

II

As I'm making my way to my bedroom, I begin to get undressed. I think to myself. Traveling, only God knows where, with a wealthy, handsome man. *How risqué of you.* Finally getting out my comfort zone though. This should be fun.

What if he's some psychotic crazed killer? *Pfft. That'd be my luck.* This getaway...*this* is something women dream about but it never *really* happens. A handsome stranger whisking them away. I still have my doubts on its validity but I'll let this play out. See if it's more than just a tall tale.

As I sip my night time tea, I have a seat on my bed and pull out my laptop. I've never heard of the Windsor family and he claims to not be an American. Then what *is* he? He didn't have a defining accent. Perhaps I'll just Google him. There can't be that many people who are billionaires in the world.

I go straight to the Google search page. "Okay, let's see," I crack my knuckles and my neck and proceed to typing. E-R-I-C... space... W-I-N-D-S-O-R, enter. I scan the search page but nothing stands out. I decide to try W-I-N-D-S-O-R... space... B-I-L-L-I-O-N-A-I-R-E, enter. First entry is from ancestry.com. I click on the link and up pops a gentleman who looks like Eric's twin and it states within the brief explanation, born in 1895, the Windsor family was already worth millions.

"Well," I chuckle to myself, "at least he's not full of it." I begin to get butterflies in my stomach as I get excited all over again. I'm going to start packing tonight and post a job replacement right NOW. I don't even know how long I'll be gone.

As I sip my tea further and lose myself in thoughts of exotic beaches, I hear my phone beeping. I grab the small purse I had for the evening and see that I'd already missed three calls. *Eric perhaps?* I excitedly unlock the screen and press the phone button. Three missed calls from... Eryn. Wrong E-R name, last name I wanted to see. Why though I'm not sure.

Here is this dashing, handsome stranger who more or less swept me off my feet and single handedly saved my business and I *don't* want to talk to my best friend, this has never happened before. Maybe it's the idea that I know she'll be pissed that I'm leaving for a while. Just then, my phone rings again. It's Eryn. Should I answer it? *Ugh.* I'm dreading talking to her. I don't want to hear her lecture me but I know I might as well get it over and done with.

"Hello Eryn," my tone sarcastic as I roll my eyes and take another sip of tea.

"Um, why am I just now hearing from you?" she snaps.

"I just got home, calm down." I begin to pace in the room and set things up for the next day.

"Who was that guy you were with this evening? You told me you were going to be home..."

"Well *mother*, you don't have to worry. He's just a shareholder now, but of course you know that."

She went silent for a moment, "And when, pray tell, were you going to inform me about him?"

"Hmm, maybe this evening after dinner. Oh wait, you were at dinner so..." I'm sure she can hear both the sarcasm and smile in my voice.

"Excuse me Brie, but last I checked we were partners."

"Eryn, last *I* checked you were my VP and business confidant, partner is a term we use loosely. I still *own* the majority share along with my sister. You don't *own* any part."

"Oh I see..." she sounds almost hurt.

"Don't get all crazy, look, I will be doing interviews this week and I'll be going out of town for a while..." I bite my lip, clenching my jaw.

"Seriously, Brie? What are you *talking* about? I'm coming over."

"Um, no you're not, we will talk more tomorrow."

"Brie, you can't do this to me. I worked on getting Fiorello for months and this is how you repay me? You go parading around with some gorgeous stranger and just forget about me?!"

"If I didn't know any better, I would say that you were a little jealous now. And it's nothing personal, it's just business. He took a significantly lesser share in the company than Fiorello was offering and gave us more money. Effectively, he convinced Fiorello to then take a lesser share as well and now we have double the capital to work with. I'm still thinking very clearly."

"Okay, prove it. Fiorello knows this type of business inside and out, let him hire your replacement." She's always got something up her sleeve.

"Whoa now," I sit down on my bed, "Considering how important this is, I can't just leave it to anyone."

"Why don't you allow *me* to run it then and I will hire someone to do my job for a while."

"I love you Eryn, but I'll be hiring someone else. It's nothing personal, it's just..."

"Business. *Right*. Whatever Brie. I guess I'll see you tomorrow," she angrily hangs up the phone.

I look down at my phone and see it blinking that the call ended, "What a bitch!" *I'm not going to let her ruin my night, no way*. Just then I get a text message. I don't know if I should check it because it's probably just more of her negativity. I pull it up anyway. I have a soft spot for Eryn and even though she's a bit crazy right now, she's *MY* crazy bitch.

'Love you, I'm sorry and I can't wait to hear more,' it says.

I'm beginning to think she's bipolar but she is just wound up. We've both been super stressed about what direction the business was going to go. I smile at the phone and put it down. It rings again, so I immediately pick it up. "Erynn, it's okay, I forgive you just..." I can hear breathing over the phone. I pull the phone away from my ear to look at the number and it just says 'unknown'. "Hello?" I ask. "Erynn if this is your kind of a joke, I'm not amused."

A deep, husky, voice breaks the silence, "We are coming for you Aurecia." Then they hang up. *What the hell?* Inside I'm freaking out a little. I can feel my heart starting to flutter. It's that time of year though, October rolls around and it might as well be Halloween from the first to the thirty-first. I turn my phone off.

"Jokes on you, douchebag," I mumble to my phone as I toss it aside. I clamber into my bed and turn my bedside lamp off.

I laid there in the dark for about thirty minutes and couldn't fall asleep because I was too excited about Eric. I turn the lamp back on and open the drawer of my end table. The cashier's check sat there staring at me in the face and it was a sight for sore eyes. I smirk and think to myself, I really hit the jackpot with this one... *lucky me*. So rarely can I ever say that.

I grab my phone and turn it back on. As it's loading up I'm staring off into space wondering what clothes I should bring on this 'expedition'. When my phone finishes loading up, it gently vibrates to let me know that I have another text message. I open it up to see that Eric sent me something... shortly after I turned my phone off apparently. *Of course.*

'I'm excited to be working with you Brie, please let me know if you need any help for this transition.'
-Eric W.

Even his text messages sound so prim and proper. I wonder if he has someone in mind to replace me... I mean, he did already have the check and he knew he was going to ask me to leave. I open the keyboard on my touch screen and begin swiping away.

'I know you won't see this until morning, but before I decide to post on the job board, do you happen to know someone who may be able to fill my spot while I'm gone?'

-Brie

It's worth a shot if it saves me from a weeks' worth of interviews. He seems to want to leave right away but I wonder if we will be back for the holidays. My mind is off pondering again and I reach to turn my light out. I place my phone on the end table and plug it in to charge. I drift off into the most wonderful dream.

* * * * *

I can hear birds chirping in the distance, the sound of the wind gently swaying the trees. Everything appears hazy because the sun is so bright. I'm in a gorgeous field filled with long ivory tulips. The

smell is crisp, clean, and fresh. I can feel the flowers amongst my finger tips, walking in the direction of the sun.

As I get closer to the trees, I can make out a small stream. The trees shielding my eyes from the bright sun as I sit down next to this tiny river. I run my fingers in the crystal clear water, feeling the coolness it provides from the short walk. I can see animals sipping from the refreshing creek; two fawns and their mother, a couple of bunnies, different types of birds being alarmingly nosy. I smile at the one fawn looking over at me.

Suddenly the fawn falls over and the field dims. The other animals quickly scurry away, except for the poor fawn. I'm looking around frantically, trying to figure out what just happened. I go to stand up and make my way over to the fawn. As I step into the river it seems as if the distance between me and the fawn gets wider. The closer I step, the further I seem to be. Once the water reaches my hips, I noticed it starts to turn red. The ivory draped dress I'm wearing is now blood stained. I look up to see the fawn is bleeding out. I continue to walk towards it and with my next step the ground disappears beneath me. I'm sinking infinitely into the water, the surrounding ground no longer there, drowning within its icy grip. I look up towards the surface to see a large dark figure hovering above the water as I take my last breath.