's not the only one.”

“It won't start.” I twisted my lips in irritation and looked away. “My moment has passed.”

“You act as if you died with her,” he muttered.

“I never said that.” I was even more irritated by the direction the conversation was taking.

“Years have passed, and you're still here, single, bitter, and sad.”

“It's not because I haven't found another wife that I'm bitter and sad. My daughters are a constant source of joy.”

“They're lovely, but that's not what I'm talking about.”

“I don't want a girlfriend, Deborah, and certainly not another wife.”

“Why not?”

“You know.”

“I may have forgotten.”

“You're not going to do that to me.” I crossed my arms.

“I'm not doing anything. You're the one with the dodgy answers. You always get like that when I try to tell you that you need to go out and meet new people. I'm not even talking about getting married, but a girlfriend could be great for you.”

“I'm fine the way I am.”

“You know she's never coming back, don't you?”

“Of course, I know!”

“So...”

“So, nothing, Deby.”

“Why are you doing this to yourself, Thom? It's torture you don't need. You don't have to punish yourself for being alive and her not.”

“Torture? You don't understand, do you?” I shook my head, and she stared at me, expecting more than just that reaction from me.

“What don't I understand?”

“It's not about tarnishing her image by putting another woman in her place or any guilt about being alive, but an accident. I've thought about it a lot, and there was nothing I could have done to stop it.”

“So what's the problem?”

“The pain...”

“Pain?” She raised an eyebrow in surprise at what I was saying.

“I loved her, and losing her was like having my heart ripped out.”

“I can imagine...”

“No! You have no idea, otherwise you wouldn't be insisting on this subject. What I went through, everything I felt when I buried her, is a pain I don't want to go through at any other time in my life.”

“It doesn't mean you'll miss the next one, Thom.”

“There is a risk.”

“Dying is the risk of being alive. Pain is the risk of having feelings, but when you feel them, good things can also come of it. The girls need someone, you...”

“We're fine.” I interrupted his speech.

“Okay.” She took another sip of her wine and stopped insisting on the subject.

I had already made up my mind never to experience that again, and I was fine with it.

Chapter seventeen

I spent the whole of Sunday trying to avoid thinking about what had happened in the nightclub. Every time my mind even started to drift in that direction, I fought with all my strength to push it the other way until I forgot who Thomas Lennox was.

I took the day off to clean the apartment, stay with my grandmother, and prepare some of the week's lessons for the children. We were going to make collages, and I hoped they would be excited about cutting out paper and nailing their little fingers with glue. They were still very young; they were learning everything little by little, but I was very happy to be part of the big steps forward in their lives.

In fact, I had tried very hard to let that incident with Thomas remain in the past, but as soon as his little girls came running towards me, it was impossible not to think of the man.

They had the same black hair and the same blue eyes, and although they were kind and gracious, they had more of their father's traits than I could simply ignore.

“Plofessola!” Mary hugged my hips tightly.

“Hey, little one.” I stroked your head.

Anne also came along and soon they were both squeezing me.

“Hi, girls!”

“Saudadi!”

“I missed you too. Did you have fun at the weekend?”

“Yes!”

“Oh, good!”

“We won candy,” Anne commented.

“Who gave you candy? Dad?” I swallowed as I had the mental image of the man, but I quickly pulled myself together; I couldn't show any change in front of my students.

“No. Aunt Deborah.”

“Auntie?”

“Dad's magnet.”

“Sister?”

“É.”

“That's nice, girls. Now let's go in.” I grabbed their little backs and led them into the room so they could take off their backpacks and lunchboxes.

I paid attention to other students while I thought about what the twins had told me. It was no big deal, except that I was still upset with that man, probably because of the indecent proposal he had made to me.

Cretin!

I had been naive to think that he could be a nice guy after saving me from Julius, but at least the first one had the excuse of being drunk.

“Teacher!” One of my little students grabbed the hem of my blouse and pulled it to get my attention.

“Hi, David.”

“Aren't you going in?”

“Yes, I'm going.” I smiled at him and guided him to his chair.

The class with my little ones went just as I had hoped. They loved the activity, and I had some time to rest and have lunch while they took a mid-afternoon nap. They were such sweethearts, and there was nothing that made me happier than spending the day with them.

At the end of the day, I accompanied the class to the playground and made them sit in a circle in the usual place to wait for their parents or guardians. My eyes didn't leave the twins for a single moment. As much as I had the excuse of fearing that they would disappear, I knew it was much more than that.

A part of me- the idiotic and perhaps slightly angry part- wanted to see their father again. I wouldn't say anything, nor would I be that crazy. Just imagine the mess that could happen if any other parent at the school even dreamed that Thomas had offered me money to have sex with him. I knew those rich snobs well; they wouldn't see my side. They'd only see me as a prostitute, and I loved my job too much to risk losing it.

“Mary, Anne...” Holly gestured for the girls to come as the man in charge had arrived.

I followed them with my gaze until they passed through the gate and held a man's hand, but he wasn't who I was expecting. It took me a while to recognize him as the guy who had picked them up earlier. He was their driver, and it soon became clear that their father wasn't coming to pick them up.

That was great, the less chance I had of running into that guy again, the better for me. But deep down, I felt a nagging feeling that I tried hard to ignore.

He's an asshole, Helena!"I repeated to myself in thought.

Surely, everything good about the girls must have come from their mother. I knew I might be exaggerating a bit, but I was still very angry about the whole situation.

Thomas had better not cross my path again.

Chapter eighteen

“Sir...” My secretary stood and followed me as I entered the floor.

“What is it, Violet?”

“I have the files on the Federithon case against the state of New York that you asked me for. Would you like me to put them on your desk?”

“You can hand it to me here.” I held out my hand, and she handed me a heavy folder with several pages of files that would take me many hours to analyze. But that was part of my job, and it was usually the lesser of two evils.

“I want a brief report on the associates' work—the hours dedicated to each case and the possible resolution. If someone loses any case, even if it's pro bono, I need to be informed because it can directly impact our metrics.”

“Yes, sir.”

“We need to continue as the best law firm in New York.”

“Let's continue.”

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“It's more than just words, Violet. It takes hard work.”

“Of course.”

“I'll be in my office analyzing these papers.”

“Yes...”

I didn't even wait for her to finish before walking past her and slamming the door.

I left my briefcase on one of the sofas and went to the table with the documents she had given me. I wanted to use them as a basis for another case I was handling, and I also needed to settle the collective action incident against the drinks distributor once and for all. The union was still analyzing my proposal, and I needed to put pressure on them to accept it; lowering the financial offer of the settlement could be something that would push them to move.

If we went to trial, it was possible that my client would end up getting some jail time, but people wouldn't get the same amount I was offering. In the end, the money could help them a lot more than a man spending a few years in jail because of an accident.

I opened the folder and began to read the case file. Between several lines of far-fetched and boring language that I was already used to, my mind began to wander and soon, I was thinking about the conversation I had with my sister while she and the rest of the family were at my house.

It's the pain, the risk of having feelings...

I'd done very well ignoring them over the last few years; at least, that's what I kept telling myself and convincing myself.

Not having to worry about any woman or run the risk of going through the same ordeal made my life much easier.

I already had two twins, and the job of looking after them was quite exhausting, however rewarding it could be. Trying not to fail them was my duty. If I took the risk of putting another woman in my life, there was also the risk of how she would treat my girls. Taking on another woman's daughters as her own was something that not everyone would do willingly, and there was no arguing; my twins would always be my priority.

Paying for sex was much easier; it set limits and exempted me from any commitment.

I took a deep breath and brought my attention back to myself. I couldn't charge the members if I were failing in my own cause.

I was good as a lawyer, and at least in the legal field, my life didn't seem like a losing battle.

After a long day of discussing the associates' performance with the board members and lawyers who had been with the firm for many years, I was finally able to return home.

It was late; the sun had been down for at least an hour when I parked in one of the parking spaces in the luxury building where I lived. Fortunately, Mylon had already returned from his family vacation and had picked the girls up from school. When I walked into the living room, I saw them sitting on the fluffycarpet, leaning over the coffee table, alternating their attention between a sheet of paper and the cartoon on the television.

I came closer to them and picked up an orange crayon that had slipped onto the carpet.

“Be careful, girls; someone might step on it.”

“Daddy!” They turned to me with the biggest smiles in the world and completely ignored my rebuke.

“Hi, little ones.” I squatted down and opened my arms so that they could come to me.

They each kissed my cheeks before vying for space to grab my neck.

“How was your day today?”

“I glued polka dots...” replied Anne.

“Little balls, eh?” I repeated, putting my arm around each of their waists and picking them up.

“É!” Mary confirmed. “So much color. We cut it out.”

“And they weren't hurt by the scissors?”

They said no.

“How brave my girls are.” I put them back on the floor. “What are they doing now?”

“Drawing..”.

“What?”

Mary went over to the table and picked up the sheet, showing it to me. In the childish drawing, which bore little resemblance to the real image, I recognized two smaller girls, a larger man and a woman.

“Who is that?” I ventured to ask.

“Helena.”

“Your teacher?”

“They shook their heads together.”

“Why did you draw it with me?”

“She could be our mother,” Mary said openly, and I was surprised at the thought.

“Ah, children...” I scowled and bent down again so that my eyes were level with theirs. “She's your teacher at school, and she can't be your mother.”

“What?”

“Because your mother is in heaven.”

“She's not coming back.” Mary seemed to get annoyed with me.

“Unfortunately, not.” They weren't the only ones who were bothered by the situation. I would do something if I could, but I didn't know of any court capable of reversing death.

“So I want otla.” Anne beeped.

“That's not how it works.”

“What?”

“A mother is the one who puts us into the world and cannot be replaced; there is only one, and yours has gone to heaven.”

“Luke wins other. He's even going to beyour little brother.”

“Has his father remarried?”

“Yes,” replied Mary.

“Youcan.”

“It's complicated...”

They stared at me, waiting for something better than that simple sentence, but how could I make them understand my situation if I wasn't even capable of it?

“Sir,” called the nanny, and I was forced to turn around to pay attention to her, relieved that the subject had been interrupted, at least for the time being.

“Hi.”

“Can I go now, or do you need me to stay longer?”

“Go ahead.”

“Thank you. See you tomorrow!”

“Until.”

“Bye, girls.” She waved to the twins, who waved back.

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“Daddy!” Anne pulled me, and I tensed up again, imagining that they were going to bring up that subject that was making me more and more uncomfortable. “Are we going to have bonbons again?”

“Do you want candy?”

They said yes.

“I don't have any bonbons, but how about a pizza?”

“Wow!”

“Can I keep this?” I picked up the drawing that had been the reason for the whole conversation.

“Podi.”

“Pizza.” Mary's eyes were sparkling, and she wasn't thinking about anything else, much to my relief.

At least for the time being, I had been freed from my daughters' pressure to find someone to fill the position that their mother's death had left vacant. Although it wasn't that simple, I knew that a large part of that dilemma was my own resistance.

They were very happy with the pizza, so I ordered their favorite flavor, pepperoni, and let them have two pieces each. It was a lot for little girls, but an extravagance on a single day wouldn't hurt.

After they'd seen a bit more drawing, I made them put away their crayons and sheets, then go to bed and brush their teeth. I put them to bed and read the beginning of a book before they fell asleep.

As soon as I left their room, I felt more exhausted than ever. It was as if all that fighting was wearing me down. It would have been so much easier if Daphne hadn't died and left me in this situation. But I couldn't blame her or anyone else.

I went into my room and undressed to take a shower. Once I'd relaxed a bit and gone to sleep, I could start a new day. One at a time, as it had been for the past few years.

I felt the paper in my pocket and saw the drawing the girls had made: me, them, and the school teacher. They lived with the woman every day; it was normal for them to direct an absence they felt towards her, but that didn't mean that a little nursery school teacher was the right person for me.

There was no doubt that Helena was so young and beautiful that I was interested in taking her to bed. But sex was the only thing I could see happening between the two of us, just as it had been with the other women I had been involved with after becoming a widower. There was no reason to have anything else.

Closing my heart forever was the best thing for me.

It's the pain, the risk of having feelings...

My sister's voice echoed in my head again, and I was even more annoyed by Deborah's speech. I was fine the way I was, and I didn't need to change anything.

Could it be?

It disturbed me as if my subconscious was objecting to my arguments, almost like an

annoying prosecutor.

I was a cold, cunning, and sometimes even cruel man in business when defending my clients. But in my personal life, I even managed to get a different version of myself, one that was more caring and kind. But I was saving that only for my daughters. Why couldn't I go on like this?

It was just a silly drawing. I threw the paper aside, causing it to glide to the floor, and went into the bathroom.

The girls were still very young, and over time, they would understand my motivations and stop fantasizing about something that wasn't going to happen.

Chapter nineteen

When I opened the door after another day at school, my grandmother wasn't sitting in the same place, which caught my attention and made me drop my bag to chase her around the house.

“Grandma!”

“I'm here.”

“What do you think you're doing?” I put my hands on my waist and looked at her with a serious expression when I found her in the kitchen fiddling with the pans.

“Our dinner.”

“Why didn't you wait for me to do it?”

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“I was feeling in a good mood and thought it would be a good idea. You're already so tired every day, darling.”

“I can finish...” I tried to get closer, but she held out her hand for me to move away.

“I may be old, but I can still handle the kitchen.”

“But...”

“Take a shower, Helena. Change your clothes and rest.”

“Okay.” I nodded in agreement. “But you have to promise to be very careful not to burn yourself.”

“I got it.”

“Grandma...”

“I promise. Just go!”

“Okay.” I laughed as I left the kitchen.

I went to the bathroom, put my clothes aside, and allowed myself a moment to relax. The week was over again. And over those days, I had managed to stop thinking about the twins' father. I never saw him again, and every day that followed, it was the driver who was there. They said goodbye to me, but I didn't say a word to the guy, who seemed very serious. What was I going to do? Ask him about his boss. No way!

It was for the best. If I never saw Thomas Lennox again, I could forget that arrogant lawyer and everything that had happened the week before.

My life would be exactly the same again.

I finished my shower and was heading to my room, wrapped in a towel, when my grandmother shouted from the living room.

“Helena, there's a handsome man waiting for you.”

“Handsome man?” I asked low enough so that she couldn't hear me or answer me.

I hurried to my room and put on a sweatshirt because it was the first thing I found.

As soon as I stepped into the living room, I was startled. Of all the people in the world and the guys I knew, the last one I expected to see sitting in my grandmother's armchair was Thomas. He lowered his eyes, and those two blue pools completely disconcerted me.

“What are you doing here?” It took a while before I could muster the breath to question him.

“Hello, Helena.”

“How did you find out where I live?”

“Did I leave you at the door, or did you forget?”

“But I don't remember telling you where my apartment was.” I clenched my teeth so hard that my jaws ached.

“A very nice neighbor in the lobby helped me with that.”

“Gossip,” I grumbled.

“Poor thing. She was very kind.”

“Go away!” I indicated the door.

“Helena.” My grandmother scolded me.

“That guy had better stay far away from here.”

“I thought I'd take you to dinner. How would you like to have something to eat with me? Do you like Asian cuisine, or do you prefer something more Italian?”

“Are you deaf?”

“Excuse me, sir. I didn't teach my granddaughter to be so impudent.” Grandma gave me a nasty look, but if she'd ever dreamed of what that asshole had proposed, she wouldn't have defended him like that.

“You should be with your daughters.”

“The nanny is watching them for me.”

“On a Friday night?”

“That's what I pay her for.”

“Of course.” I snorted. “I know that the girls' tuition covers part of my salary, but my employment contract doesn't include being visited by their asshole father in my house. So please leave!”

“We didn't get off to a good start.”

“You bet they won't.”

“I'd like to correct a mistake if you'd like to talk to me.”

“I've already made it clear that I don't want to.”

“The twins would like us to get along.”

“I can't believe you resorted to that argument.” I crossed my arms to show my irritation even more.

“I always use all the ones I have at my disposal.”

“He's such an asshole.” I rolled my eyes.

“Helena, go with him.”

“No, Grandma. You even cooked dinner.”

“You can eat it tomorrow. I'm sure it's not even that good.”

I stared at Thomas, and he stared back at me. I imagined that we would be at an impasse, so I ended up agreeing.

“I choose where we go.”

“Okay.”

I went back to the bedroom and just grabbed my cell phone and a small wallet, not even bothering to change so that he wouldn't imagine that I had any intention of reconsidering that indecent proposal. I might even accept an apology, but only because the twins were very important to me.

I left my room, and we walked down the stairs in silence until we reached the building's road. He pointed out the luxury sedan in which he had already given me a lift, but this time, I wasn't going to take any risks by getting into the car.

“Let's walk.”

“But why?”

“The snack bar is just around the corner.”

There were other places worse than Bobby's diner to take a guy like that, but I thought a bit of fast food and small tables would be enough for one night, as well as being around people who knew me; after all, I'd been going there since I was a kid.

I sat down on one of the padded benches near the wall, and he pulled up a chair in front of me, moving his head from one side to the other to examine the place. His expression alternated between curiosity and fear very quickly.

“Are you sure you want to eat here?”

“Yes.”

“We can go somewhere... better.”

“Do you think the diner where I've spent my whole life isn't good enough for you? If that's the case, you can look elsewhere; I'm fine here.”

“That's not what I said.”

“That's what I understood.” I shrugged.

“Are you angry with me?”

“Do you think so?” I leaned towards him, clenching my teeth even harder.

“I must apologize.”

“You certainly should.” I looked from side to side, noticing who might be listening, and I lowered my voice so that the other people in the diner wouldn't hear what I was going to say next. “What went through your arrogant, rich Manhattan head to think that I could be a prostitute? I'm very proud to be a teacher to your daughters and other children. I don't sell myself to guys like you or anyone else.”

“It's more about me than about you.”

“Ah, of course.” My tone was mocking, and I wasn't taking the man's words seriously.

I still thought it was ridiculous that we were there. As much as I'd been thinking

about that asshole all week, I'd only accepted the invitation because of my grandmother's insistence, who didn't know what had happened before or after the nightclub.

“Helena...” He grabbed my hand, which was on the table, and completely dismantled the tough, aggressive posture I was trying to maintain.

“Why are you doing this?”

“I didn't want to offend her.”

“It was a great way to try.”

“After the twins' mother died...”

“There's no need to make excuses,” I interrupted.

“It's the truth. I swore to myself that I wouldn't get involved like that again to avoid the pain.”

“I'm sorry...” As much as it could have been a mouthful, thinking about how painful it was to lose someone like that disarmed me. “The girls miss their mother.” That was a certainty that I'd had for a long time, and at that moment, it slipped out of my mouth.

“They miss a mother,” he corrected me.

“Why are you saying that?”

“When Daphne died, they were too young to even remember her. My mother and sister try to stay close, but it's not the same.”

“I wanted it to be different for them.”

“Me too.” He fumbled and pulled something out of his pocket, opening a drawing in front of me. “It's you.”

“I know. They made one of those for me too.”

“They think you're perfect.”

“I'm just the teacher.”

“It could be more than that.” He stared at me so deeply that it made my heart race. But I wouldn't let myself get carried away that easily, no matter how much I loved his daughters.

“A drawing of the twins isn't going to make me reconsider your proposal, Mr. Lennox.”

“I shouldn't have offered money.”

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“He offered and was Scrooged.”

“I think you're beautiful, and I thought we could have an evening. I'm just getting used to it...” He regretted it in mid-sentence and stopped talking. “I'm sorry.”

“Do you ask this kind of question to every woman you find interesting?”

“No.”

“Good thing, too, or maybe his skills as a lawyer wouldn't have been enough to get rid of the beautiful lawsuit.”

“Can we start again?”

“Start what again?”

He held out his hand and puffed out his chest.

“Nice to meet you, I'm Thomas Lennox.”

I stared at his palm stretched out towards me and pondered for a moment. I wanted to reject the length, but in the end, I gave in.

“Helena Price.” I squeezed my hand.

“It's a pleasure to meet you.” He gave a smile that ended up making me smile back.

As much anger as I wanted to feel towards that man, I couldn't, and it wasn't exactly because of the twins.

I pulled my hand back when I realized that my palm was getting sweaty, and the whole moment was becoming disconcerting.

“Where is the menu?” He turned from side to side, looking. “No waiter has come to take our orders yet.”

“Waiter?” I giggled. “We go to the counter, place our orders there, pay, and they shout our names when it's ready for us to pick up.”

“Ah!” He looked surprised.

“Never been to a cafeteria?”

“Will it be terrible if I say no?”

“Let's just say I was hoping for something like this.” My laughter became more intense. Men like him were certainly used to having everything in their hands.

“Do you recommend any dishes?” He stood up, straightening his fancy suit.

“The house combo. It comes with a burger, fries, and a medium soft drink.”

“Are you going to order this one?”

“I'd rather swap the soft drink for a milkshake.”

“And you can be that thin?”

“Looking after ten children takes a lot of energy.”

“Oh, I can imagine. Those two alone are enough to drive me crazy sometimes.”

I felt like saying that he was doing a good job with them, but I thought it best not to comment. I preferred it when he put his ego aside.

Chapter twenty

I took another one of the greasy fries and put it in my mouth, drinking the soda to help me swallow. My daughters would certainly love to eat that crap, but it really wasn't my favorite dish. But there was a reason I'd swapped a five-star restaurant for a cheap diner in Queens, and he was sitting in front of me, sucking on a strawberry milkshake and laughing as he told me about my daughters' antics.

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Helena was even more beautiful when we weren't growling at each other.

One part of me was still pulling at me, saying how risky it was to get involved without predefined boundaries and put my feelings on the table, but the other seemed to be getting more and more involved with this woman.

“You've made a mess.” I leaned over the table to wipe away some of the sauce that had accumulated on the side of his mouth.

“Thank you.” She took a napkin and dabbed at the spot where my fingertip had just been.

“Are you going to eat the rest of your potatoes?”

I said no. They were so greasy that my stomach was already warning me that it would soon be sick.

“I think the girls would love to come to a place like that.”

“Why don't you bring them back sometime?”

“Would you come with us?”

Helena was disconcerted, chewed a potato and took a while to finally answer me.

“Maybe so.”

“They would love your company.”

“I also love the company of the twins.”

I knew my daughters very well, and I knew how sincere they were. They had already made it clear several times how much they liked the woman in front of me, practically choosing her. As much as Helena's presence was very pleasant, it was still difficult to let go of all my fears.

“I think we'd better go,” he said after he'd drunk the rest of his milkshake, and the silence settled over us again.

“Now?”

“Well, the nanny won't be looking after them all night, will she?”

“If I need her to stay, she stays.”

“Even so, I imagine the girls are missing you.”

“That's a nice way of dismissing me.” I giggled.

“I tend to be more incisive when I want to dismiss someone.” He twisted his lips.

“I realized.” I got up, and we walked together back to the entrance of his building.

As soon as we stopped near my car, she alternated her gaze between me and the vehicle before talking to me again.

“You'd better go.”

“Okay.”

She turned her back and went up a step, but before she got too far, I called out to her again:

“Helena, wait!”

“What's wrong?”

“Shall we go out again? This time, I'll choose the place.”

She bit her lower lip and pondered as she stared at me.

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“What do you really want with me, Thomas?”

“I’m still trying to find out.” I was sincere, even if I didn’t think it was exactly what she wanted to hear.

“So tell me when you know.” She disappeared at the entrance to the building, and I didn’t go after her.

As much as it wasn’t exactly what I had hoped for that evening, the moment helped me to reflect a little and think about the choices I had made and those I was yet to make. It had been years since I had sat down with a woman and simply talked to her without sex or business involved.

After standing there for a while, watching nothing, I went to my car when I realized that some of the neighbors were noticing me and drove back home. It was late when I arrived, and the girls were asleep.

I wasn’t going to say anything to them about my meeting with the teacher because I knew I might raise their hopes about something I wasn’t sure would come true.

Chapter twenty-one

The weekend was strange. I never saw or spoke to him again, and as the hours passed, I had the feeling that our moment on Friday had been a crazy dream of mine.

I had reason to hate him because he had offered me money, but I still couldn’t stop thinking about him. We had something in common that we both liked very much: the

twins; even if it wasn't a reason to bring us together, it was something that brought us closer.

I had often wondered how someone like him could be the father of such lovely girls, but during a more friendly conversation, I could see that father and daughters had more in common than the color of their eyes and hair.

“Fesora!”

I was forced out of my thoughts when one of my students started tugging at the hem of my apron.

“Hi, Lion!”

“Look!” He lifted the sheet as high as he could, and I noticed what he had done. It was a smudge of his hand with several colored droplets around it.

“How cool is that!”

“Right!”

“You're an artist.”

“You?”

“Yes, it is.”

“Bligado!”

“Why don't you try a more colorful and fun one now?” I loved encouraging my pupils because it was at that stage that they developed their main skills.

“I'm going!”

“That's it!” I gave him a clean sheet of paper, which he promptly got dirty with his stained fingers, but instead of getting upset, the little boy laughed.

I went to the back of the room while I watched all the children paint.

The twins were concentrating on their paintings, and since they had arrived, they had acted the same way towards me. I assumed that their father hadn't said anything about our brief moment. It was better that way, and I didn't want them to start imagining anything or cultivating any hasty thoughts about everything.

It wasn't because we'd eaten a greasy burger together that anything would happen between us.

“Plofessola!” Another of my students called me over to help distract me from my thoughts.

Was I supposed to hate him? He was an asshole. Or should I? Helena!

I'd better stop thinking about all this.

After the lesson was over, I helped the children collect their backpacks and lunchboxes and took them to wait for their parents at the usual place. As usual, Holly was at the gate, recognizing the family members and handing the students over to those who had permission to pick them up.

“Mary and Anne, come!”

When the twins got up to leave, I looked at the gate in the vain hope that their father would be there to pick them up. As obvious as it was, seeing the driver left me a little disappointed. A large part of me had hoped that Thomas would come as a simple excuse to see me.

There wasn't exactly a rule forbidding teachers from getting involved with students' parents, but it wasn't common. Deep down, I thought it would be better if he didn't show up so there would be no way for the principal to see anything or make any kind of interpretations about a relationship that didn't exist.

It didn't exist...

Those last two words kept echoing in my mind and made me think again that Friday was a dream.

“Helena!” called Holly after closing the gate as the last child passed through. “What have you been up to?”

“What do you mean?” I frowned as she came towards me and it was then that I realized she was carrying a white box. “What's this?”

“For you.”

“What do you mean?”

“Mr. Lennox had the driver deliver it to you.”

“Mr. Lennox?” I repeated thoughtfully.

“Don't pretend you don't know who you are, funny girl.”

“Why would this man send me anything?”

“It's up to you to answer me.” She handed me the box. “It looks like quite a present.”

“I don't know...” I kept looking at the package and creating theories about what could be inside.

“You don't know, or you don't want to tell me?”

“It must be because of the work I do with his daughters,” I lied, but it seemed the most plausible justification.

“Aren't you going to open it?” She waited, curious.

After everything that had happened between me and Mr. Lennox, I couldn't expect anything, and I didn't want her to see anything before I was sure of what was there.

“Then.”

“But...”

“Do you need help with anything?”

“No.”

“See you tomorrow, then.” I leaned over to kiss her cheek.

I went back to the classroom, picked up my bag, and carried the box to the bus stop. As curious as I was, I waited to open it when I got home.

“Hi, Grandma!” I greeted her as I passed through the living room and went straight to my room, closing the door behind me.

I threw the bag on the corner of the mattress and arranged the box in the middle before undoing the bow and looking inside.

On top of a layer of tissue paper, there was a red envelope that was the first thing to catch my eye. Inside was a small note.

I thought about what we discussed and realized that I wanted to get to know her better. It's the first step before I decide on anyone else. That's why I hope you'll agree to go out with me tonight. I'll be by at twenty to pick you up.

In the box is a present that I hope you'll use.

Kisses.

Thomas

I put the envelope aside and opened the silk. There was a long black dress with a slit up the back. It was beautiful and very sophisticated and certainly cost a lot more than a month's salary. But the box didn't just contain the dress; it also contained a pair of high heels.

Why was that man doing that?

I was confused.

I wasn't the type of woman to be interested. It wasn't the luxury that had swayed me, but the fact that he wanted to get to know me better and had noticed me enough to be able to decipher my dress code.

One part of me told me not to fall into that trap, no matter how seductive it was, while the other wanted the opportunity to get to know him as if the barbs exchanged and the stories that came out about him weren't enough.

Thomas Lennox was a powerful lawyer and a senior partner in one of the biggest firms in the city. But also the father of two cute little girls and a man who had ventured into fast food because I said I wanted to.

I hated to think how bad I'd felt when he'd asked me what I was worth, but if he tried a little harder, I could put that incident behind me.

“Helena...” My grandmother knocked on the bedroom door.

I put my things in the box and went to open it for her.

“Hey!”

“Is everything all right?”

“Yes.” I fiddled with my hair a little awkwardly. Thomas's attitude had impressed me.

“You arrived and went straight into the bedroom.”

“Sorry, Grandma.”

“If you're well, there's nothing to worry about.”

“I am,” I assured him.

“Good.”

“Maw Maw!” She turned away, but I called her back.

“What is it, darling?”

“Is it okay if I leave later?”

“Of course! I keep telling you that you need to enjoy life more.”

“Thank you.”

“Is it the same man as last week?”

“Yes.”

“I knew you'd hit it off.” He smiled mischievously.

“It's much more complicated than that.” I hugged my body as if I was feeling cold when I thought about the situation as a whole.

“It can be much simpler if you want.”

“We'll see, Grandma.” I walked past her and stroked her shoulder before going to the bathroom.

Chapter twenty-two

I parked the car in front of her building and checked the time on my wristwatch. It was still a few minutes before the time I had agreed on in the note, but it wasn't enough to stop me from feeling uneasy. My driver had assured me that he had delivered the box, but that wasn't enough for me to be sure that she would accept my invitation.

For a moment, I thought I was an idiot, and it was much easier to pay for women because I didn't have to subject myself to situations like that: waiting without knowing whether she would come or not. The fact that my daughters adored her might not be enough for me to lower the defenses I had built up over the last few years to avoid my suffering.

Dating again...

Wow!

My thoughts were interrupted when I saw her coming down the steps of the building. I had chosen the gift because I thought the pieces were beautiful. I admit that a saleswoman had helped me put it together, but it was unforeseeable that she would look so stunning.

The dress had a circular collar at the front and came down, hugging her body as if it had been designed for those curves. Her loose, wavy hair covered a little of her bare back. She looked delicate and even naive in the midst of so much seduction.

“Hi,” he stopped next to me, and I couldn't look away. “Thanks for the present.”

“It looks stunning.”

She lowered her face, and her cheeks flushed.

I gently touched his chin and lifted his head. We stared at each other deeply, and I realized that we could stay like this forever. I hadn't felt like this for a long time.

Her lips were painted with pink lipstick that made them look striking. I wanted to cover them with my own. I hadn't yet kissed her, and I really wanted to, but I stopped myself. The entrance to the building was only a few meters away and she might run off and give up on our date.

“The girls...”

“With the nanny.”

“What did you say to them?”

“That he had an appointment and would be back late.”

“Ah...” she stammered, looking a little disappointed.

“Would you rather I had told them I was with Professor Helena?”

He nodded.

“They will know when the time is right.”

“If that moment ever comes.” Apparently, I wasn't the only one afraid.

“Shall we?” I approached the car and opened the car door.

She nodded and settled into the seat. Then I turned around and took the wheel.

“Shall we have dinner in Manhattan?”

“Yes.”

“Look...”

“Hey!” I reached out and touched his hand, which was resting on his thigh. “Relax. Unless the only thing you eat is fries and hamburgers.”

“No.”

“Then everything will be fine.”

“Okay.”

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“What kind of music do you like?” I turned up the radio to relax her a bit.

“Pop, Latin... I think I'm quite eclectic at times.”

“Hip hop?”

“Also.”

“There's always a style we don't like as much.”

“When I show up, I'll tell you.” He chuckled, and I realized I was achieving my goal.

“The girls love it.” I turned up the volume and let the dancing sound fill the vehicle.

“Oh, so that's what Anne keeps humming?”

“I admit that she's not an excellent singer at the moment, but when she can pronounce all the words correctly, who knows?”

“She's very cute...”

“The two are.”

“Yes.” Helena's smile widened. “Do you often talk about your daughters with the women you go out with?”

“They're not usually that interested in girls.”

“That's a shame.”

I nodded but didn't make any other comments. Helena was the only woman outside my family that I was talking to so openly after Daphne's death. I thought that shutting myself away from them was the best thing for me, but I was very wrong.

We arrived in front of the restaurant, and I was the first to get out of the car, handed the key to the valet, and went around to open the door for her.

I noticed that Helena looked a little uncomfortable as she looked from side to side.

“What's wrong?”

“I think I prefer my hamburger.”

“It's just a restaurant.”

“It's not just a restaurant, Thomas.” He tilted his head from side to side. “Look at all those people.”

“What about them?”

“They are...”

“Like you and me?” I raised an eyebrow.

“Not like me.”

“How do they differ for you?”

“Apart from the bank account?”

“That's just a detail.”

“I ate French fries for you.”

“It's different.”

“Why?”

I got a laugh out of her.

“You sound like the girls.”

“I learn from them every day, but there's no point in answering just because.”

“Even they don't fall for it anymore.”

“That's right.” I put my hand on her shoulder by reflex, and she moistened her lips, drawing my attention to them. “If you hate the food, I swear I'll find somewhere else.”

“How could I hate food?”

“Exactly.”

“Is that why they call you the devil's advocate?”

“I'm holding back on that part.”

“He said he wanted us to get to know each other better.”

“I'm good at arguing, but it seems you are too.”

“You acquire one talent or another by dealing with ten very clever children every

day.”

“I’ll remember that when I need to study for a case.”

“You have a good display at home.”

“I have.”

“Mr. Lennox?” The restaurant receptionist approached us. “Are you going in now?”

I looked at Helena, who nodded.

“Please come with me.”

We crossed the large, well-decorated, and refined hall until we reached the table reserved for us. The hostess removed the sign and pulled out one of the chairs for Helena to sit on.

“A waiter will be right with you.” He hands each of us a menu.

“Thank you.” Helena opened the leather folder and then closed it. “Thomas...”

“Ask for what you want.”

“An orange juice?” Her expression made me laugh.

Helena was a different woman from my late wife, who had also come from a wealthy family, and despite the luxury I was offering her, she refused, which attracted my attention even more. Dealing with processes, agreements, and courts for so long, I had to learn to read people, and she was very honest and transparent with me.

“That may be, but do you like wine?”

“A sweeter one... I'm the type who prefers children's drinks.”

“That makes sense, teacher.” Laughs.

“How nice!”

“An orange juice for you, then.”

“Thank you.”

When the waiter approached, I ordered an orange juice for her and another for myself to go with the starter.

“That lady I saw at your house, your grandmother... Is that right?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“Your parents...” In the middle of my sentence, I tried to analyze his reaction for fear of touching on a subject that might be too delicate.

“My mother is somewhere. She keeps disappearing, it's been like this since I can remember. It was my grandmother who brought me up and always looked after me. My father, well... My mother doesn't know who he is.”

“But you never wanted to know?”

“If he never cared about me, I thought it best not to care either. Life was hard enough without suffering from it.”

“I can imagine.”

“You have living parents who moved to the suburbs after he retired and passed the business on to you.”

“Wow! You've done your homework.”

“It's easy to find information about you on the internet.”

“Unfortunately, yes.”

The waiter brought their orders, and she sipped her juice.

“I'm sorry about the accident.”

“Everyone feels it, but it's something no one imagines when they get married. They talk about it until death do them part, and you never think it can happen so quickly.

I noticed that she swallowed, and I hurried to change the subject because I didn't want to talk about something that hurt me so much. I'd had enough time to suffer because of my wife, but I'd learned to stand up for my daughters. I had to keep living for them.

“Why teacher?”

“I've always loved children, and I thought that helping them learn and develop was the best thing I could do.”

“But you don't have children?”

“No.”

“Why?”

“Since my grandmother became ill, there was less and less time left, and I admit that I wasn't making an effort to date either. Going home from work was much calmer and kept me from having to worry about other problems.

“So it seems I wasn't the only one hiding.”

“I never went around asking how much a guy wanted to...” He gritted his teeth and didn't even finish his sentence.

“I apologize for that.”

She stepped back, softening her expression.

“If it weren't for them, we might never be having this conversation.”

“But we are.”

He nodded and drank some more of the juice.

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However big the difference between the two of us, I was increasingly interested in her company, and it seemed worth taking a risk to see how far we would go.

Chapter twenty-three

He was so comfortable in that restaurant that it became increasingly obvious that we weren't there just to impress me.

I had no ambitions of getting a boyfriend like that, to be honest, a boyfriend wasn't in my short-term plans. But my biggest fear was getting hurt. As much as he seemed to be being honest with me, and the twins' opinion influenced me a lot, he was a ruthless lawyer who used to win everything.

Would my heart be just another one of your prizes?

“I don't want to be just a challenge for a man who is used to having everything,” I said honestly, crossing my cutlery over my plate as I finished my meal.

It was very tasty, but I didn't know if it was worth what they charged for it.

“And I don't want to lose someone I care about again.”

“We seem to have reached an impasse.”

“I already see it as a common interest.” He leaned over the table, and I couldn't escape his gaze.

“Which one?”

“None of us wants to get hurt.”

“You're right. I don't want to.”

“Me neither.”

“So what do we do?”

“We try to stay true to that.”

I remained silent, looking at him and reflecting on everything we had talked about. The cards were on the table, and now it was up to us to decide what we would do next.

“Dessert?”

I said no.

“I'm pleased.”

“Then I'll ask for the check.”

“Okay.”

Thomas paid for dinner, and we headed for the restaurant entrance where the valet was already waiting with the car.

“Do you want me to take you somewhere?”

I didn't know exactly what he was expecting, but I answered the obvious:

“Home.”

“Okay.”

We got into the car, and I fastened the seat belt across my chest. It was tight, and I doubted it was because of the protection. Dinner was great, the food was good, and I ended up relaxing after a lot of chatting, but something was missing that made me uneasy. I tried with all my might to push that feeling away, but it came back with all its might, bothering me even more.

When he finally stopped at the entrance to my building, I unbuckled my seatbelt and grabbed the door handle to open it.

“The dinner was great, thank you very much.” I leaned over to leave, but he reached out and took my hand, preventing me from pushing the door open.

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“Wait!”

“What was it?” It was a mistake to look at his eyes because they were so close to mine that they paralyzed me.

“I like it when I'm with you, and it's more than just a suggestion from my daughters.”

“I enjoy your company too,” I admitted, realizing that the anguish in my chest had subsided when I spoke the truth.

He let go of my hand on the car handle. I thought he was going to let me go, but instead, he pulled my face to his, and I was surprised by his mouth on mine, his tongue pushing its way through.

If there was any part of me that was against the situation, it was completely silenced by my desire to kiss him. I felt his goatee on my face as my hands went up to the back of his neck and grabbed his hair. I returned the kiss, which became more and more intense as we searched for the perfect fit between our mouths.

The taste of his lips was much better than I thought, or maybe the anticipation had made the moment even more incredible.

I was almost out of breath when he ran his mouth down my neck and bit down until he reached my cleavage.

“Thomas...” I gasped.

He raised his head and stared into my eyes in a way that was impossible to resist.

“I think I'd better go in.”

“Is that what you want?” He brought his mouth close to my ear and sent shivers down my spine.

“No...”

Definitely not what I wanted.

“Come with me...”

“The twins can't...”

“I'd better not take you to my house. Not today...”

I ended up nodding and realized that I could have left my wits at the restaurant.

Thomas gave me one more kiss, bit my lower lip, and started the car, driving away from where I was supposed to be. We headed back to Manhattan and were soon pulling into a hotel parking lot.

I didn't ask any questions because they would probably make me change my mind. I just followed him, and soon, we were in one of the suites.

He reached out, turned on one of the switches, and closed the door before pulling me in and squeezing me against one of the walls. Any possible protest was silenced by the weight of his mouth coming back to dominate mine and his palms going around my body and up my dress until he pulled it off my arms.

I had no bra on, and it took me a while to realize that he had left me in just my panties and shoes.

His teeth grazed the sensitive skin of my neck, and I threw my head back, slamming it against the surface and letting out a shriek. Waves that made me shiver and feel hot, all at once, started from where he touched me and radiated throughout my body.

The hairs of his goatee gave me a different kind of tickle that excited me even more, and I responded by rubbing my stiff nipples against the fabric of his jacket.

I let my hands slide from his shoulders to his chest to the buttons of the garment, opening it and pushing it to the floor.

Thomas slid his kisses down to the valley between my breasts and sucked on one of my nipples, causing me to dig my nails into his shoulders. I wiggled against the wall as he tasted one of my breasts and squeezed the other with a firm hand. His other hand, which was free, went down my belly and into my panties.

I clamped my mouth shut to stop myself from moaning when he unceremoniously opened the space between my labia majora and pressed down on my clitoris. I rolled over, begging for more, silently pleading with him to keep masturbating me while I fought the urge to moan.

Being in his arms was even better than I could have predicted.

Thomas ran his tongue up between my breasts, making my hair stand on end, and found his way back to my mouth. He made the kiss even hungrier while his finger was still inside my panties, inciting my pleasure and arousal.

I moved my thighs as far apart as I could without risking falling and allowed him to explore me.

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It was possible to find heaven and hell at once with just one touch.

Thomas bit my mouth, pulling until it cracked, and I was panting when our eyes met. His pupils were dilated, tinging the deep blue with black, and I assumed he was as turned on as I was.

I didn't have long to spend staring at him because Thomas put both hands on my waist and turned me around, making me flatten myself against the wall so that my back was to him. He pulled down my panties and made them slip down around my shoes. On impulse, I thrust my ass out at him, and Thomas grabbed my buttocks, squeezing them in a way that made me moan. I tried, but I couldn't hold back the urge to roll over in his grip.

Her horniness and need for him were screaming louder than anything.

As soon as he let go of me, I heard the zipper of his pants and realized he was unzipping them. Thomas didn't bother to take off the rest of his clothes; he just pulled down his pants and took a condom out of his wallet. Once he had taken what he needed, he let the rest of the object fall out, along with the laminated plastic that was used to cover the condom.

He grabbed my waist and made me bend my ass even further before thrusting into me. In the midst of the penetration, I sprawled against the wall and dug my nails into the paintwork. Any noble intention of not moaning out loud was challenged when his body collided with my ass, causing a pop.

I threw my head back, resting it on his shoulder as my eyes rolled back in their

sockets with deep pleasure.

I had even fantasized about what it would be like to have sex with him, but the reality was far better than my imagination.

His hand warmed me beyond belief as it trailed up the side of my body to grasp one of my exposed breasts.

I let out a little scream and dug my nails even deeper into the wall as he pushed in and thrust hard, molding my body to his. As the thrusts became more and more intense, the need to reach the apex became unbridled.

Thomas pulled out of me, but before I could protest, he turned me around. He pulled down his pants and underpants completely and kicked them away. I did the same with my panties, which were still at my feet, and prepared to start again when he grabbed my thighs and lifted me up. My back hit the wall the moment he brought us together again.

I lowered my head, searching for his mouth with moans as my trembling, slippery fingers tried to open the buttons of his shirt, which had fallen to the floor in the midst of his sex. He slid out, but before he thrust against me again, I brought my body to his in an increasingly uncontrolled need.

We were sweating and panting, our skins were sticking together from the friction, and all I could think about was reaching climax. I collapsed on his shoulders as the tension that was growing where we connected exploded in a wave so intense that it took my breath away for a few seconds. I was off balance, unable to think or breathe for a long time, but luckily, he was holding me up.

Wow!

After he came and put me on the floor, I wondered how a man with such a hard-on needed to pay someone to have sex with him. Of course, I wasn't thinking rationally, and it was all about the orgasm.

I held his sweaty chest and searched his eyes as my chest rose and fell, still panting.

Thomas tilted his head and gave me a quieter kiss.

“Let's go to bed.” He ran his fingertips down the line of my spine. I didn't know if it was the caress or the husky voice that tempted me more.

Chapter twenty-four

“Damn! Damn!”

I opened my eyes, trying to get used to the brightness of the room, until I saw Helena's silhouette jumping out of bed.

“Hey!” I tried to pull her back, but she dodged me. “What's wrong?”

“I should have gone home.”

“I thought she'd like to spend the night with me.” I sat on the bed and watched her put on her dress and run her hands through her disheveled hair.

“I...” He pondered, biting his lips, and his cheeks turned red. “I liked it.”

“So what's the problem?”

“I have to be at school in an hour, and I still need to go home to change and hopefully have a shower.”

I got out of bed, still blinking sleepily, and reached into my pants pocket for my cell phone, which was lying on the floor.

It was full of calls that I hadn't answered and an alarm clock that I'd certainly ignored.

“Damn!”

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“I have to run to the subway!”

“Hold on.” I grabbed her waist and pulled her back as she passed me.

“Thomas, I really have to go.”

“I know, I have appointments too. I'll just get dressed and take her home. I'll wait for you to get ready and take you to school.”

“You don't have to.”

“I'm to blame for your tardiness.”

Her cheeks turned red.

“It was for a good reason.” He was so embarrassed that he couldn't keep staring at me. “I don't want you to be late either.”

“Fortunately, I'm my own boss.”

“Okay.” Since she agreed so quickly, I figured she was really worried about the schedule.

I found the hotel room, and we left as quickly as we could. I drove through the streets of New York City to her apartment and waited outside for her to get ready as quickly as she could. Then I dropped her off at school and went home. The children had already left, and there was no one around, but I needed a clean, well-tailored suit to

meet a client.

Chapter twenty-five

The morning had been a complete rush, and I was very nearly late for school; luckily, Thomas had brought me because, depending on public transport, it was unlikely that I would be able to keep to the timetable.

I only allowed my heart to slow down a little when the children were having fun doing an ensemble-related activity.

“Hi!”

I was startled when Holly entered the room and stopped next to me, looking at the children.

“What are you doing here? Did the principal ask you to say something to me?”

“Not the principal.”

“So what is it?”

“The driver brought the twins, but their father came to bring the teacher...”

“Keep it down!”

She giggled.

“Do you think the girls saw?” I was worried.

“They don't.”

“Whew!”

“But I saw... So he gave you more than just a present yesterday.”

“Forget about it.”

“You're kidding, right?”

“No.”

“I can't forget. You have to tell me what's going on in detail, or I'll die of curiosity.”

“I'm not going to say anything.”

“That's very unfair!” He twitched his lips like one of my pupils when he was getting into a tantrum.

“I don't want anyone commenting on it.”

“Commenting on what? That you're dating Thomas Lennox?”

“Shi!” I waved my hand to silence her. “I don't want anyone to hear this, not even the principal, and especially not the children.”

“As far as I know, it's not forbidden to date a student's father.”

“But it may be inappropriate.”

“So that's it! You're dating.”

“No!” I answered too quickly. “I mean, I don't know. It's complicated, Holly. I just don't want to hurt the girls with this story.” I crossed my arms as I looked at them. They were busy doing the activity and had no idea where the conversation with my coworker was going.

“You don't want to hurt them or yourself?”

“The three of us...”

“I wish I was dating that man.” She shook herself as if she was feeling hot.

“Holly.”

“Tell me if he's at least a good kisser.”

I remembered the kiss, the grip, the sex...God! I couldn't get wet at that time of day and in a room full of children.

“This is not the time for that kind of talk.”

“But...”

“Holly?” The principal appeared in the doorway, calling for the staff member.

“Yes, ma'am.” He pulled himself together and took on a more serious expression.

“Come here; I need your help.”

“Of course.” She walked past me and leaned over to comment quietly. “Our conversation isn't over.”

Of course, I wasn't going to go into details about my relationship with Thomas because even I didn't understand if there was anything between us after that night. Everything was cloudy and confusing. After what he had already done, I was too afraid of getting hurt, and at the same time, it was inevitable not to want him.

I did my best for the children, trying to focus on the lesson and the activities I had proposed for them during the day, but I couldn't stop thinking about him for a single moment. It was as if he had taken root in my mind, and I hoped it was just that.

Chapter twenty-six

I took out my cell phone and called the driver.

“Mr. Lennox.” It didn't take long for Mylon to answer.

“Where are you?”

“I've come to do some shopping that the maid asked me to do and as soon as I've delivered it to your apartment, I'm going to school to pick up the girls.”

“You don't have to go there today.”

“Oh!” He looked surprised. “Did something happen?”

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“No, but I'm going to pick up my daughters.”

“Are you sure? I'll be on my way soon, and I'll get to the school before they're released. After that, I'll take them home immediately and leave them in the care of the nanny.”

“You can do your shopping, leave it in the apartment, and then go home.”

“Okay.” He didn't insist, no matter how unusual my attitude was.

“Good afternoon, Mylon.”

“For you too.”

I hung up the call and checked the time on my luxury wristwatch. There was still a long time before my daughters would be released. I hadn't said anything to my driver, but they weren't my main reason for going to school, but the excuse to see the teacher.

After the evening with Helena, I spent the whole day thinking about her. Between meetings with clients and analyzing the progress of cases, she took up my every thought. I hadn't felt so eager to see a woman and be with her for a long time.

It would be a lie if I said that I had put aside all the fear of being alone that had prevented me from getting involved with another woman since losing Daphne. But my sister was right; it was a risk. It didn't mean that I was going to lose Helena in the same way, did it?

Even before I had her in my arms, before I had tasted her body, I was more and more enchanted by her. Could this relationship work? I was the kind of man who didn't go into a dispute to lose, but I was much safer when it came to my legal cases.

I tried to avoid those thoughts, at least until it was time to leave. At some point, I would have to make up my mind about my relationship with Helena, but it didn't have to be then.

It could be much simpler than it seemed; maybe all I needed was to want her and be able to keep her. It was becoming clear that this was the best thing for my daughters and for me.

Just as their departure time was approaching, I said goodbye to my secretary, ending my work for the day, and got into my car, driving to the nursery school where they were studying. Several parents and guardians were already at the school gate before the main gate was opened, and the children were released. The woman at the door recognized most of the people who were there, but took a little longer when she needed to analyze some authorization. They had better be very careful not to hand one of the children over to just anyone.

I got close to the gate and she stopped staring at one of the mothers to look straight at me. Her eyes swept me from head to toe, almost as if they were scanning me, and then she giggled.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Lennox.”

“Good afternoon.” My tone was firm and rigid as I looked above her hoping to see the courtyard and in search of a certain teacher.

“A... I mean, the girls are waiting.”

“Can you get them for me?”

“Of course!” She leaned against the gate a little so that no one could get through but soon returned, holding my daughters in each of her hands.

“Daddy!” They shouted excitedly when they saw me.

“Hi, my princesses.” I knelt down, and they both hugged me.

“you didn't come home yesterday,” Anne grumbled.

“I had a long appointment.”

The woman at the entrance giggled, and I raised my head to look at her because I thought she might know something, but she didn't dare say anything. I just couldn't keep quiet.

“Where is she?”

“She?” She played dumb.

“You know.”

“She's in the living room. Do you want me to call her?”

“Yes.”

“Just a moment.” She looked around and handed over three more students before going inside and disappearing for a few seconds.

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“Daddy!” Mary tugged at the hem of my jacket. “Let's go!”

“Wait a minute, child.” I stroked her hair.

It took a few minutes for Helena to show up. She was wearing the same clothes as when I had left her there in the morning, but I had the strange feeling that I hadn't seen her for a long time.

“Tho-Thomas...” stammered in surprise as soon as her eyes found me standing on the sidewalk and surrounded by the twins.

“Hey, Helena.”

“What are you doing here?”

“I've come for my daughters.” I put one of my hands on each of their shoulders

“Ah!”

“I also wondered if you wanted a lift home.”

“I don't think so.” She scowled.

“Girls, you'd love to leave the teacher at home, wouldn't you?”

“Let's go!” They jumped up and down excitedly.

“What a dirty game, Mr. Lennox.”

“Not that dirty.”

She nodded.

“You know you don't have to.”

“And you know that I'm only here because I want to be.”

“Go and get your things.” Encouraged the other woman who I took a while to remember was called Holly.

“Okay.” Helena pondered but ended up agreeing. “I'll be right back.”

“I'm taking the girls to the car.”

“Okay.”

“Come on, girls.” I led them to where I had parked my car.

“Wow!”

“Let's take her home.”

They were jumping up and down, very excited, but they had no idea that my intention went far beyond a simple ride.

“Yes.” I opened the back door. “Now settle into your car seats and stay behaved.”

I helped them to sit down and fastened their belts so that they were secure. When I

stood up and looked back, Helena was standing with her arms crossed and looking a little out of place.

“I don't know if it's a good idea.”

“The ride?”

“Yes.”

“I brought you in this morning.”

“But it was different; I was late.”

“And we...”

“Be careful what you say,” she interrupted me emphatically, looking from side to side as if we were being watched.

“I'm not kissing you now because I haven't said anything to the girls.”

“Thomas, this is crazy.” He bit his lower lip, and I moistened mine, feeling even more needy for the taste of his mouth.

“I'm quite sober.”

“It's not a joke.”

“I'm sure you don't. I'm ready to answer that I want you. We can be together.”

“I'm not going to get into it without labels.”

“Labels?” I repeated in surprise.

She shook her head.

“My girlfriend. Is that enough for you?”

She uncrossed her arms and took a step back as if she had been hit by something invisible.

“Girlfriend?” it was his turn to repeat.

“I think we'd better start like this and see what happens.”

I hadn't had a girlfriend for years, and starting again gave me a chill in my stomach. If I accepted the challenge, there was a reward that could be very gratifying.

“I...” He began the sentence, but his voice dropped until it disappeared.

“Need some time to think?”

“I just didn't think you'd talk here.” He looked from side to side again.

Most of the parents had already left, but the woman at the gate was staring at us. As much as she couldn't hear our conversation, she was spying on us.

“I thought you enjoyed our evening last night.”

“I loved last night.” Her cheeks blushed.

“So just tell me, yes, then we can discuss the details of this deal.”

“Deal?” She laughed. “Yes, counselor.”

“Daddy!” Mary leaned back in her car seat. “Aren't we going?”

“We're going, child.”

I opened the car door and motioned for Helena to get in. She hesitated a little but eventually got in.

I got behind the wheel and drove away from the school.

“My house is on the other side,” said the teacher when she noticed that I was going the other way.

“I decided to take a little detour.”

“Thomas.”

“You'll like it, and so will the girls.”

“My grandmother will worry about me if I get home too late.”

“I promise I won't take up too much of your time, but you can call her and let her know where you are.”

“And where am I?”

“In an ice cream parlor.” I pointed to the façade as I stopped the car in a parking space in front of the establishment.

“Ice cream!” The girls vibrated in the back seat.

“Before dinner?” Helena twisted her lips, making me laugh.

“Just one day won't hurt.” I blinked.

I got the girls out of the car, and the four of us headed inside the establishment. I settled them in chairs around a table and asked which flavor each of them wanted before pouring two scoops for each, adding syrup, and weighing them. I ordered myself a milkshake in honor of my first meeting with Helena, and she did the same. While I waited for our orders, I watched the twins slurp their milkshakes.

“Is it tasty?” I asked them.

They nodded.

I looked at Helena sitting next to me and put my hand over hers.

“Thomas.”

“Don't you think we'd better tell them straight away?”

“We can prepare them a little more.”

“They're clever.”

“But...” She didn't even manage to finish her sentence before Mary screamed.

“Dad and Helena are dating.”

“How do you know that?” The teacher and I spoke together, wide-eyed.

“Matt spoke,” Anne answered. “He saw...”

“What did he see?” I tried to extract what they knew.

I'd only dropped Helena off at school, I hadn't even kissed her in front of the building or anything that could arouse any suspicion.

“Youtogether.”

“When?” Helena insisted.

“Hoji.”

I started to laugh.

“I thought we were telling them something new.”

“Can I have some moresorbet?” Anne lifted her pot.

“In a little while, child.”

“Are you happy to see us together?” Helena was still wary, even though the twins had given many indications that they wanted this.

“Yes!” Mary vibrated.

“The people,” Anne admitted.

I smiled as I looked at them both. In a way, their wish had come true. They both looked at each other and then got up to hug their teacher and kiss her on the cheek. Seeing my daughters happy made me even happier with my decision. I tried to push aside all my fears and the possibility that the three of us would suffer if it didn't work out.

I could allow myself and my daughters a different perspective on a woman being part of our lives.

Chapter twenty-seven

I opened the apartment door, smiling and humming. This drew the attention of my grandmother, who stirred in her armchair and squinted to notice me.

“You look happy.”

“I am.” I sighed as I plopped down on the sofa next to her.

“Does it have anything to do with what happened yesterday?”

“Not just yesterday.”

She checked the time on the television screen before asking me questions again.

“Were you with him?”

“Yes.”

“That's good.”

“We told the girls that we're together.”

“Together?” My grandmother frowned when I said it again.

“He told me about us being boyfriend and girlfriend... I don't know.” My speech became hurried as I feared my grandmother's judgment. “Do you think it was too fast? That I should be more cautious? I think...”

“Helena,” he interrupted me, “you have to do what your heart tells you, child. Life is hard enough. It gets even worse when we don't do what we think is right.”

“My mother just followed her heart, and look what happened.”

“Her mother had always been a little lost. She never knew what she really wanted, and that left her aimless.”

“And if he's not the right guy, he seemed like an asshole at first...”

“You'll only know if you try.”

“You're right.”

“I'm happy for you.”

“Thank you, Grandma.” I got up to hug her.

We stayed like that for a while until I went to my room, took a shower and when I lay down on the bed, I picked up my cell phone and was surprised by a message from Thomas.

Thomas:

The twins are very excited about the news.

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Helena:

I don't want to disappoint them.

Thomas:

Neither.

I know it can be complicated dating a man who already has daughters and a past. I hope I don't make the situation uncomfortable for you in any way.

Helena:

I love them, Thomas.

Thomas:

Then you've certainly chosen the right woman.

Helena:

I hope so.

Thomas:

Now, let's move on to adult conversation.

Helena:

Do I need to be afraid of that?

Thomas:

Only if you don't like a few bites.

Helena:

I didn't know you were the cannibal type.

Thomas:

I can tear off a few pieces, but I'll start with your clothes.

Helena:

Wow! That's how scared I'll be.

Thomas:

You don't have to. I know how to be a good guy too.

Helena:

I haven't seen that part yet lol.

Thomas:

I'll try harder.

Helena:

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Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 7:40 am

I hope the girls aren't around.

Thomas:

They're in another room watching television.

Helena:

Not so bad.

Thomas:

Can I pick her up again tomorrow? This time, bring her to my house.

Helena:

Sleep in your house?

Thomas:

In my bed.

Helena:

It's too soon. I don't want to confuse the girls.

Thomas:

Why would they be confused? They already know we're together.

Helena:

It's different from starting to sleep together.

Thomas:

He wanted labels and now he's afraid of commitments.

Helena:

That's not it.

Thomas:

So what is it?

Helena:

I just don't want them to think that I'm trying to occupy a position in their lives that isn't mine.

Thomas:

What other people think is their business, and we're not in front of a jury to prove anything.

Helena:

I know...

Thomas:

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Daphne is dead, and nothing will change that. Believe me, I would have done something if it were possible. Thetwins miss their mother, no matter if she's biological or not. No matter how hard I try, there's a void.

I'd be lying to you if I said they didn't expect you to occupy that position.

Helena:

And what do you want?

Thomas:

May it work out. Not just for them but for me too. As much as I'm afraid.

Helena:

I'm afraid too. It's a normal human thing.

Thomas:

So, what do you say about my invitation?

Helena:

I'll think about it.

Thomas:

I thought you used good arguments.

Helena:

And he did.

Thomas:

So?

Helena:

Okay, I'll go.

Thomas:

Great!

Helena:

Now I need some time to prepare for my next classes. I bet I won't be able to do anything in the evening tomorrow.

Thomas:

You'll do a lot of things, but it certainly won't work.

Helena:

Pervert.

Thomas:

I didn't say anything too much.

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I'll let you concentrate. I also have work to do.

Helena:

See you tomorrow.

Thomas:

Good evening.

When we stopped messaging, I hugged the phone, sighing. It was hard to believe that I had felt so much anger towards that man just under a month ago, and at that moment, I was falling in love. He had great arguments, and it seemed easy to understand how he always won every legal dispute.

I sat on the bed and took a deep breath as I squeezed my knees together. I wasn't just going out with a handsome and interesting man to find out what the two of us could become. There were two beautiful girls, twins, motherless, who had seen in me a figure that had been absent for many years. Was I ready to take over the family that another woman had left behind?

As much as I loved my students with all my heart, I focused on looking after my grandmother, studying, and being a good professional. I hadn't bothered to date, let alone build a family; staying with Thomas meant I'd have to deal with a ready-made one. It would be a more complicated mission than my heart would let me feel.

Chapter twenty-eight

“Violet!” I called my secretary as soon as I entered the office that morning.

“Yes, sir.” She came running to my side, almost tripping over her high heels.

“Call Harold Gilson and confirm our 10 a.m. meeting with him.”

“I will.”

“Has the union representative given you an answer about the deal I offered? If not, tell him time is running out; if we don't get an answer by the end of the day, we'll halve our offer.”

“That's what I wanted to talk about.” She stopped running when we reached my office door, and I turned to face her.

“Then say it!”

“He's just called and asked to meet with you. He seems tempted to accept the offer.”

“And what did you do?”

“I've scheduled a meeting for after lunch to reschedule your schedule.”

“Wasn't I going to meet a potential client?”

“I asked one of the directors to take his place.”

“Which one?”

“Paul.”

“Okay. He'll manage the situation. Do I have my lunch free?”

“Yes, unless you want to...”

“No,” I interrupted. “Leave it as it is. I have plans for lunch.”

“Okay.”

I opened the door and looked at her one last time before going in.

“Let me know when Harold arrives.”

“I'll ask you to wait in the meeting room, and I'll call you.”

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“Good.” I nodded and locked myself in the room.

I left my briefcase on the table and sat down in the leather chair. Before starting the day, I took out my cell phone and sent a message to my sister.

Thomas:

Are you available for lunch?

Deborah:

Yes.

Thomas:

So let's meet at the usual restaurant.

Deborah:

What kind of miracle is that? You haven't called me for lunch in so long.

Thomas:

I want to tell you something.

Deborah:

Should I get excited?

Thomas:

Don't create theories.

Deborah:

That's the best part.

Thomas:

See you at noon.

Deborah:

Agreed.

I stopped messaging my sister and opened my laptop, analyzing some recordings of a client's case, when Violet called me.

“Sir, the client is in the meeting room.” He said from the other end of the line.

“Tell him I'm coming.” I disconnected the call and locked the computer before leaving the room and heading for the meeting.

After spending almost the whole morning talking to the guy, I sorted out a few more office issues and was finally able to go out to meet my sister.

Deborah had already arrived and was waiting for me at a table for two.

“Hi!” I leaned over to kiss his cheek before sitting down in front of him and opening the napkin in my lap.

“How are the girls?”

“Great.”

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“How nice! Tell me, what did you want to tell me?”

“We haven't even placed our orders yet.” I raised my hand for a waiter to approach us.

“You're seriously going to keep playing me?”

“She's very anxious.”

“I'm PMSing, so please don't test me.”

“Is that a threat?” I giggled as I opened the menu.

“Maybe.” My sister winked at me.

“I think I'd better go.”

“You can stay put.”

“What happened, Deby?”

“I can't believe Tyler won the case for that asshole!”

I laughed even harder at her outrage.

“Even you?”

“He's a judge, and he has to be impartial.”

“It was obvious that this guy was guilty.”

“But they didn't have enough evidence to convict him.”

She twisted her lips.

“You get too involved, sister. You can't solve all the world's problems, and you know it.”

“I'm just trying to be fair.”

“Life isn't fair.”

“That's why you followed in Dad's footsteps, and I didn't.”

“You're a good prosecutor, Deby.”

“Sometimes I have doubts about that.”

“Don't.”

“But let's change the subject.” She called the waiter over again so that we could place our orders. “We came here to talk about you, not me. Now that we've gone around and chosen our dishes, you can finally tell me.”

“I'm dating Helena.”

“Is it serious?” Her eyes lit up.

I shook my head yes.

“Since when?”

“Yesterday.”

“Do the twins know?”

“They found out before we even told them.”

“Those are my nieces.” Deborah laughed. “I’m very happy for you, brother.” She leaned over the table and stroked my shoulder. “God forbid a grumpy old man who stopped living too soon.”

“Don't overdo it.”

“You deserved another woman. A young and beautiful one like her.”

“If something happens...”

“The only thing that can happen is that you ruin everything by being an idiot. So please don't. My beautiful nieces and I are rooting for you.”

“Thank you.” Laughs.

“See? You're even more polite.”

“What about you?”

“What's wrong with me?”

“Anyone?”

“Let's not talk about my love disappointments.”

“Instead of trying so hard to convince me, you need to find someone else.”

“Believe me, I'm trying. At least I'm the youngest and have more time.” She shrugged.

I liked my youngest; Deborah was witty, kind and generally tried to see the world in a better light, even if I thought she was disappointed most of the time. She, Tyler, and I got on well, even though they had chosen other paths in law rather than being at the firm with me.

“When are you going to introduce her to the rest of the family?”

“Let's take it easy.”

“Do you think Mom might scare her?”

“I don't know.”

“If the twins have already approved it, we don't have to dispute anything else. You know that we all just want to see you happy.”

I nodded.

The waiter brought our plates, and the conversation continued until we both had to attend to our afternoon commitments. But it did me good to talk to my sister and be able to open up a bit in a relaxed way.

Chapter twenty-nine

“Principal?” I knocked on the woman's door when the children were asleep and waited for her to raise her eyes to look at me.

“Come in.” He adjusted his glasses on his nose as he took a good look at me.

“Do you have a minute?”

“Go ahead.” He indicated the chair in front of him.

“I...” I swallowed, gathering my courage and searching for the best words to talk to her about without the subject ending up in my dismissal. As well as needing the money, I loved my job.

“What's wrong?” He squeezed his eyes shut.

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“Before you heard about it from someone else, I thought I'd come here and let you know.”

“Is that something I should worry about? You've worked at this school for years, Helena, and the parents and students like you very much.”

“It's nothing to worry about, at least I don't think so. I just want you to be aware to avoid any misunderstandings.”

“So speak up.”

“Thomas Lennox and I are dating.”

“Thomas Lennox?” He jogged his memory. “The twins' father?”

I said yes.

“Since when?”

“It's quite recent.”

“Hmm...”

“I want you to know that this won't get in the way of my commitment to the school and all my students.”

“That's what I hope.”

I remained silent, and she stared at me for a few moments before continuing.

“All I ask is that you be very discreet. We deal with children, and I don't want any complaints from other parents.”

“Yes, ma'am.”

“Is that all?”

I shook my head yes.

“Thanks for your transparency; you can go now.”

“Not at all, ma'am.” I left her office feeling lighter.

I went back to my students and waited for them to wake up. Mary, Camile, and another student were the first. The second picked up a doll, and one of the twins came closer to talk to her classmate.

“Is Aunt Helena going to be my mommy?”

Mom?

That word echoed in a strange way inside me; at the same time that it made me happy, it caused a certain astonishment. I thought about intruding on the conversation, saying that it wasn't quite like that, but then I realized that it was better not to.

“Aunt Helena isn't your mother. Your mother rides.”

I swallowed. Camile didn't have to be so cruel, but she had lived with children long

enough to know that they were sincere to the extreme.

“Aunt Helena flirting with Dad.” Mary puffed out her chest confidently.

“It's a lie.”

“It's not!”

“Aunt Helena!” Camile got up and ran over to me.

“Hi, darling.” I pretended I hadn't heard the conversation.

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“Are you reallygoing tobeMary's mother?”

“Her father and I are together, yes.” It was a way of answering without using the weight of the word mother.

I became even more afraid of the situation because I didn't want to hurt them.

“See.” Mary pouted at her colleague.

“Ah!” Camile scowled.

“What do you think about waking up the rest of the class for breakfast?” I changed the subject. “Who's hungry?”

“Me!” They both jumped.

“Let's go!” I made them accompany me.

Chapter thirty

I parked in front of the school and walked to the gate where the children were leaving with their parents.

“Hello, Mr. Lennox!” The woman at the door turned to me as if we were old friends.

“Hi,” I replied without the same enthusiasm.

“I'll call them.”

“Okay.”

I was wondering if I would have to wait long for Helena to leave, but a huge smile formed on my lips when I saw her escorting my daughters to the school gate. The twins were jumping up and down, as happy as I'd seen them in a long time.

At that moment, I realized that it wasn't just myself that I was isolating by depriving myself of deeper involvement with other women. I always did my best for my daughters, but it was clear that I had a void that I would never be able to fill.

“Daddy!” They came running and hugged my waist.

“How are my princesses?” I bent down to kiss each of them on the forehead.

“Good.” Anne shook her head; Mary didn't even answer, coming straight out with another question that must have been the reason for her anxiety.

“Is Helena going with us today?”

I stood up, facing the teacher, who gave me a broad smile of assent.

“Yes, she's going with us.”

“Yay!” The girls celebrated by jumping up and down.

I leaned towards Helena and wanted to kiss her, but before I could, she shook her head no and dodged me.

“Not here.”

“Okay.” I was a little embarrassed, but I understood his reasons for not insisting.

I led them to my car, and we settled the twins in their car seats until Helena sat in the back seat.

“I told the principal,” he said as I started the car and drove to my apartment.

“About us?” I thought.

“Yes.”

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“What did she say?” I was curious.

“That it's okay as long as we're discreet.”

“That's good, isn't it?”

“That's great.” She leaned over and smiled at me. “I was afraid that she might end up reprimanding me in some way because of my relationship with the student's father.”

“She couldn't forbid us.”

“You don't know.”

“I'd find a way.” I winked at her.

“No lawyer stuff, please.”

“I didn't say anything.” I played dumb.

“But I thought.”

I shrugged, and Helena smiled even more. She was beautiful, but her beauty intensified when she looked happy.

I didn't even remember what it was like to notice a woman like that and let myself be charmed by little things.

I parked in the garage, and Helena helped me get the girls out of the car. We took the elevator up to the penthouse.

It was difficult to have a moment alone with my girlfriend because the twins were always around. They had spent the whole day with Helena, but it didn't seem to be enough. I would have to find a balance, but at another time, not that one.

When nine o'clock came around, the time I put them to bed, I took Anne into the bedroom on my lap, and Mary dragged Helena out so that she could come with us.

We put the girls to bed and covered them up. Mary asked for a story, which Helena read until the girls fell asleep.

We said goodbye with a kiss on the top of the head, and it was my turn to drag the little teacher to my room. I couldn't wait for us to have an adult conversation.

“Alone at last.” I wrapped my arms around her waist, pulling her to me, and Helena sighed as I grazed my goatee across the sensitive skin of her neck.

“Thomas...” He squeezed my shoulders, twisting my dress shirt over his fingers as I nibbled my way down his neck to his chin.

“I was dying to do that all night.”

“Not in front of the girls.”

“That's all I waited for.”

I brought her onto the bed with me and laid her down in the middle of the mattress with my legs around hers. My mouth sought hers, enjoying the taste of her lips while my hands explored her contours. She let out a muffled cry when I squeezed her waist

and bit her neck.

Helena had showered and was wearing pajamas that were too discreet for my liking, but I could understand her choices. My eyes weren't the only ones weighing her down that night. Fortunately, my daughters were in bed, and I could get them out.

I slipped my hand inside her blouse, working my way around until I found her bra. I slipped my fingers under the rim of the bra, and she let out a muffled moan when my fingers finally found her nipples.

“I want to kiss you all over.” I bit her ear, making her shudder as I pulled up her blouse, and she let me take it off without any protest.

“Oh, kiss me!” She gasped, surrendering completely to my advances.

I threw my blouse on the bed next to us and pulled down the straps of my bra, licking one of the nipples that had escaped. My mouth was salivating, eager to taste every part of her.

My cock was throbbing frantically in my pants, eager to be inside her. I was eager to taste that wet vagina once more.

I ran my teeth along the valley between my breasts, about to get rid of my bra once and for all, but before I could, I heard a faint knock on the door.

“Dad, Helena?”

“What could have happened?” I asked, a little irritated.

“I don't know.” Helena hurriedly picked up her blouse and put it back on before getting up to open the door.

Before my daughters came in, I tried to pull myself together, and I didn't usually get a hard-on at home except when I could be strictly alone in the bathroom and relieve myself with a handjob.

“What is it, girls?” Helena watched them standing at the bedroom door.

“Canwestay here?” Anne asked in a sly voice to convince us.

Helena looked at me, and I had no choice but to nod.

“Come on, girls.”

“Wow!”

They entered the room like two small hurricanes and took over the bed, putting an end to my noble intention of a happy night with my girlfriend.

Chapter thirty-one

I woke up to him blowing hot breath in my ear, which sent shivers down my spine.

His firm hand was on my waist, moving down to my ass, as close to his hip as possible. I flinched out of reflex and felt his bulge.

We were cuddling while the girls slept in front of us. They seemed to be in a deep sleep, but I didn't want to risk it.

“Thomas, stop!”

“Let's get up,” he said softly, his mouth against my ear in a way that was far more tempting than I'd like to admit.

“The girls...”

“They'll stay here and sleep.”

“Where do you want to take me?”

“Come.”

He rolled out of bed, and I ended up letting myself be led into the hallway. The girls stayed under his bed, sleeping, and my boyfriend dragged me into another room, shutting us in what seemed like an office despite the dim light.

“Now they leave us alone.”

“Poor things, I don't think...”

I wanted to say that they weren't doing it out of spite, that their only wish was to stay with us, but your mouth silenced mine, and it was impossible to say anything.

“Thomas...” I let his name slip when he picked me up and carried me over to a desk.

I pushed something, probably an ornament or a paperweight, and the object fell to the floor, making a loud sound.

“Be careful,” he warned me.

“Sorry.”

“You don't want to wake up the girls, do you?”

I just said no and wrapped my arms around his neck again. Thomas wasn't the only one who wanted that. My body was throbbing; the area between my legs was begging for more in a need that was growing uncontrollably.

I moved my hand and ended up bumping into a stapler, but luckily, it didn't fall to the ground.

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I giggled, and Thomas put his finger on my lips.

“Shi...” he murmured so that I would be silent, but it was difficult if, at the same time, he slipped his hand inside my shorts and began to stimulate me.

I rolled over on the wood, feeling his finger make circles on my clit, and my need for him only grew.

“Lock the door,” I asked softly, regaining my wits for a moment.

Thomas nodded and moved away from me just enough to comply with my request, then came back to me.

He lifted me off the table and spun me around. I fell onto it with my palms open. I leaned forward as Thomas ran his hands down the side of my body until he grabbed my waist, pulling it up. I thrust my ass out and moaned as I received a spanking I hadn't anticipated. I leaned closer and dug my nails into the wood.

“Tho...” His name came out mixed with a low moan.

This time, he had no ceremony in pulling down the bottom of my clothes and pushing them to my feet. He pulled down my blouse and finally opened my bra, leaving it beside me. With the lights off, the room was dimly lit, and I wanted to know where I had left my clothes when we were finished.

I had no idea what time it was, but I had dozed off a bit with the girls, but any trace of sleep had gone when Thomas started teasing me again.

His heavy hands went up the side of my body and grabbed my breasts. I rolled into him, feeling the erection in his shorts as his fingers played with my nipples, squeezing and pulling in a way that only turned me on even more. I might have thought he was an asshole at first, but there was no doubt that he knew very well how to lead a woman on.

He kept hold of my breast, and his other hand went down my spine, grabbing my ass again in one swift movement and leaning me forward.

It was crazy the way my body was getting hotter and hotter, and I couldn't think of anything other than the anxiety of being there with him at that moment. Thomas had barely touched between my thighs, and I could already feel the wetness seeping through them, and the more he touched me, the greater the need to be explored.

I heard the sound of the zipper of my shorts being unzipped, and Thomas's firm hand leaned me even closer to the table, making me lie down on the pile of papers.

“Thrust yourself towards me.” He held my hips, pushing me further forward. It was completely impossible to resist that request.

I rested my hands on the surface and raised my hips as much as possible, biting my lower lip to stop myself from moaning when he thrust into me. It was practically impossible not to moan.

He began a delicious back-and-forth movement, fitting his body into mine as he thrust deep.

I dug my nails into the wood, feeling wonderful and increasingly intense impulses sweep through me with each impact.

It was good... very good to experience it all.

There was still an adrenaline rush from hiding that made everything even more intense.

Thomas ran a firm hand up my neck and grabbed my hair, pulling it back, and it was impossible to hold back a scream.

“Silence.” He pressed his lips against my ear.

“It's hard with you doing this to me.”

“Do you want me to stop?” He slowly slipped out just to torture me.

“No!” I stretched one of my arms back and grabbed his waist, pulling him to me and making him snap again as his body collided with mine.

He took hold of my waist on both sides again. He thrust into me with gusto, and with each thrust, the pleasure in me grew. Thomas had a grip, a way of doing it that was the best thing I'd ever tasted.

“Come bounce on me.”

“Bounce?”

He got off me and pulled me with him. I only realized there was a sofa in the room when he got on it and made me sit on his lap. I rested my hands on his chest and sat down on his cock without hesitation.

His firm hands gripped my ass, and he dictated the rhythm with which I moved up and down on his lap. In that position, my clitoris rubbed against his pelvis, and the pleasure became even more intense.

I moved, and he helped me until we were both completely exhausted and shuddering with orgasms.

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I collapsed on his chest and Thomas started combing my hair with his fingertips while we recovered from the fuse.

“That's very good...” I confessed.

“I thought you didn't want to have your sleep interrupted to have sex with me.”

“I just didn't want the girls to see.”

“I don't want to either.” He stroked my cheek with his thumb. “We'll work it out.” He pulled my chin and gave me a quick kiss.

“Now I need another bath.”

“Can I go along?”

“Will it just be a shower?”

“Maybe not.” He tilted his head to bite my neck in a way that made me shudder.

“Thomas, I have to work tomorrow!” I patted his chest.

“She's not the only one.”

“I just thought you might want to take advantage of me a bit more.”

“Do I enjoy you?” I widened my eyes.

“Yes.”

“You'd think so.”

“Then let me enjoy you.” He squeezed my ass, and I had no other impulse but to roll into him.

I knew I had to go to sleep; otherwise, I'd be on that lap all night.

Chapter thirty-two

“Are you smiling, sir?” Violet noticed me when I arrived at the office the next morning after dropping the three of them off at school.

“I haven't had such a good night in a long time.”

“Did you do any sightseeing?”

I shook my head no.

“I stayed at home.”

“Ah!”

“Let's get to work.” I changed the subject so that she wouldn't insist.

“Yes, sir. Do you need anything?”

“I'd like a coffee and the latest cases we're working on and the members' reports on them.”

She nodded, but before she could walk away, I called out again.

“Can you tell me if the drinks distributor has paid for the agreements?”

“I think it's scheduled for the end of the week.”

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“Keep me informed. It's better that they stick to what they agreed to so as not to complicate their situation even further.”

“I'll remind you.”

“Great!” I opened the door to my office. “Knock when you've got what I asked for.”

I locked myself in the room and settled into my chair.

As much as there was nothing different about that day at work, I was feeling great. It had been a long time since getting up in the morning, and following my routine had been so motivating.

I wondered if, perhaps, it hadn't been better to have taken Deborah's advice earlier but probably not to have gotten involved with Helena under those circumstances. I wasn't the kind of man who believed in fate, especially since I'd have to admit that there was someone planning everything about my life, which included Daphne's death, but at least I was happy with that morning.

My cell phone vibrated in my pocket, and it was no surprise when I saw my sister's name appear in the notifications; it was almost as if she had guessed that I was thinking about her, or rather, was spying on me the whole time.

Deborah:

Hi! What's new?

Thomas:

What do you want to know?

Deborah:

How's it going with the teacher?

Thomas:

If I say good is good enough?

Deborah:

You know better.

Thomas:

She slept over last night.

Deborah:

Did the girls take it well?

Thomas:

Too well...

Deborah:

What's wrong?

Thomas:

They wanted to sleep with us.

Deborah:

The twins ruined Dad's fuck lol.

Thomas:

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It's funnier now than it was then.

Deborah:

Depending on how eager you were, it's really complicated.

Thomas:

I waited for them to go to sleep and took Helena to another room.

Deborah:

You always find a way.

Thomas:

Only in what is possible.

Deborah:

That's more than most people tend to do.

When are you going to introduce her to our parents?

Thomas:

I don't know...

Deborah:

There's no reason not to like her, Thom.

Thomas:

She already has to deal with my daughters seeing her as a second mother. I don't want her to think I'm trying to force the issue.

Deborah:

You're not pushing the envelope; you're just taking it seriously.

Thomas:

I hope it looks like that.

Deborah:

Don't boycott yourself now. Everything will work out.

Thomas:

How are you?

Deborah:

Working. I think that's the best thing our family can do.

Thomas:

At least we tried.

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Deborah:

You bet it is. Family lunch on Sunday?

Thomas:

Wouldn't I be the one to score?

Deborah:

You've never been very good at it.

Thomas:

You're right.

Deborah:

Tell my new sister-in-law that we'll be waiting for her.

Thomas:

Please don't scare her.

Deborah:

As if I was going to do that.

I have to go now. Take care, Thomas.

Thomas:

You too.

I stopped messaging my sister, and Violet entered the room with the information I had requested. As much as I didn't want to, I was devoured by work and barely had time for lunch. Episodes like that used to be commonplace, but I had gained yet another reason to want to go home.

Chapter thirty-three

I helped one of my students put on his backpack and led the class in a line outside the school to wait in the courtyard before the gate, as was customary. While I was checking all the children in my class had picked up their belongings, Holly came closer, and from her smile, I guessed she might end up asking me some embarrassing question.

“Are you going away with the handsome guy today?” He winked at me, and my cheeks flushed.

As happy as I was with my relationship with Thomas, I didn't want people making inappropriate comments, especially as we were dealing with children who could make inappropriate interpretations and comment on them to their parents or family members.

Thomas and I hadn't arranged anything, but I was worried about my grandmother and wanted to see her, but before I could say anything to Holly, my cell phone started ringing, saving me from the situation.

“Hi...”

“Helena?” I hadn't noticed the caller ID, and my heart raced when I heard his voice.

“It's me.”

“I'm sorry, but I won't be able to pick you up or the girls today. Mylon will be there soon because I've got complicated here at work. This is an important matter that I can't leave aside, but I promise I'll make it up to you later. The nanny will keep an eye on the girls, and we'll go somewhere, just the two of us...”

“Not today, Thomas...”

“Why not?” He seemed disappointed with the way I answered him.

“I need to stay with my grandmother.”

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“I bet she's fine.”

“She's already an old lady. She can't be left alone for so long without care. I need to make sure she's eating and taking her medication properly.”

“I understand.”

“It's not as if I don't want to see him.”

“I know that.” He sounded a little frustrated on the other end of the line but didn't insist.

“The girls are going with Mylon.”

“He can leave them at home.”

“I can manage with the bus.”

“But by car...”

“I'm fine, Thomas.”

“Okay. If you need anything, give me a call.”

“No problem.”

“Send your grandmother a hug for me,” he said before hanging up the call, and I put

the phone away.

“I think he's just answered my question,” Holly commented after hearing my call.

“Her parents must have arrived by now.” I indicated the gate for her to open.

Holly nodded and went to the door. As soon as she was gone, the twins came running and wrapped their arms around my waist.

“Helena!”

“Hi, little ones!”

“Aren't you going home with us today?”

“Unfortunately not.”

“Why?”

“Because your dad has a job.”

“Healways works.”

“And I have to look after my grandma.”

“Ah!” They looked disappointed.”

“Twins, Mylon has arrived.”

“Ah!” They looked disappointed but got up and walked to the gate where their father's employee was standing.

“Bye, girls!” I waved to them.

“Bye, Mom!” Anne said goodbye and ran off. I didn't even have time to correct her, and if I had, I wouldn't have known what to say. They weren't my real daughters, but their mother had died, and they missed their mother very much.

The other children who hadn't left yet stared at me but didn't ask anything. It was quite possible that the girls had already talked about it with all their classmates. I had no choice but to deal with the situation.

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I went back to collect my belongings from the living room and took the public transport home.

As soon as I arrived at the apartment, I heard a sound coming from the kitchen and didn't find my grandmother sitting in the armchair as usual.

“Grandma, what are you doing?” I asked as I stopped by the door, and she gasped. I'm sure she was distracted and didn't even notice me coming.

“Helena, my daughter!” She turned to face me. “Do you want to kill me with your heart?”

“Of course not! What are you doing?”

“I thought I'd prepare some pastries.”

“Pastries, Grandma?” I crossed my arms with a serious expression.

“Yes, pastries.”

“As well as being greasy, you could risk burning yourself.”

“They're delicious.”

“How about a vegetable soup?”

“Soup?” He twisted his lips.

“That's right.”

“It doesn't look good.”

“It's delicious.”

“Sick food.”

“You're not old enough to stuff yourself with greasy things, you know.”

“Weren't you going to stay with your boyfriend?” she dodged the question.

“Not today, and I have to look after the lady.”

“I raised you, young lady; I can take care of myself.”

“I'm just trying to give something back.”

“The best way to give something back is to enjoy your life. That handsome man...”

“Grandma!” My cheeks flushed at the depraved expression that took over her face; I wasn't expecting something like that.

“What's wrong?” He shrugged. “I'm old, but I'm not dead.”

“You're terrible.” She laughs to herself. “It's more complicated than it looks.” I sighed, leaning my head against the doorframe.

“Because of his daughters.”

“I love them, but...”

“Getting involved with a man who has a past isn't easy, but nothing in life is. You just have to be sure that it's what you really want. At least the ex-wife is dead and won't come back to haunt you.”

“Grandma!”

“All right.” He made a sign of the cross.

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“Let's get this dinner ready.” I took a pan from her hand and changed the subject as quickly as I could.

“Pastel?” He looked at me with a childlike expression.

“No. Vegetables.”

“Ah...”

“It's for your health, Grandma.”

“I'm already dying; why don't you let me enjoy the good things in life?”

“You're not dying, Grandma.”

“Just getting old...”

“Why don't you chop some carrots?” I pointed to the fridge. “I'll do the rest.”

She ended up giving up and accepting my decision.

Chapter thirty-four

“Daddy!” The twins came running to me as I entered the living room door.

I left my briefcase on the floor and picked them up, kissing them on the forehead and walking with them to the center of the sofa.

“Shouldn't you two be asleep?”

“I've put them to bed, sir,” said the nanny as she appeared and looked at me. I certainly didn't want to be reproached for the fact that the girls were still awake.

“Did they get up?” I looked at them seriously.

“We wanted to see you,” grumbled Anne slyly.

“They could wait to see me in the morning.”

“Helena didn't come?” When Mary asked me, I realized that they might be waiting for my girlfriend and not me.

“Not today, daughters...”

“Ah!” they mouthed.

“Let's go back to bed.” I took them both by the hand and led them back to the bedroom, settling them in their respective beds.

“Is she coming back?” Anne wanted to know.

“Yes, she will.”

“When is she coming to live with us?” Mary was already rushing everything.

“I don't know.”

“Ah, Dad, please call.”

“It's not that simple, my princess.” I stroked her head.

“Just get her over here. Sleep in your bed or buy one for her.”

“It's much more than just a bed.”

“What?”

“She needs to look after her grandmother.”

“Just bring it.”

“Ah, my little ones, when you get older, you'll be able to understand that it's never like it seems. Now go to sleep.”

“In a quello...”

“Yes, you should.”

“I don't want to.”

I frowned, and they nodded.

“Good night, my loves.” I kissed each of them and left the room, closing the door behind me.

I wanted to do the best for them and for myself, but I also had to be careful not to hurt any of us.

The babysitter had already left, and I grabbed something to eat in the kitchen. I took a shower and then went to my office. I looked through some more paperwork before sending a message to Helena.

Thomas:

Have you gone to bed yet?

Helena:

Not yet.

Thomas:

How is your grandmother?

Helena:

Stubborn, but good.

Thomas:

That's great!

Helena:

What about the girls?

Thomas:

Missing you and me too.

Helena:

We'll arrange another day.

Thomas:

How about every day?

Helena:

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You're not asking me to move in with you, are you?

Thomas:

Maybe.

Helena:

We'd better take things slowly. Not only is our relationship very recent, but I can't just abandon my grandmother.

Thomas:

I understand.

Helena:

I hope so.

Thomas:

Speaking of family, I have an invitation for you.

Helena:

What kind of invitation?

Thomas:

To meet my family.

Helena:

Isn't it a bit early?

Thomas:

You're my girlfriend, aren't you? Besides, I know your grandmother.

Helena:

It's completely different.

Thomas:

Why?

Helena:

You practically broke into my house.

Thomas:

Small detail.

Helena:

What if they don't like me?

Thomas:

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Of course they'll love you.

Helena:

The women in your family seem like the luxurious type, where I don't fit in.

Thomas:

It's all a question of perspective.

Helena:

I don't know.

Thomas:

I'm sure they'll love you.

Helena:

Okay, when?

Thomas:

On Sunday, is that okay?

Helena:

Agreed.

We stopped messaging, and I wondered if she had slept or was simply distracted by something else. As much as I was afraid, I didn't think she needed to fear meeting my family. Just like Deborah, they were eager for me to find happiness again. After spending years locked away in a dark corner of my heart, I thought I was close to it again.

Chapter thirty-five

As much as my grandmother had assured me that there was nothing to be afraid of, I was tense. The week had gone by faster than I would have liked, and I was there getting ready, or at least trying to, meet Thomas's family. I had bumped into his sister on the day of the nightclub, but the rest, I had no idea who they were.

A quick search for the surname Lennox on the internet revealed a traditional New York family in the field of law. All Harvard graduates had an impeccable record dating back to the great-grandparents of Thomas. They usually pursued their careers in the traditional family firm, but Thomas' brothers had chosen other areas of the law. Would they be there too? I couldn't say.

“Helena!” my grandmother shouted. “Your boyfriend has arrived.”

I straightened my hair for the millionth time and left the apartment's small bathroom, going into the living room, where I saw Thomas standing. He was carrying a bouquet of flowers in one hand.

“Wow!” I was surprised. “They're beautiful.”

“I brought it for your grandmother.” He came closer and handed it to her.

“Oh, dear.” She was a little embarrassed. “He didn't have to.”

“You deserve it.”

“Thank you.”

“Shall we?” He held out his hand to me, and I smiled.

I entwined my fingers in his.

“Take care, Grandma.”

“No problem. Enjoy!”

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I waved to her and left the apartment with Thomas.

“Flowers for my grandmother?” I commented as I put on my seatbelt when I was already in his car.

“Doesn't she deserve it?”

“Of course, he deserves it, but...”

I stopped talking when he reached out and pulled an even bigger bouquet from the back seat than the one he gave to my grandma.

“Wow...”

“You deserve it too.”

“Thank you, Thomas!” I sniffed the roses, filling my nostrils with the scent. “They're beautiful.”

“No more than you.”

“I didn't know you were so gallant.”

“You still have some secrets about me that you'll discover little by little.”

“Oh, I want to know.”

“Here...” He leaned over me and grabbed my thigh, bringing his mouth to mine.

“Tho...” His tongue plunged into my mouth, and I couldn't say anything else; I just returned the kiss.

My fingers tangled in his hair, and I pulled harder, making the contact between our mouths even more intense. The desire that came over me while we were together was almost uncontrollable. I had to agree with Holly; Thomas was quite a man. Just thinking about him made my legs wobble.

He tried to pull me onto his lap, but before we did something inappropriate for children at the door of his building, I stopped him.

“Hold on.” I pushed his chest, grabbing the collar of his shirt. At the same time that a little rationality led me to push him away, my desire was to pull him back.

“Helena...” she muttered softly.

“We can't do that here.”

“I know.” He pulled himself together, and we settled into our seats.

“Where are the girls?” I put the bouquet on my lap and fixed my hair, which he had pulled.

“They've already gone to my parents' house.”

“Ah...” I tensed up again.

“Don't worry about it.” He stroked my hand affectionately.

“Sounds easy to say.”

“They have no reason not to like you. I haven't taken a woman home since Daphne died. They know that if I'm introducing you, it's because you're important to me.”

I nodded. I should be worrying for nothing; there was no reason to be tense, but at the same time, I was getting more and more involved with that man every day, and the possibility of it all coming to an end at once frightened me.

For a long time, I had no man; no one else was a priority in my life apart from my grandmother. But being with Thomas and thinking about my relationship with the twins had changed all my perspectives. I wanted that man and the whole family.

It was crazy to think that I was agreeing to become the mother of two four-year-old twins, but I got excited about the possibility every day. Those little ones and I could do a lot of good for each other.

Thomas drove to the outskirts of the city, and we soon left the tall buildings to see fences and mansions. It was a quieter, more secluded area, far from the hustle and bustle of the metropolis. We passed through an electronic gate, and he parked the car in a space next to several other luxury vehicles. He had more cars than anyone needed, and I knew that his family was large enough for each vehicle to correspond to a member.

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“Can I leave it here?” I put the bouquet on the seat when I opened the car door.

“Yes.” He turned around and held out his hand to me.

“What a beautiful house!” It was impossible not to exclaim when I saw the building from the outside.

It was made of light brick, with tall columns at the entrance and a staircase leading up to the main door. It had three floors, with white windows and a light gray roof that gave the place a modern, sophisticated look.

“Yes, it is.” Thomas agreed.

“Did you grow up here?” I was curious.

“No.”

“Ah!”

“When I was a child, my father ran the firm, and we lived in an apartment similar to mine. It was only when he decided to retire that my mother convinced him to move to a bigger, quieter place, away from the hustle and bustle of Manhattan.”

“Are you thinking of living somewhere like this one day?”

“Maybe...” He bit his lower lip, looking more thoughtful. “The twins like it here, but I don't know if it will stay that way when they're fifteen or twenty. It may be that

when I get to my father's age, the need for peace will speak louder. Why do you see yourself in a place like this?"

"Well... It wasn't a perspective I had."

"But do you like Manhattan?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you move there?"

"Rent is very expensive, and so is my grandmother's medication. I had to make a choice."

"I understand." He stared at me and pulled my hand, kissing the back of it.

We didn't have time to say anything more because the front door opened, and the twins came running.

"Daddy! Helena!"

"Be careful not to get hurt, girls."

I knelt down to hug them, and they both came to me, vying for space to wrap their arms around my neck. I kissed each of them on the forehead, and they snuggled up to me like two sly kittens.

"How are my princesses?"

"Good," replied Mary.

“Setting up a block with Grandma.”

“Oh, you were playing with a building block?”

They said yes.

“What fun.”

“Yes, of course,” agreed Mary.

I stood up, holding each of their hands, and stared at the couple of gentlemen in the doorway, together with Thomas's younger sister. I took a step towards them, and they took another three towards me.

“Hello, Helena.”

“Hi, Mrs. Lennox.”

“You can call me Genevive, dear.”

“Thank you.”

“It's a pleasure to meet you.” The woman gave me a hug that surprised me. It took a while for me to let go of the girl's hands and reciprocate.

“It's my pleasure.”

“It's so nice to see my son with such a beautiful and kind woman.” She stroked my cheek as she looked at me. “My granddaughters spoke very highly of you.”

“I'm glad.”

“Let's go in, dear.” The man gestured for us to pass.

“Of course.”

“Welcome.”

“Thank you very much, Mr. Lennox.”

He just smiled at me, but it seemed sincere. Thomas's family's receptiveness soon made me feel less tense about being in front of them. I was thinking that they might look down on me and judge me for my humble origins, but that wasn't the case. My

boyfriend was right, the fact that he and the twins liked me seemed enough to make me welcome.

“So that's the saint?” another man asked as he appeared in front of me. He looked a lot like Thomas, but he wore a full beard that was well-groomed, unlike my boyfriend's goatee.

“Saint?” I raised an eyebrow in surprise at the comment.

“Tyler...” Genevive reproached him.

“Only a saint could deal with my older brother.”

“Funny.” Thomas closed his face.

“I'm Judge Tyler Lennox, Helena.” He extended his hand to me.

“I bet she doesn't care about that,” grumbled the younger sister.

“I'm just introducing myself, prosecutor.”

“We're not in court, Tyler.” She twisted her lips.

“Good,” said Thomas.

“Come and have a look.” Anne pulled my hand, and I let myself be dragged by the girl, escaping the family presentation.

She only stopped dragging me when we were in front of the coffee table in the huge, beautifully decorated living room. As stunning as that house was, I wondered if it didn't seem terribly empty when the children were away.

As it was always me and my grandmother, I wasn't used to a big family, let alone all that luxury. Every day that I spent around Thomas made me more certain that the two of us belonged to completely different worlds. I just hoped, over time, this wouldn't become a problem.

“Sit down!” Anne pointed to the fluffy carpet.

But before I could settle down, their grandmother approached.

“Girls, let's have lunch first, then you can play with Helena.”

“Ah...” they muttered in protest.

“There's bonbon pie for dessert.”

“Yay!” They cheered.

“But only if they eat it all.” Thomas was firm.

The girls looked at each other and nodded.

“Let's go into the dining room.” Grandma held out her hand for them to go with her

The girls ran off and left me as if they hadn't even remembered I was there. I laughed to myself. I was used to children, so I knew how they behaved.

“They're a comedy,” his sister commented to me.

“I love children.”

“Thomas said you're a teacher, but you don't have children, right?”

I said no.

“Studying and looking after my grandmother were my main priorities in recent years.”

“What's it like dealing with both?”

“Well... I love them, and I think they love me too.”

“Sit down, Helena!” Mary waved for me to settle down in the chair between her and

her sister.

“They certainly love you.” Deborah smiled. “They're planning to have more after...”

“Let's take it easy.” Thomas interrupted the conversation by placing his hands on my back and guiding me to the chair his daughters had already reserved for me.

“Okay.” Deborah giggled.

“You said you live with your grandmother,” their father brought it up. “Your parents...”

Thomas glared, but I didn't mind the question.

“My mother keeps disappearing and showing up at the most inopportune moments, while my father, she never knew who he was.”

“I'm sorry.”

“That's all right. I'm used to it.”

“Did you study at Columbia?”

“With a full scholarship.”

“Apparently, she was an exemplary student.”

“I had to work hard because my grandmother wouldn't be able to pay for university for me.”

The man opened his mouth again, but before he could ask another question, Thomas

stopped him.

“Dad, that's enough!”

“I admire those who make up for a lack of opportunities with effort.”

“Thank you, sir.” I smiled at him, pleased with his comment.

I hadn't grown up in a beautiful house surrounded by luxury and refinement like them, but I had always done my best to achieve my goals, and I was very proud of the person I had become.

“Helena!” Anne tugged on my arm.

“Hello?”

“Are we going to swing?”

“Do you have a balance sheet?”

“Grandpa put it in the garden.”

“Of course, we're going, but we have to wait until lunch is digested; otherwise, you might get sick.”

“Iestão?”

“Digestion,” I corrected her so that she would learn the correct pronunciation of the word.

“What is it?”

“Digestion is when our body absorbs nutrients from food after we have chewed and swallowed.”

“Ah...”

“Demola?”

“A little bit.”

“Tendi.”

“Let'seat!” Mary jumped up and down in her chair when a waitress started serving the dishes.

Thomas and I looked at each other and laughed as he reached under the table to take my hand.

Chapter thirty-six

“Here.” Tyler handed me a shot of whisky.

“Thank you.” I took a sip as I looked out over the horizon, where Helena was pushing the twins on the swing my father had placed in a tree at the back of the house.

“Beautiful.”

“She's beautiful...”

“A little too young for you.” He squeezed his eyes shut to try to analyze her better.

“Shut up, man!”

“I'm just telling the truth.”

“I didn't ask your opinion on that.”

“It seems he's already in love.”

“It took me a long time to open up to another woman.”

“Do you think she's the right girl?”

“Look at them.” I pointed while my daughters laughed and played with my girlfriend.

“Are you looking for a new girlfriend or a mother for your daughters?”

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“You can't disassociate one from the other.”

“What if she doesn't make you happy?”

“She's already making me happy.” I turned to face him. “Look who's asking me that question.”

“What's wrong?” He shifted his shoulders. “I worry about you.”

“I know that, but you're not the best love advisor there is. You only have affairs.”

“That's why. I get the best out of every woman.”

“Then she threw them away.” Deborah came out onto the balcony and pulled up a chair to sit at the table, joining us.

“This happily ever after thing is bullshit.”

“Maybe because of men like you.”

“I thought you loved me.” He crossed his arms.

“Just because you're my brother.” She shrugged and took his glass, drinking the rest of the shot. “Stop agonizing over Thomas's relationship; he deserves it.”

“I'm in mine.”

“I know...” Deborah looked up.

“Aunt Deby!” Mary came running up the small wooden steps from the balcony where we were standing.

“Be careful not to hurt yourself.” My sister went over to her niece.

“Come and play with us.”

“Do you want me to go on the swing?”

“Quelo!”

My sister looked at us, and I nodded in encouragement.

“I think she'd be a great mother,” Tyler commented when our sister walked away from us.

“Everything has its moment.”

“You're getting old, man. Talking just like Dad.”

“Life changes us.”

“I hope not.” He crossed his legs and stared at the horizon.

I swore that I would never put another woman in my life, much less get involved to the point of giving my heart away, but there I was, looking with a passionate air at the woman who played with my daughters. I knew that Tyler would also be challenged by fate at some point, but that wasn't my concern at the moment.

Chapter thirty-seven

Thomas was right, his family welcomed me with open arms and after spending a very pleasant day in their presence, I no longer even knew why I had been afraid of that meeting. Even though they had money and a lot of resources, they were kind to me and didn't let me down at any point. The girls were very used to the house, and that helped me too.

When we got into the car to leave, and I settled them in the back seat, I had the feeling that it wasn't the first time I'd been there. If this atmosphere continued over the next few visits, I was likely to get on very well with everyone.

I was afraid of how my relationship with Thomas would develop, but as time went by, it became increasingly clear that there were many positive points for it to work out.

“Will you let me take you to my place today?” He moved his hand towards me, but before he ended up with it on my thigh, he put it on the gearshift, probably remembering that the girls were in the back seat.

“Not today.”

“Helena.”

“Ah, Helena...” The girls complained from the back seat, practically imitating their father.

“No more: Ah, Helena, you little pests...”

They pouted, and I had to be strong not to let myself be persuaded by all that cuteness.

“I have a house, you know.”

“It could be ours.” Mary winked slyly.

“You can't.”

“Why?”

“Why not?”

“Ah, Dad...”

“You're going to see Helena tomorrow at school.” He tried to get around the situation.

“Yes, we'll see you tomorrow.”

The girls were still frowning but ended up being convinced by their father's argument.

I wanted to stay with them. If it were up to me, I wouldn't leave their side, but I needed to set limits before the situation got out of hand. There was also my grandmother. She had done so much for me, and I couldn't just abandon her after all these years.

“I'll leave her at home.” Thomas nodded.

“Thank you.”

He started the car and drove first to my address, leaving me at the door of the building.

“The day was wonderful.” I picked up the bouquet, sniffing the flowers once more.

“I'm glad you liked it.”

“Your family is great.”

“You see, there was nothing to be afraid of.”

“You're right.” I giggled. “See you tomorrow, girls.”

“Until.” They smiled at me.

“Hold on.” Thomas grabbed my wrist before I got too far away.

“What's wrong?”

“Kiss me.”

“The girls...” I was at a loss.

“It's just a kiss.”

I looked at them for a moment and then leaned towards Dad, giving him a quick kiss.

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“Ew!” they exclaimed from the back seat, and Dad laughed.

“I also want to see her tomorrow.”

“Let's discuss it.”

“I'm good with arguments.”

“I know that.” I winked at him before hugging my bouquet and running into the building.

I was sighing and completely in love with that man. Every moment I spent with Thomas, I wanted more. Being part of his life and that of the girls was proving to be a great choice for me.

When I entered the apartment, I heard the television on and found my grandmother sitting in the armchair with a bucket of popcorn, munching slowly.

“Hey, Grandma! Just tell me you've had lunch.”

“The chicken you left ready.”

“Not so bad.”

“How did it go with Thomas's family?”

“Much better than I imagined.” I threw myself on the sofa, sighing.

“That's great news.”

“Yes.”

“That bouquet is bigger than mine.”

“Beautiful, isn't it?” I put my face in the flowers.

“You're falling in love with him.”

“How could I not fall in love, Grandma?” My heart began to beat faster. At the same time, I was tense.

“I'm very happy for you, my daughter.”

“Sometimes I'm afraid.”

“Did he ever give you any reason to worry?”

“No.”

“So don't suffer from things that are only in your head. Life is hard enough with real problems.”

“You're absolutely right.” I got up to kiss her forehead. “I'm going to take a shower.”

“You should have slept with him.”

“I've come to stay with you.”

“I'm sure that man, without clothes, is much better company.”

“Grandma!” My cheeks burned with shame.

“What's wrong?” She shrugged. “I was your age and disposition too.”

“But we don't need to talk about that.”

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“I thought she was your best friend.”

“It is!”

“So.”

“I'm taking a shower!” I escaped to the shower and left her laughing.

Thomas really was quite a man, with and especially without clothes on. Just thinking about how he took me made every cell in me explode. But we had to balance all that horniness with his daughters and his day-to-day commitments.

As soon as I came out of the bathroom, I saw that there were messages from him on my cell phone. I lay down on the bed and put my legs up to answer it.

Thomas:

Tomorrow you're going out with me.

Helena:

Is that an order?

Thomas:

Perhaps an ultimatum.

Helena:

I didn't know you were so bossy.

Thomas:

I can stay as long as I want to kiss you all over.

Helena:

What a pervert!

Thomas:

Tell me you don't want me making you cum and I promise I'll behave.

Helena:

Will you comply?

Thomas

Don't you want to?

Just from the way the conversation was going, my sex was already hot and throbbing. My mind was filled with images of him grabbing me, kissing, and biting me; I'd be a huge liar if I denied it.

Helena:

Oh, I want to!

Thomas:

I'm lying here thinking about you.

Helena:

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That's dangerous, Mr. Lennox.

Thomas:

I'm alone in my room. The girls have already gone out. It's been a busy day for them.

Helena:

I know, I'm tired too.

Thomas:

Would you deny me if you were in my bed?

Helena:

Possibly not.

It's a shame I'm not here.

Thomas:

We can change that. Just let me know and I'll come and get you.

Helena:

No.

Thomas:

Are you sure?

Helena:

Tomorrow.

Thomas:

Can I consider it a promise?

Helena:

You can.

Thomas:

Okay, I'll wait.

Helena:

We'd better go to sleep now.

Thomas:

Before or after a cold shower?

Helena:

I've already showered.

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Thomas:

Too bad not with me.

Helena:

lol.

Thomas:

See you tomorrow.

Helena:

Until.

I put my cell phone away, sighing like a teenager. The thought of a life with that man was beyond all my expectations, and I increasingly wanted a happily ever after with Thomas Lennox.

Chapter thirty-eight

“I know we should have dinner first.” I looked over her shoulder as I pulled her into the hotel room and saw the table set for two and decorated with candles. Our dinner scented the room, but the only smell I was worried about was that of her body.

“Aren't we going to?” He shuddered when I ran my tongue up his neck.

“There's something I'm more eager to devour.” I squeezed her waist, eliciting a low moan from her, and moved my mouth up to nibble on her ear.

The taste and softness of his skin had me salivating.

“Thomas!” She pressed my shoulders, digging her nails into the fabric of my jacket.

“I spent the whole day thinking about when I would finally be with you.”

“Me too...” He admitted in a low voice, running his fingers up the back of my neck as I grazed my teeth on his neck.

My skin was hot, making me feel hotter and hotter inside the suit, and the erection in my pants was only getting bigger. The desire I felt for Helena was very intense, and I wasn't even trying to suppress it.

“Thomas...” he moaned my name, rubbing himself against me while I enjoyed his body with my hands and mouth.

“I'll stop if you want to have dinner first,” I said with my mouth on his ear, noticing all his hairs shivering at the contact of my breath.

She pulled away, looking into my eyes, and stared at me firmly before answering:

“I don't want to have dinner first.”

I gave her a satisfied smile before tangling my fingers in her hair and pulling her face towards me. I bit her lower lip, getting even hornier with the sounds she let out.

If it were up to me, I'd rip off all her clothes until we were one, but I tried to be a little more patient. As my tongue entwined with hers, I ran my hands up her slender waist

and lifted her blouse. I interrupted the contact between our mouths just to pull the garment out of her arms and throw it on the floor.

I moved my face down, getting intoxicated by her perfume and noticing how quickly her breasts moved up and down. I put my head between her breasts, and my hands went up her back until I opened her bra. When I pulled it down, I sucked on one of her nipples, and she moaned louder.

“Ah, Thomas...” Hearing my name escape her lips only made me want her even more.

I had been honest in my conversation with Tyler. I was sure that Helena would be a great mother to my daughters, but that wasn't the only reason I had gotten involved with her. My desire was latent and had gotten in the way of my last night. Every time I looked at her, I couldn't stop thinking about her naked.

I licked, sucked, and nibbled on each breast, filling my mouth with its flavor as if it were the tastiest dessert in the world. While my lips were still on them, I reached down with one hand and unzipped her pants, then slipped my hand inside her panties. Helena moaned before I even found her clit with my fingertips and rolled over slightly.

With my other hand, I grabbed her ass under her jeans and held her still. She grabbed my arms again, digging her nails into me while I jerked her off.

“Thomas...” He spread his legs as far apart as he could.

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I kept my hand inside her panties and moved my mouth up her neck until I found hers. We kissed again, and I muffled her moans, indicating her pleasure at my intimate touch. I could feel her wetness growing as I touched her clitoris.

“Do you like that?” I bit his ear again.

She nodded.

“I didn't hear.” I rubbed my goatee against her neck, making her wince, and squeezed her clit a little harder.

“I like it...”

“É?”

“Humrum... Ahhh”

With the hand that was holding her ass, I pulled her pants and panties down to the middle of her thighs, leaving her sex completely exposed to me and making it easier to continue stimulating her.

“Look at me.” I pulled his face and made him look at me.

His pupils were dilated, and his lips were half-open, through which the sounds of his pleasure escaped, gradually becoming more evident as my hand commanded him. I could see the climax coming in his eyes, and his legs trembled as he came with my fingers.

I smiled, pleased to realize that I had brought her to climax, but I was far from satisfied for the night.

Helena rested a hand on me, and I could see how unsteady she was as she pulled off her shoes and finished getting rid of her clothes. As she stood completely naked in front of me, she also made it clear that she wanted more from me. It was good to realize that I wasn't the only one eager for it.

She balanced herself on my shoulders and moved her head, searching for my mouth. Her lips were cold and dry, showing her need for mine. Even though I was still dressed, her stiff nipples in contact with my chest were driving me crazy. I didn't even try to contain my hands' desire to explore them. Helena's body was so beautiful, and if it wasn't for all that horniness, I could have spent the whole night just redrawing it.

I bit her mouth, and she dug her nails into me.

“Hot.”

“So are you.” She gave a naughty little smile that drove me even crazier.

It was her turn to start kissing me. I shook my head when her soft lips touched my neck, and her fingers opened the buttons of my shirt. Helena moved down my chest and I followed her gaze until she was kneeling in front of me.

Without hesitation, she unbuckled my belt and unzipped my pants. My cock was about to burst out of my underwear when she raised her head and looked into my eyes.

“Can I?”

“You shouldn't even ask me that kind of question.”

He giggled when I grabbed his hair. He slipped his delicate hands inside my underwear and pulled out my penis. He licked his lips before opening his mouth wide and taking me under his hot, wet tongue. By then, I was going crazy with excitement, and I couldn't stop myself from moaning when she started sucking me. I liked blowjobs, but nothing compared to that. The woman I was falling in love with was wonderful, naked in front of me, kneeling with my penis in her mouth. The sight of her breasts from above and her soft hair in my hands was very sexy.

“Ah, Helena...”

I even tried to warn her that I was going to come, but she didn't stop. My liquid flowed down her throat as I reached a delicious climax, and she didn't get up until I had finished. Her satisfied smile showed me that she was happy with what she had just done.

I grabbed her hair again and brought her mouth to mine. I devoured her in a fierce kiss as I pushed my girlfriend onto the bed. I squeezed her breasts and her waist, rubbing my cock against her entrance.

I settled between her thighs and slid in without ceremony. She was as wet and horny as I was, so it was easy to slide in. Her vagina contracted on my cock, and I moaned, grabbing her ass and thrusting into her even harder.

His nails slid down my back and were probably leaving marks, but I didn't care at the moment.

We stayed like that for a while until I pulled out of her just long enough to turn her on the bed and put her on all fours. The wonderful sight of her perky ass, as I thrust deep into her, took me to a particular form of paradise. Some would say she was too young

for me. Helena was beautiful, and I wanted to enjoy her body. I didn't think I'd get tired of it so soon.

I squeezed one of her buttocks, making it vibrate, and Helena grabbed the pillow, twisting it between her fingers and turning her face towards me with her eyes rolled back. Her hair was messy and wild, which made her look even more beautiful.

I moved my hands down from her waist, sinking them into her ass and increasing the speed with which I moved my body towards hers. Our moans got louder and louder, and I let them fill the room. I wanted it to last longer and I did my best to prolong the moment. There was no better sight than those breasts swaying as I crashed my body into his.

I heard Helena moan, her internal pressure on me becoming stronger. Her walls contracted intensely, almost expelling me, which made me realize that she had reached another orgasm. I couldn't hold back for much longer and joined her straight away.

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Exhausted, I rolled over in bed as soon as I regained control of my muscles.

Slyly, she came to my chest and laid her head on my heart.

“Wow!” she whispered, still a little out of breath.

“I said I was crazy about you.”

“I thought I'd melt.”

“I hope in a good way.”

“Yes.” She giggled.

“I hope I'm living up to your expectations.” I ran my hand over his face, brushing away a few strands of hair that had gotten stuck in his sweat.

“I didn't think you'd feign modesty so soon.”

“I'm in love, Helena.”

“Me too.” She cracked a wide smile.

“I think my daughters know me better than I realized.”

“You shouldn't underestimate the intelligence of little girls.”

“You're absolutely right.” I gave her a quieter kiss.

“Now I'm hungry.” He placed a hand on his stomach awkwardly, and I realized that he had snored.

“Let's have dinner.” I motioned for us to get up and led her to the table that was set.

Helena and I settled down in front of each other. She was so beautiful that I couldn't stop looking at her. I imagined that I would never be able to experience with another woman what I had experienced with Daphne, but I was wrong, and life had given me a chance to start again.

“She knows that the twins like having her around.”

“Just them?”

“Of course not!”

“I love being with you too, Thomas.” He smiled at me before sticking his fork into a piece of meat.

I matched his smile and opened the bottle of wine, pouring a glass for each of us. I knew we had to work the next day, but I didn't want to go to sleep so early.

Chapter thirty-nine

A few months later...

I was hoping it was just a headache that was taking too long to go away. The test was just to rule out the possibility and take my mind off it, but when I looked at the result, I grumbled quietly.

Pregnant!

I threw the test into the garbage can and massaged my temples. I could even try another one, but with the symptoms I was feeling, it was unlikely that the result would be any different. I was loving every day of my relationship with Thomas, but I wasn't planning on getting pregnant with him, at least not anytime soon.

To be honest with myself, I'd done absolutely nothing to stop it from happening since we started having sex. We used condoms at one time or another, but not at all.

“Helena, aren't you going to be late for school, dear?” My grandmother knocked on the door outside the bathroom just like she used to do when I was a little girl and started rolling around.

“I'll be right there.”

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I took a deep breath before leaving the room and facing her.

“Is everything all right?”

I shook my head, nodding, as I realized that she was looking at me. Grandma knew me well; she probably realized there was something wrong, but she didn't insist. I also knew that when I felt comfortable, I would tell her.

“I'm going to school.” I kissed her cheek.

“Call Thomas if you feel anything.”

“No problem.” I grinned a little as I picked up my bag and my materials from the living room.

The thought of Thomas at that moment sent a shiver through my body. We were both fine and happy, but I had no idea how he would take the idea of having another child. He'd spent years looking after the twins on his own, and he was still doing it. He'd said it was better to take things slowly when he'd talked about moving in together. It wasn't as if I didn't want to, and I just didn't know what it would be like for my grandmother. After all these years, I didn't want to have to leave her alone.

How could I take it easy with a baby on the way?

I criticized my mother so much for being irresponsible, but there I was. At least I knew who my baby's father was.

I took the subway and went to school. Over the course of the day, I could find a way to tell Thomas and my grandmother about my pregnancy.

I didn't want it to fall like a bomb on my relationship, especially when everything seemed so good.

Chapter forty

I opened the velvet box on my office desk and sent a photo to Deborah. It didn't take long for her to reply.

Deborah:

Nice, but don't you think she deserved a bigger diamond?

Thomas:

Helena is a discreet woman. She doesn't need to go around with a spotlight drawing more attention than her eyes.

Deborah:

But it will be Mrs. Lennox.

Thomas:

She's not you, Deby.

Deborah:

You're right.

Thomas:

I just hope she likes it.

Deborah:

I'm sure she's more concerned about her heart.

Thomas:

I thought I would never love another woman again.

Deborah:

I'm glad you took the chance.

Have you told the twins that you want to marry her?

Thomas:

I'll order first. Girls aren't good at keeping secrets.

I stopped messaging my sister when my secretary burst into my office. I left my cell phone on the table and squinted to face her.

“You should have knocked.”

“Excuse me, sir.”

“What's wrong?” I got straight to the point.

“There's a woman who wants to see you.”

“Have you made an appointment?”

“No.”

“Then I'd better ask her to come back another day.”

“I think you'll want to...” She didn't even have time to finish speaking; suddenly, red nails pulled open the door, and a second woman entered my office.

She was tall, with straight brown hair and green eyes. Seeing her in front of me was like staring at a ghost.

“Hi, Thomas...” The voice was exactly as I remembered it.

“Da-Daphne,” I stammered.

She should be dead...

“No, Diana.” She came closer, and I realized that there were very subtle differences, but more in manner than in specific appearance.

I knew that my late wife had a twin sister, which explained the daughters we had together, but the other had followed life in Europe and had never appeared in our lives, at least not until that moment.

“You can't do that.” He pointed to the engagement ring that was still open on the table.

“Was that it?” I was still confused by her presence.

“Marry someone else.”

“What? How could I not...” I blinked.

“My sister wouldn't like that. You can't put a stranger in her place.”

I closed the box and put it in my pocket so that the woman wouldn't stare at it.

“Unknown to whom? You're unknown to me.”

She pressed her lips together, irritated by my statement.

“How long have you been with her?”

“That's none of your business.”

“You can't do that to my sister. You should have loved her.”

“I loved her.”

“And he intends to marry someone else.”

“Yes.”

“You can't!”

“Who are you to say that? You never called your sister Diana. You never even answered her messages. For a long time, Daphne tried to contact you, but you didn't even bother to tell her if you were alive. Years after your sister's death, you have the nerve to show up here and demand anything from me? Be honest, what do you want?”

“I'm only thinking of the best for my nieces.”

“You don't even know them.”

“I came here to change that.”

“You won't see them.”

“You can't stop me.”

“Yes, I can! I'm their father, and you're an aunt who's never shown her face. No judge in their right mind would give you any rights. Believe me, I know many.”

“I thought he'd be more receptive to me.”

“Go away.” I indicated the door.

“You don't...”

“You can go on your own,” I interrupted, “or wait for security to accompany you. I advise you to choose the first alternative.”

She pursed her lips but didn't have the audacity to swear at me out loud.

I had no idea why my late wife's sister was there, but the only thing I knew for sure was that I wasn't going to let her near my daughters. Whatever that woman's intentions, it was my role to protect my twins.

When he realized that he couldn't convince me of anything, he puffed out his chest and left the room as if he had somehow won.

I picked up the phone on the table and dialed my secretary.

“Violet?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Tell the gate that I don't want them to let Diana up without me being informed.”

“Sorry, as she's your wife's sister...”

“Just let me know.”

“No problem.”

I hung up the call and took the velvet box back out of my pocket.

I didn't know what she was doing there, but I wasn't going to let her ruin my happiness.

Chapter forty-one

“Luke, watch your backpack.” I adjusted the strap on my student's back as he ran outside when it was time to leave.

“Bye, teacher.”

“Bye, Polly.”

I looked down when I saw Anne tugging at the hem of my blouse.

“Hi.”

“Are you going to marry us?”

“Not today, princess.”

“Why?”

“I have to look after my grandmother.”

“Take Grandma,” said Mary as if it were very simple.

“I can't.”

“Ah,” they both muttered.

I really wanted to stay with them, but I was still absorbing the news of the pregnancy and thought I needed another day to deal with it. I wondered how the girls would react when they found out they were going to have a little brother or sister. Would they be happy or jealous?

And their father?

I swallowed as the image of Thomas invaded my mind. It was amazing having him as a boyfriend. I was falling in love with him more every day, and it wasn't just the sex that was amazing, but his whole presence. I loved being with him, talking to him, or just lying on his chest and listening to his heartbeat.

The news of a pregnancy could be impactful even when you were expecting it, and being unexpected like that, I had no idea how it would affect both of us. I just hoped that everything would go well when I had the courage to tell him.

“Will you send your dad a kiss for me?”

“Vamu!”

“Thank you.” I kissed each of them on the forehead and took them by the hand to the school gate.

Part of me had hoped to meet Thomas, but he hadn't told me anything, and soon Mylon approached to pick them up.

“Hello, miss.”

“Hi.” I smiled at him.

“Are you coming with us?” He picked up the girls' backpacks.

“Not today.”

“Okay.”

“Hello, Anne and Mary” a voice called out to the girls and made us all turn around.

That face was strangely familiar, but I had no idea where I had seen it until one of the girls whispered.

“Mom...” Anne was confused, and so was her sister.

“No.” The woman came closer, and I noticed similar features to the girls. “I’m Aunt Diana. Your mother and I were the same, just like you two.”

“Auntie?” Mary squeezed her eyes shut even tighter.

“Yes!”

“Does Mr. Lennox know you’re here?” asked the driver. “If not, I need to inform him.”

“Oh, come off it! I just came to see my nieces.”

“It's my duty to look after them, ma'am.”

“I know that. And I'm sure you do a great job.”

Still confused, the girls clung to my legs, keeping a safe distance from the woman. They recognized the image of their mother because there were photos in their room. The woman had died when they were very young, and they probably had no memory of living together.

“Call Thomas, Mylon,” I said to the driver.

“It's not necessary.” Diana raised her hand when the driver pulled his cell phone out of his pocket. “You can take them now; I just stopped by to see them a bit. They look so much like my sister and me.”

“Come on, girls,” Mylon called out to the girls, who clung to me even tighter and wouldn't let go.

“Off you go, little ones.”

“Come on,” Anne whimpered.

“Not today, but everything will be fine.” I let go of their little hands and handed them to the driver, who took them to the car.

The two of them stared at me with slightly frightened looks on their faces until they were settled in the back seat, and the driver started the car to take them away.

“You're very stupid.”

“What?” I was surprised by the woman's comment.

“You shouldn't order their driver around like that. I'm the girl's aunt.”

“If he could even be the Pope, he won't keep them without their father knowing.”

She gritted her teeth and put her hands on her waist, irritated by the answer I had given.

“Just because you're fucking him, you think you're entitled to something? You're just a self-interested tramp. You're not the girl's mother.”

I swallowed drily at her offensive words. We were in front of the school, and I'd better restrain myself so as not to lose my temper and end up being rude in front of some parents who were still picking up their children.

“You're not their mother either, as far as I know.”

“I'm the closest they can get.”

“Just because she looks alike?”

“The same!” He emphasized the word so much that my stomach churned; I doubted it was because of my pregnancy.

“I haven't met Daphne, but I don't think she'd behave like that.”

“You're right; you haven't met my sister, and you're nothing more than a profiteer trying to con my brother-in-law and using my nieces to do it.”

“Scam?” I was shocked by the word she used. “Look, you don't know me, and you can't make false accusations.”

“What more would a woman like you want with a man like him?”

I had no idea what could be going through her head, but I was more and more sure of how wrong I was.

“I don't know what you came here for, but you'd better leave.”

“I just came to warn you to stay away from them. You can stop your plans; you won't achieve anything.”

“Plans? Thomas and I have been dating for months.”

“It's all part of your frame.”

“There's no frame. I love him.”

She laughed.

“He loves his money. Only if he does.”

“What's going on here?” When Holly approached us, I realized that other people were noticing.

“It's nothing.” I tried to pull myself together. “That lady is already leaving.”

“You'd better get away from him before I unmask you,” he threatened as he turned his back and walked to a cab waiting around the corner.

“Who is this crazy woman?” Holly dared to ask.

“Apparently, the twin sister of Thomas's late wife.”

“Oh, shit. Did you know her?”

I said no.

“She seems like the kind of person you should worry about.”

“Just take care of the twins so that she doesn't go near them unless Thomas authorizes

it.”

“No problem!”

“I'm going home. Do you need anything?”

Holly said no, and I went into the building to get my things. I walked to the subway and, by some miracle, found an empty bench. I sank into it and put my hands on my stomach by reflex.

I had spent the day thinking about how I was going to tell Thomas about my pregnancy, but how was I going to do it now that that woman had shown up? I hadn't planned on getting pregnant, let alone getting anything out of him, but it was very likely that she would accuse me after the offenses she had done to me.

I really wanted to tell him and share the child that was being born in me, but it definitely didn't seem like the best time.

As soon as I got home, I left my things on the coffee table and approached my grandmother. She was sitting on the sofa, and I settled down next to her, turning my head to lie on her lap.

“Hey... what's up?”

“Ah, Grandma,” I whimpered as I used to when I was a child.

“You've been acting strange for a few days. Are you going to tell me what happened?”

“I'm pregnant.”

“Oh my God!”

I hid my face in his legs, embarrassed.

“Weren't you careful?”

“We take... Most of the time. Other times, I just wanted to sit on his lap.” I hid my face with my hands, completely embarrassed.

She started to laugh.

“Sorry, Grandma.”

“On a lap like that, even me.”

“Grandma!”

We laughed together, but the moment didn't last long because I became tense again.

“Have you told him?”

“Not yet.”

“He's a good father to the twins. Is there any reason why you think he wouldn't be for this baby?”

“He became a widower. He had to take care of them.”

“He could have just left it in the care of employees, but he cares.”

“That's true...”

“So what's the problem?”

“Their aunt.”

“Auntie?” My grandmother's eyes widened. “I thought his family treated you well.”

“The Lennoxes treat me, but it's not Deborah.”

“Who, then?”

“His late wife's sister.”

“I didn't even know she had a sister.”

“It seems she has. She came to school and insulted me a lot, saying that I was self-interested and trying to scam Thomas.”

“He wouldn't believe her.”

“I don't know, Grandma.” I was afraid.

“You were fine.”

“We were.”

“So don't worry about that woman.”

I wanted to say that I had no reason, that it was just my head, but it was the worst time to be challenged after I'd found out I was pregnant. If that Diana girl continued her accusations, she'd probably say I was trying to pull a belly flop or something.

Chapter forty-two

“Come over here.” I took my daughters by the hand and made them sit on the sofa in the living room.

They were both attentive, looking at me and noticing every trace of my expression as if they were trying to guess what I was about to say. They were small, but they still surprised me with how clever they were.

“Mylon told me you saw Aunt Diana today.”

“Is she an aunt?” Mary wanted to be sure.

“Yes, it is,” I confirmed. There was no reason to lie to them.

“What?”

“Why was she here?” I tried to guess the question.

Anne nodded.

“It's still something Dad is trying to figure out.”

“Ah!” they stammered.

“Can you two promise me something?”

“Podi.”

“Don't go with her alone, okay? Always listen to Helena and Mylon. Do you understand?”

They nodded.

I bent down and kissed each of them on the forehead.

Until I understood what Diana had come to do there, I had to be very careful about what she might try with my daughters. I doubted that, after so many years, she was really trying to preserve her sister's image in any way because she hadn't even come back for Daphne's funeral.

“Are you hungry?”

“We are!”

“Then go and have a bath so we can have dinner.”

“Pizza!”

“No pizza today, Anne.”

“Ah!” They snorted.

“Go and have a shower,” I encouraged them. “The nanny is waiting for you.”

As soon as they had gone down the corridor, I headed for my room. My little pests weren't the only ones who needed a shower and a bit of relaxation.

I took off my suit and put it on the bed. After spending a few minutes under the water, I came back with the towel wrapped around my waist, picked up my cell phone, and looked at the photo in the background. It was a picture of me with Helena and the girls that we had taken on an outing last month.

My daughters were happy with that relationship, but I, more than anything, was grateful that I had been given the chance to feel love again.

Seeing Diana that morning reminded me of how much I had loved Daphne. Losing her had undoubtedly left a wound that would never be healed, but what I felt for Helena was strong and just as important, showing me that I could live again.

I didn't know exactly why my ex-wife's sister had shown up out of the blue, but I had to be careful that it didn't disrupt anything good I had achieved in my life after so long.

I took the velvet box from my trouser pocket and stared at the ring. I was determined to ask Helena to marry me, and it wouldn't be a few rude words from a woman that would change my mind.

Chapter forty-three

My cell phone started vibrating, and I pulled it off the table to see who it was. Thomas's messages were nothing new since we were dating, but thinking about them made me tense after the day's events.

Thomas:

Are you at home?

Helena:

Yes.

Thomas:

Busy?

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Helena:

Preparing for next week's children's class.

Thomas:

Can I steal a bit of it?

Helena:

Where are you?

Thomas:

Look out of the window.

I stopped replying to his messages and got up. The windows of the apartment all faced the street, and I could see him standing at the entrance to the building, leaning on the side of his luxury car. He wasn't wearing his usual suit, but he still looked good in dark pants and a gray polo shirt.

He waved at me when he realized that I was watching him, and I waved back in an almost involuntary movement.

I put aside my notebooks and went down to him after telling my grandmother.

“Hi!” I smiled as I met him in the street.

“Hey...” Thomas leaned towards me, and I couldn't contain my impulse to get closer and stand on tiptoe to kiss him.

He stroked my cheek with the back of his hand and gave me a few kisses before plunging his tongue into my mouth. The kiss was tender and intense at the same time, making me forget any tension, at least for as long as it lasted.

“We hadn't agreed on anything today,” I said when he moved away to take a closer look at me.

“I just wanted to see my girlfriend for a bit, can't I?”

“Of course!” I couldn't help but smile. “Did the girls stay with the nanny?”

“Yes. They should go to bed soon.”

“How nice!”

“They're always asking about you.”

“As if we hadn't spent the whole day together.”

“It's different when it's just the four of us.”

“I know...”

“Mylon told me about Diana.”

I swallowed at his words. Remembering that woman wasn't exactly what I wanted to do at the moment.

“She turned to see the girls, but Mylon soon took them away.”

“They did the right thing.”

“What does she want?” I ventured to ask.

“I don't know yet.” Thomas stared at me and wrapped his arms around my waist to pull me closer. “You seem tense.”

“It's nothing.”

“Helena...”

I became even more nervous. I felt I needed to tell Thomas about the pregnancy, but at the same time, it didn't seem like the best time with that woman haunting us. If she had said all those terrible things to me, she could have said even worse things to him.

“Never mind.”

“What did she do?” she insisted.

“Nothing.”

“It's not what it seems.”

“He only said a few things...”

“Look,” he lifted my face by the chin and made me face him, “I don't want you to let whatever she said affect you.”

“Can I ask you a question?”

“Yes, love. Anyone.”

“Do you think I might be a gold-digger or something?”

“What? Of course not. That woman is crazy.”

I smiled, feeling reassured by his answer.

“Is that what she told you?”

I said yes.

“Don't worry. I love you, Helena; the girls do too.”

My smile widened even more.

“I love you all too.”

I moved my mouth closer to Thomas's, and this time, our kiss became much more intense. My body warmed up as his hands went around it, and it was easy to remember how I had ended up pregnant.

“Go find a room!” someone shouted as they passed by on the street, and I turned away completely clumsily.

“I bet it's jealousy,” joked Thomas.

“We can't keep grabbing each other in the middle of the street.”

“Then come with me.” He wrapped his arms around my waist again.

“Not today.”

“Please...”

“I have classes to finish, and you must have work to do.”

“I can continue tomorrow.” He grazed his goatee on my neck, knowing how hard it was to resist the shiver he was giving me.

“I’d better not.” I slipped my hands around his shoulders.

“Are you sure?”

“I have.”

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“Okay.” He ended up agreeing. “But only if you agree to have dinner with me.”

“Just dinner?”

“And whatever else I'm entitled to.” He smiled mischievously.

“Thomas.”

“Tell me you don't like it.” He put his hands on my ass, squeezing it, and it took a lot of willpower and the fact that we were in the middle of the street to push him away.

“I like it, but we can't do it here.” I slapped the back of his hand.

“Then get into my car so I can drive us to a quieter place.”

“What are you proposing?”

“I think you understand.”

My main concern at that moment should have been to tell him I was pregnant and not to continue having sex like two teenagers, but it was that seductive look and the thick voice that had put me in that situation.

“I need to get home.”

“I promise I'll bring her back.” His smile got even bigger.

Maybe I shouldn't have, but I got in the car anyway.

Thomas drove for a few minutes until he stopped in the parking lot of a small roadside motel.

“I can take her to a better place.”

“Sounds perfect. I thought we were going to have sex in the back seat of your car.” I giggled.

“This is also an option.”

“Let's just get a key.”

“As you wish.”

We got out of the car, and the woman at reception didn't say anything; she just took payment for one night and gave us one of the rooms.

As soon as we entered, my boyfriend closed the door behind us and locked it.

“Thomas...” A part of me even considered telling him I was pregnant, but I was silenced by his lips, and my hard-on spoke louder.

“I spend all day thinking about your smell.” He sniffed my neck, and every part of me vibrated.

Thomas pressed me against the wall as his mouth slid down my throat, leaving kisses, bites, and hickeys that enveloped me in a haze of increasingly intense arousal.

I pulled his hair and brought his tongue back to mine. As we tasted each other's

mouths in that uncontrolled need, it was hard to even worry about breathing.

His firm hands gripped my waist, and he pulled down my elastic shorts in one fell swoop, taking my panties with him and leaving me naked from the waist down in a few moments.

I rubbed my body against him, eager for more, crazy to feel him, and my unprotected sex met the bulge in his pants. My fingers went down to him, and without any calm, I unzipped his pants. I slipped my hand inside his underpants and pulled out his throbbing penis and the area between my thighs. He was stiff, his veins were bulging, and I couldn't wait to get him inside me.

“Come here.” Thomas wrapped his arms around my waist and lifted me up, pressing my body against the wall.

He thrust into me without even bothering to take off the rest of our clothes. I wrapped my arms around his shoulders and sprawled against the wall, lifting myself up before leaning in to kiss him again.

Thomas held me with one hand and leaned the other on the wall, moving in and out of me in a delicious rhythm that made me wetter and wetter. My desire for that man was so intense that he slid in easily. With each thrust, all I could think about was the next one, and I couldn't wait for it.

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“Oh, you're so hot...” he moaned in my ear.

“You too.” I wrapped my legs around his waist, hugging him and giving myself over to the moment.

I forgot about the offenses and all the bad feelings I had experienced that day just to feel him. When I was in his arms, it was too intense and incredible.

He held me again and took me to bed. He didn't pull out of me as I lay on the hard mattress, much less comfortable than the hotels he was used to taking me to. However, we could have been having sex on the floor, and I wouldn't have cared. My only concern was having him in me and being dominated by all those sensations.

I pulled his shirt off to feel his skin and ran my hands over his muscles. I knew he worked out at lunchtime, but I was still amazed at how he managed to keep in shape.

I stared into his blue eyes and let myself climax as his pelvis rubbed against my clitoris. I collapsed on the bed, completely knocked out by the climax, and he kept moving until he joined me.

After we had both come, Thomas gave me a quieter kiss and lay down next to me.

“I'm still taking her to dinner.”

“I thought I'd had enough.”

“Today was just a quickie, or did you forget that you made me promise to take you

home?”

“Yeah, I need to get back...”

“Promise you'll be all mine tomorrow?”

“I'm all yours.” I lay on my side, seeking your gaze.

“I loved hearing that.” He pulled me in for another kiss.

“Now I have to go.” I got up to take a quick shower and pull myself together.

“Are you sure?” He hugged me from behind.

“I have...” It took a lot of willpower not to go back to bed with him.

“Okay, I'll leave her at home.”

“Thank you.” I turned my face and gave him a quick kiss before escaping to the bathroom.

I hoped that dinner the next day would be the opportunity to finally tell him that I was pregnant.

Chapter forty-four

“Sir...” Violet came running after me when I entered the office that morning.

“What's wrong?” I turned to her before entering my living room.

“I have the case files you asked me for yesterday.” He handed me a thick folder with

several papers.

“Great!” I quickly looked around, but I was going to take it easy after I sat down.

“Any sign of Diana?”

“She didn't show up again after security escorted her out yesterday.”

“Better that way.”

“Do you want me to call the police or someone else?”

“It's not necessary at the moment.”

“Let me know if you want me to do anything.”

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“No problem.” I went into my office and put the folder on the table when I heard my cell phone ring.

I was thinking it might be a lot of people except my brother.

“Tyler?”

“Trouble in paradise?” There was a certain tone of debauchery in his voice on the other end of the line that could easily have made me angry.

“Why are you asking?”

“I may no longer work for the firm, but I still know what's going on, as I'm one of the partners.”

“I'm sure it's not just through society that you find out about things.”

“Sometimes it's good to have friends...”

“What did they say to you?” I wanted to get straight to the point.

“That a ghost has appeared.”

“I don't know what Diana wants here.”

“Are you sure?”

“Do you think that if I hadn't known, I would have found a way?”

“Money, probably. That's what she knows we have.”

“It's possible, but she hasn't asked for anything yet.”

“You have to protect the girls.”

“What do you think I'm trying to do?” I raised my voice, a little irritated, even though it wasn't his fault. Even though my brothers were single, they also worried about the girls.

“I know, man, but you'd better find out soon. If you haven't already, get the office investigators on her.”

“I'll put it up.”

“I'm here if you need anything.”

“Thank you, Tyler.”

“Good morning, brother.”

“For you too.”

Even though it didn't seem necessary, I took his advice and put the company's investigators on my sister-in-law. If she had come back after so long, I wanted to know why.

Chapter forty-five

I came out of the bathroom fixing my hair and my grandmother sighed when she saw me.

“You look so beautiful.”

“Thank you.” I smiled at her.

“You're going to tell Thomas you're pregnant, aren't you?”

“I hope so.” I tensed up again when I remembered that subject.

“He needs to know, darling.”

“I know that, Grandma.”

“There's no reason for him not to be happy.”

“That's what I hope.”

“Come here...” She tapped a vacant space next to her on the sofa.

“Ah, Grandma!” I lay down next to her and rested my head on her lap, receiving a warm cuddle just as she used to when I was a child.

“You deserve to be happy, Helena.”

“I don't think life is about deserving.”

“It's about allowing yourself. You need it.”

“You're right.” I stood up and smiled at her.

“When you and Thomas get married, I want to move here.” She handed me a brochure, and I looked at it for a while until I realized that it was a retirement home for the elderly.

“Grandma, I don't want to leave you.” I twisted my lips, getting irritated and feeling a little tightness in my chest at the thought of the possibility.

“It's not about leaving me.”

“But...”

“Of course, I hope you'll come and visit me whenever you can, at least once a week, but you need to live your life, daughter. You can't be stuck in this house just because I'm here. Besides, it'll be better for me too. I spend all day in this house, alone, with no friends and only the television.” She pointed to the pamphlet. “They have doctors and physical and artistic activities. I'll have someone to live with, other people my age...”

“I feel like I'm abandoning you.”

“I know you would never leave me.” She smiled, stroking my cheek lovingly. “Besides, it's not a public place.” She scratched her head a little awkwardly. “You'll have to pay for it. I thought that when you move in with Thomas, you could hand over this apartment and use the rent for that.”

“Of course, Grandma.”

We heard a horn that broke up our conversation.

“Now go!” She encouraged me to leave. “Have a great dinner.”

“Thank you.” I leaned over to kiss her cheek.

I went downstairs, still thinking about her proposal. My grandmother had always been everything in my life. I had never even thought about living in a house where she wasn't, but the possibility that she would be better looked after and could make friends made me think a little. It was something I would need to analyze before I could be sure.

“Hi!” Thomas smiled at me as I left the building, and our eyes met.

“Hey.”

“You look beautiful.” He ran his hand over my face and tucked a lock of my hair behind my ear. “You are beautiful,” he corrected.

“You too.” I put my hand on his chest and moved up the lapels of his jacket until I reached his broad shoulders.

His steady gaze had me completely mesmerized. Even though he was more than a decade older than me, I couldn't remember feeling more attracted to another man at any time in my life.

“Let's go to the restaurant.” He moved his hands down to my waist and then held mine.

“For a restaurant, are you sure?” I joked in a more mischievous tone.

Maybe there was a bit of truth in my desire to take a little detour because my whole body warmed up at the thought of what it was like to be in his arms and dominated by his kisses.

“Don't tease me, Helena.”

“I'm well-behaved.” I played the saint.

“I know...” He leaned in and gave me a kiss that prolonged the contact between our lips, but he pulled away before I could reach for his tongue. “Let's get to the restaurant before we convince each other to change our route.”

“We can stay in a hotel and order room service. I don't even need to be served by a waiter...”

“Come on, Helena...” she insisted.

“Okay.”

Thomas opened the car door for me, and I settled into the back seat. While he went around the car to take the wheel, I put on my seat belt.

He drove back to Manhattan, and we stopped in front of a fancy building.

“Helena?” She held out her hand to help me down after handing the car key to a valet.

I held back my exclamations as we took the elevator to the top floor. The view was wonderful, allowing us to see the bay and the Statue of Liberty. The skyline was all lit up, and some aircraft were bright spots in the sky.

“How beautiful!”

“I'm glad you liked it.”

“You never cease to amaze me.”

“It's a sign that I've been doing a good job.”

“You are.”

“Please come with us.” The restaurant receptionist gestured for us to follow him.

“Where are we going?” I searched Thomas's eyes, curious.

“Hold on.”

We went up a side staircase to a small terrace where there was just a table set for two with decorations of green arrangements and candles. I had already experienced many moments with Thomas, but this one was special and seemed like the perfect opportunity to tell him that I was pregnant.

He pulled out a chair for me and waited for me to settle down before sitting down opposite me.

“I love this view,” he said, settling his napkin on his lap.

“You can't help but love it.”

“The only vision I like better is you.”

I felt embarrassed, and my cheeks burned, but I didn't say anything.

“Helena...”

Chapter forty-six

The ring weighed heavy in my pocket, and as I looked at her, beautiful, smiling, and a little flushed, with the beautiful view of the bay behind her shoulders. As well as a woman who loved my daughters as much as I did, I hoped that I would have Helena by my side to share the rest of my days with or enjoy everyone that I could because every second mattered.

When I called her name and it echoed, she looked at me and smiled. I could wait for the starter to be served, but I immediately wanted to ask her to be mine for the rest of our lives.

“I'd like to know...” I pulled the velvet box out of my pocket.

She stared at me, but before I could lift the ring and make the request, that was the question my heart was waiting most for the answer to. Diana appeared in my view, huffing and dodging the restaurant security guard who was trying to stop her.

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“Thomas, you can't do this!”

“What is this woman doing here?” Helena was surprised by the terrible apparition.

All I didn't want was to have my marriage proposal interrupted by my dead wife's crazy sister.

“My sister would never approve of that.” He put his hands on his waist, puffing out his chest.

“We disagree on that, but in any case, Daphne is no longer here.”

“They're her daughters; in my sister's absence, you have to listen to me.”

“If you seem so concerned about the girls, you should have been here over the last few years, especially when they were babies and needed help with everything.”

“I'm here now.”

“Go away, Diana!”

“She's the one who has to go.” He pointed to Helena.

My cell phone started ringing in my pocket. It was definitely not a good time for a call. I pulled it out to turn it off but was surprised to see the number of the investigator I had placed behind Diana.

“Bruce?”

“Sir, she's following you.”

“I get it.” I snorted, annoyed. “I should have sorted her out.”

“I thought it was supposed to be discreet.”

“Whatever! Don't worry; I'll find a way to get her out.”

“I found out why she came back.”

“Speak up!” As much as my evening wasn't going as I'd imagined, I'd love a reason to get rid of that interruption as soon as possible.

“She ran a few scams on millionaires in Europe using a false name and was under investigation. I imagine that with the firm's fame and the Lennoxes' influence, she could get away with it.”

“Scams?”

“Yes, sir. I have more information...”

“You can send everything to me in a report by e-mail.”

“Of course.”

“I'll talk to you later.” I hung up the call and put my cell phone back in my pocket. “It seems we've just found out who the scammer is here” I spoke to Diana.

“Her, of course.” He pointed to my girlfriend.

“You'd better get out of my sight, or I'll find a way to send you to the European police. I know you have some unfinished business to take up with them.”

“How did you find out?” He took a step back, his eyes widening.

“Did you think you'd come here, try to disrupt my life, and mess with my daughters' heads, and I wouldn't do anything?”

“I'm just trying to protect my nieces.”

“If you're trying to protect anyone, it's yourself.”

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“Thomas, please...” She changed her posture completely but struggled when the restaurant's security guards grabbed her by the arms.

“Disappear, Diana, just as you did in Daphne's life a long time ago.”

“The girls need me.”

“They've done very well without you so far and will continue to do so; you can be sure of that.”

“You can't do that!” He tried to hold on to the men's grip, but they were much stronger.

“If you ever get close to Helena or my daughters again, you can be sure I'll do a lot more than just throw you out of a restaurant.”

“You asshole!” he growled.

“Get her out of here.” I made a gesture, and the security guards left, dragging her away.

“Sorry about that.” I turned to Helena while she was still staring at my ex-sister-in-law disappearing over the horizon.

“It's not your fault.”

“Even so. It wasn't what I wanted for the evening. I hoped it would be perfect for

both of us.”

“It still will be.” She gave me a broad smile that calmed my heart.

“Helena...”

“Thomas.” She interrupted me.

“What's wrong?”

“There's something I need to tell you.” His expression became more serious, which made my heart squeeze tighter.

“Should I be worried?”

“Maybe.” He grimaced.

My perfect evening was vanishing right before my eyes.

“Speak.”

“I...” She put her hand on her stomach, going down to her belly.

“You?” I insisted that she speak.

“I'm pregnant. I know we hadn't planned it or said anything about it, but...”

I ended the distance between us and pulled her face towards me, kissing her with all my passion. After Diana's terrible interruption and my tension at the interrupted marriage proposal, that was the best news she could give me.

“Pregnant?” I repeated as I interrupted the kiss.

Helena nodded.

“Oh, my love...”

“Are you happy?” She still looked tense.

“Of course, I'm happy.” I took her face in my hands and kissed her again. “Very, very happy!”

Her smile widened as I knelt at her feet and kissed her belly.

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“That's nice...” He stroked my hair while I laid my head on his stomach.

That was a beautiful sign that we were going to be a family.

“Now it's my turn.” I finally took the ring out of my pocket.

“What are you doing?”

“Which is what I intended to do when Diana interrupted us.” I opened the velvet box and let her see the ring. “Helena, will you marry me?”

“Are you serious?”

“Of course!”

She trembled a little and opened her mouth several times but didn't make a sound. This made my heart squeeze. I didn't expect her to refuse, but anything could happen.

“I think the twins will be a bit disappointed if they know you said no.”

“That's a fine argument, counselor.” He laughed, seeming to shake off the tension.

“But I never thought of refusing.” He held out his hand to me so that I could put the ring on.

I kissed his phalanges and then stood up to pull his face back towards me.

“Next time, I'll consider the hotel room,” I said as I turned away from her after

remembering that the restaurant staff were watching us.

“Diana wouldn't have gotten in.”

“That's not what I'm thinking about.”

“Hey!” she pushed on my chest, and I pulled her in for another kiss.

Some choices changed our lives and giving me the chance to love that woman had been one of the best of mine.

Chapter forty-seven

After the proposal and our dinner, I accepted the invitation to go home with him. The ring was still on my finger, and it felt like a dream to have that moment come true. As much as the fear of him rejecting the pregnancy was in my head, I hadn't anticipated that Thomas was planning to make me his wife. The coincidence was completely perfect.

“The nanny has already put them to sleep,” he said when I opened the door to the twins' room.

I already loved them when they were just my students, but it made me very happy to know that I would be a part of their lives in the way they wanted me to be and, deep down, I would be too.

My girls...

“We'll have to wait until tomorrow to tell them.”

“That's fine with me.” He pulled my hair, leaving my neck exposed so he could sniff

and nibble my skin.

“Thomas...” I moaned, shuddering.

“Come to my bed.” He turned me around so that I was facing him and took a firm hold of my waist, making me face him.

“I like hearing that...”

“É?”

I nodded.

Thomas leaned his head towards me, but before he could kiss me, we heard a low voice coming from the bedroom.

“Dad?”

“I think one of them has woken up.”

He snorted, and I laughed.

“Just tell me it won't be two at once.” He put his hand on my stomach.

“I don't think so, but we won't know until you have an ultrasound.”

“Dad?”

“Hello, child?” We poked our heads into the room, and I saw Mary get off the bed and come to the door, rubbing her little eyes.

“Have you arrived?”

“Yes, I've arrived.”

“I'm here too.”

“Helena!” She ran up and grabbed my waist.

“Helena?” Anne also stood up when she heard my name.

“Let's go into the living room, girls.” Thomas took Anne on his lap as she approached us.

“What?”

“Dad wants to talk to you.”

“Yes.”

We settled down on the sofa, and the twins stared at us while they waited to hear what their father had to say.

“We have two new features.”

They shook their heads, waiting. All the sleep that had been weighing down their little eyes a few minutes ago seemed to be dispelled.

“Is?” Mary leaned in.

“Yes,” I agreed.

“Helena and I are getting married.” He took my hand and kissed the back of it.

“Wow!” The twins celebrated.

“There's more.” I held their little hands and made them pay attention to us again.

“What else?”

“Do I talk, or do you talk?” I asked Thomas.

“Go ahead.”

“You're going to have a baby brother.” I took their little hands and put them on my stomach.

“Or little sister,” he added, leaning over to give me a kiss on the cheek.

“Mom!” Anne stood up and threw her arms around my neck. Her sister repeated the movement and soon they were both wrapping their arms around me.

I closed my eyes and held them close to me. The moment was so blissful that words couldn't describe it.

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 7:41 am

Thomas wrapped his arms around us and we stayed like that for a long moment.

I could never have predicted that the first moment I met that arrogant man, he would become the love of my life and give me the best family in the world.

Epilogue

A year later...

I cradled John in my arms as we got out of the car in front of the place where my grandmother had been living since I left home to live in the apartment with Thomas and the twins.

“Stay close to the car, girls,” my husband said to them, afraid that they would run out and end up in the middle of the street.

As time went by, they got smarter and smarter, but they also gave us a hard time. It was much easier when I was with just the two of them than with the whole gang. However, after the birth of my son, I decided to spend some time with just the three of them and wait for him to grow up a bit before returning to the classroom. Fortunately, Thomas's condition allowed me to make this choice. I only made this decision because he had assured me that he would take care of the fees for Grandma's retirement home.

“We want bisa!” Mary was jumping on the side of the car.

“Calm down, child.” Thomas held both their hands after putting the brakes on.

We passed the reception of the building and walked through a long garden, where I saw some elderly people embroidering, others painting and my grandmother was exercising with a gymnastics group. She turned away from them when she saw us and came over to us.

“Bisa!” The twins ran to her.

“How are my girls?” He kissed each of them on the head.

“Gladis!” replied Anne.

“Yes! They're bigger than last time. Are your parents giving you two yeast?”

“Naum.” Mary laughed.

“I think it's age.” I came closer to my grandmother and kissed her cheek.

“And how is the little one?”

“Growing fast too.”

John opened his eyes and grinned at her.

“What a cute thing!”

“How are you here?” I asked after we walked together and sat down at a round table under a tree with very green and vibrant leaves.

“Happy.”

“That's very good to hear.”

“It's good to see that you're happy too.” She reached out and took Thomas' hand.
“Take good care of my little girl.”

“Seeing you well is all I want.” He smiled at me, and I gave him a quick kiss

“You deserve it.”

“Yes.” He agreed, placing his hand on my thigh.

There was nothing more important to me than being there with them. Life couldn't always be perfect, but those moments made it worthwhile.