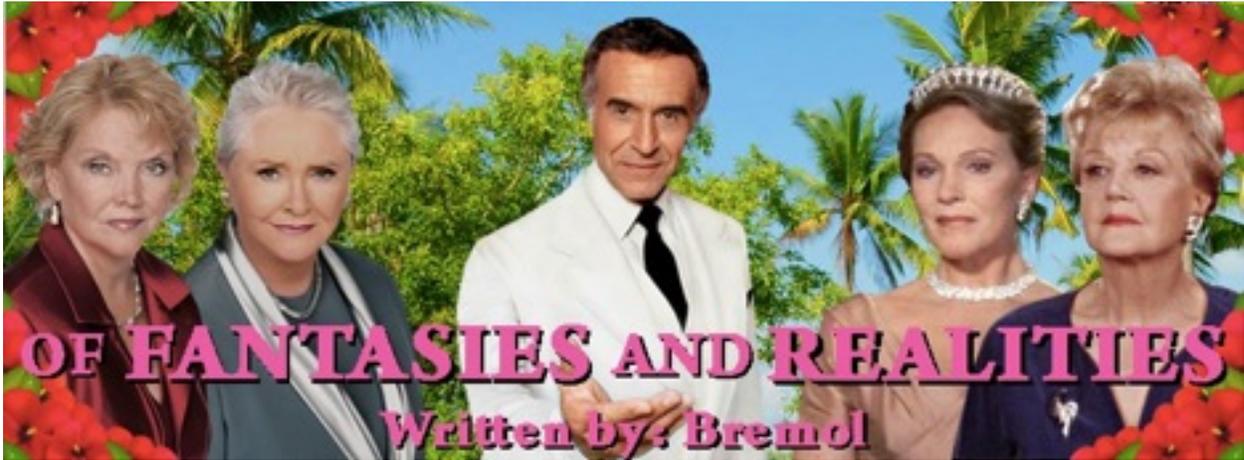


Of Fantasies and Realities

[Bremol](#)



Summary:

Four women go to Fantasy Island seeking help that only Mr. Roarke, the mysterious man that owns and runs the island, can provide them. A chance to spend one more day and night with a dead, beloved husband. A love that must be kept hidden. A quest for answers. A search for courage to change a relationship from friends to lovers. Can Mr. Roarke fulfill these wishes?

Notes:

This story changes some things around a bit, but eh, that's what fanfic is all about ;-). It's a crossover between four of the fandoms I write for, so it should be interesting trying to keep all my ladies from getting confused. If I'm not careful, Viki could wind up with Joseph, Jessica with Eric, Stephanie with George, and Clarisse with Ben...ha!

This chapter sets things up for all four women. I should also point out that Fantasy Island is the original series, not the remake.

Chapter 1

Viki sighed as she settled into her seat on the small plane that would be taking her to her destination. She still couldn't believe this place actually existed. Nor could she believe that Mr. Roarke had contacted her with an offer to join him on the island. Fantasy Island. She shook her head. It was only stuff and nonsense. Wasn't it? Surely the things she'd heard about the place down through the years were all just a bunch of made up stories from dreamers wishing to change their lives. Closing her eyes, she gave up trying to rationalize the place. She'd find out soon enough if the things she'd heard were true or false. If they weren't false, she'd get to spend one day and night with Ben. A smile graced her lips as she slipped into a memory of time alone with him.

"Hi'ya, Blondie."

*"Hello, Just Ben," she whispered as she settled into his warm embrace.
"I've missed you."*

"I've missed you, too," he breathed against her ear before kissing the soft flesh and nibbling on the lobe. "I don't like it when you have to go away and I can't go with you."

"Mmm," she hummed as she tilted her neck to give him better access when his kisses moved to the graceful column. Holding onto his arms, she let herself go to enjoy his attention. "Is the door locked?" she managed to get out. "You know what happens when we don't lock doors."

Ben pulled back and chuckled as he nodded. "I do know. All too well in fact." He shook his head as he thought about the last time they'd been here alone at Crossroads. "Of all the times we've been caught, that had to be the worst."

Viki smirked and smiled up at him. "Most definitely. On the pool table in the throes of passion, no clothes,"

"And in walks Blair." Ben finished the thought.

“I could have killed her when we saw her weeks later, the way she was looking at you.” Viki snarled. “You’re mine.”

Ben smiled, a rush of love and pride at the possessiveness in her voice. “I most certainly am. I think we made that clear to her.” He winked as he moved to lock the door. Turning back to his waiting wife, he let his eyes take her in. “You’re beautiful, Blondie.”

“Lights, Ben,” she whispered as she slowly began to undress.

Turning off the lights, Ben made his way to the pool table, tugging on the string to turn off the light overhead. Thankful for the moon’s bright light shining in through the windows, he leaned against the side of the table and watched, taking in his fill as each beautiful inch of his wife’s creamy skin was revealed.

“Like what you see, Mr. Davidson?” Viki asked, her voice low and husky.

Ben licked his lips and nodded. “I don’t just like what I see, Mrs. Davidson. I love what I see.”

Arching an eyebrow, she moved closer. “For someone who loves what he sees, you’re very overdressed, Mr. Davidson.”

“I’ve been admiring the view, Mrs. Davidson.”

“Mrs. Davidson. Mrs. Davidson, Ma’am.”

Viki started awake. Looking up into the kind eyes of the flight attendant, she smiled. “I’m sorry. I must have dozed off.”

A knowing look crossed the young woman’s face. “Having a nice dream?”

Blushing slightly, Viki nodded. “Yes. Are we there?”

“We are.” The young woman confirmed. “Mr. Roarke is waiting to greet you. I hope you have a wonderful stay, Mrs. Davidson.”

“Thank you.” Viki smiled at the young woman as she stood to gather her things, thankful that she’d been alone on the plane. Being caught in the kind of dream she had been having was bad enough, but at least it hadn’t been by a plane full of people.

~*~

Clarisse sighed as her bodyguard once again protested her being out of his sight. “I know that you were instructed by Joseph not to let me out of your sight once I leave my room during this trip, but Jamison, I need you to understand that Mr. Roarke won’t let anything happen to me.” She sighed and rubbed the bridge of her nose. “Once I go beyond those doors,” she pointed to the double oak doors behind her. “I will no longer be the Queen of Genovia. I’ll merely be a normal every day woman. No one will want to do me any harm.”

“But,” Jamison started again, stopping when he spotted the tall distinguished man come up behind the queen.

Roarke smiled at the man to put him at ease. “I’m only here to help assure you that Her Majesty will be completely safe.”

Still seeing the unease on her guard’s face, Clarisse sighed and turned to her host. “Perhaps I’ll just retire to my room. Will I be seeing you at dinner?”

Roarke smiled at the woman, the smile hiding the sadness he felt for her having to give in to the life she so desperately wanted to escape for only a few hours. “Yes, Your Majesty,” he replied with a slight bow. “I think you will find dinner to be quite an experience. I have a few other guests you might find it interesting to meet.”

“I’m sorry, but Her Majesty cannot have dinner with people who haven’t been cleared.” Jamison informed Roarke.

Clarisse sighed once again, something she seemed to be doing a lot of lately. “Jamison,” she said the name, trying desperately to keep the exasperation out of her voice. “Mr. Roarke doesn’t let unsavory people on the island. Please, you’re being insulting to the man.”

“The Queen will be with me at all times and believe me,” Roarke stared the man down, his height towering over the other man. “I can protect her should someone decide to do her harm. Although no one on the island knows who she is.”

“But they’re starting to stare because I always have you following me.” Clarisse frowned. “Your presence is giving them reason to suspect that I’m someone important. That could cause me the very problems you’re trying to prohibit.” Shaking her head, she started walking toward the path that would lead her back to her room. Even though it was still early in the day, she was in need of a nap. She could feel a headache coming on.

Turning to Jamison once she’d stepped inside her bungalow, she frowned at him. “No need for you to follow me inside. Remember? You’re only to follow me everywhere when I leave my room.” Watching the man bow and turn to take his place beside her door, she rolled her eyes in frustration as she closed the door. “What was Joseph thinking?” she murmured as she moved toward her bedroom. “He’s angry with you,” she answered her own question. She’d known the moment she requested that he stay behind to guard Mia that he wasn’t happy with her. But to subject her to a man such as Jamison. Dear god, was he really that angry with her?

~*~

Stephanie stared at the man standing across from her. “Why are you here?”

“I came to see you off.” Eric answered her.

“You’re angry with me. Why would you see me off? One would think you would be happy to see me leave.”

“Just because I’m angry, doesn’t mean I don’t still care.” Eric held her gaze. “Are you really going where I heard you were?”

“I am. It will be a nice get away.” Stephanie looked away from him. “I need to find some answers.”

“And you’re going to find them there?”

“Mr. Roarke is famous for helping people find the answers they’re searching for.”

“The island’s mystical powers are a myth, Stephanie.”

An eyebrow arched as she asked, “Are they?”

Shaking his head, Eric gave up trying to figure out what had happened to the woman he’d known all of his life. The woman that didn’t believe in fantasies and myths. “Safe travels, Stephanie.”

“Thank you,” she accepted then grabbed her carryon and made her way toward the gate as the boarding call came over the PA. If only Eric knew the questions that she was seeking answers to.

Had what everyone always said been true?

Had she ruined his life by taking him away from Beth Logan all those years ago when she’d been Liz Henderson?

Would his life had been filled with nothing but happiness and the fulfillment she had never seemed to bring him?

Would he be more than he was today?

Had he needed a more traditional wife?

She shook her head in answer to the last question. No, he'd told her that he hadn't wanted a traditional wife. And as she thought back, none of the women that had been married to him had been traditional wives.

She felt her heart break a little at the thought of his other wives. Women that had taken her place.

And then she thought of the woman that was slowly taking her place now. She didn't know her name, didn't care to. All she knew was that Eric was falling in love with someone else.

"Before I fight for you, I want to know the answers to my questions," she whispered as she settled into her seat and let her head fall back, her eyes closed. It had been a long time since she'd flown commercially and the noise, even in first class, was enough to make her wish she'd taken the Forrester jet.

Sighing as she opened her eyes and turned her head to stare out the window, she bit her lip. "Please Mr. Roarke," she whispered. "Please be able to show me the answers."

~*~

Jessica looked out over the cliffs, her mind wandering to Wick and the man she'd left behind there. She'd upset him once again which made her question how truly fair it was to keep their relationship intact.

Was it fair to keep giving the man hope?

“Can I ever give him more than what we have now?” she wondered allowed.

“I believe, Mrs. Fletcher, that is why you are here.” Roarke spoke from behind her.

Jessica turned and looked up at her host. “Yes,” she sighed, turning back to look at the scenery. “It’s beautiful here.”

“It is.” Roarke agreed as he moved to stand beside his guest. “Your mind is very troubled. I believe there is chaos where there is usually order.”

“Emotions have a way of bringing chaos to order.”

“Yes, they do. If one is unsure of those feelings.”

“I’m confused, a state I don’t often find myself in.”

“For a mind such as yours, I can understand the turmoil.” Roarke smiled when Jessica looked up at him. “I know all about you, Mrs. Fletcher. You’ve been compared to Sherlock Holmes.”

“A fictional character.” Jessica murmured.

“But a character with a mind that missed nothing. Details that most people miss, you see without even trying.” Resting a hand on her shoulder, Roarke gave it a gentle squeeze. “Maybe, Mrs. Fletcher, you’re over analyzing.”

“Over analyzing?”

“Enjoy your time here, Mrs. Fletcher. Let your thoughts rest. You’ll learn what you need but only if you allow yourself to.”

Jessica turned to look at her host and found him gone. Frowning she looked around but saw no sign of him. “Now how on earth?” She shook her head and turned to walk down the path she’d followed here. Her host was a

mystery she couldn't seem to solve. He appeared and disappeared without making a sound.

She'd heard the man and his island had mystical powers, but had always dismissed it. Now that she'd met the man, she wasn't so sure. There was something different about him, something that set him apart from anyone she'd ever met. That thought turned her back to George.

"Oh George," she whispered as she opened her cottage door. "What am I going to do?"

Chapter 2

Notes:

The ladies get to know each other in this chapter as well as giving some details into who they are for those that don't know all of the characters.

"Ladies, thank you for joining me for dinner." Roarke looked at his guests. "I'm sorry to say that I have to leave, but I'm sure you'll all get along quite well." He smiled as he held his hand toward Clarisse. "I would like to introduce Her Majesty, Clarisse Renaldi, Queen of Genovia. Victoria Lord Davidson, Publisher of The Banner in Llanview, Pennsylvania. Stephanie Forrester, co-founder of Forrester Creations an international fashion house headquartered in Los Angeles, California. And Jessica Fletcher, writer of murder mysteries, who some have hailed as the Queen of Murder Mysteries, from Cabot Cove, Maine." Finished with his introductions, Roarke bowed to excuse himself. "Enjoy the company and dinner, ladies."

Viki smiled across the table at Clarisse. "I've heard of you. Have had an article or two printed in my newspaper about you and your country. It's nice to meet you."

Clarisse returned the smile. “Thank you.” Looking around the table, she settled on Stephanie. “I wore one of your husband’s dresses four years ago to a ball at the Genovian Consulate in San Francisco.”

Stephanie smiled. “I remember.” She chuckled, “Eric was very nervous. I asked him why, because you weren’t the first member of a royal family that he’s designed a dress for.”

“And what was his answer?” Clarisse asked before taking a sip of her champagne.

“His answer was that out of all the royals he’d dressed, you were by far the loveliest.”

“He sounds like a flatterer.”

Stephanie’s smile was wistful as she looked down at her hands. “He is.”

Feeling a shift in the woman’s mood, Viki looked over to where Jessica sat. “I love your books. My,” she sighed and bit her lip, her own mood shifting as she looked down at the table. Swallowing past the lump forming in her throat, she looked back up. “My late husband used to tease me about my collection. He always said he couldn’t understand why I’d read something when I’d already figured out the end.”

Jessica smiled kindly at the younger woman. “And did you have the mystery figured out?”

Viki shook her head. “No. That’s why I love your books.”

“Thank you for the compliment.” Studying her companions, Jessica picked up her glass. “It would seem we’re all here due to problems with the men in our lives,” she looked across at Viki. “Or the men we’ve lost.”

Viki smiled sadly. “My Ben and I would have celebrated ten years of marriage this week.”

“I need to know if what everyone has always said about my having ruined Eric’s life is true.” Stephanie whispered.

Clarisse bit her lip then took a deep breath. “I want to know what it’s like to be a normal every day woman who is free to love the man who holds her heart.”

“And I need to learn how to let myself love again.” Jessica added her own confession.

“Love again? Or just learn how to let yourself give in to the love you already have?” Viki asked, a knowing look in her eyes.

Jessica studied the woman sitting next to her. “You sound as though you’ve been there yourself.”

Viki smiled, her mind drifting back to the day she met Ben. “I have. When I met Ben, there was an instant attraction and a connection that frightened me. When I realized I’d fallen in love with him, my head and my heart went to war. After everything I’d been through after the loss of my third husband, the last thing I wanted, or thought I needed, was to be in love again. My heart won and we had three wonderful years.”

Clarisse, noticing the tears in Viki’s eyes reached out and rested her hand over Viki’s. “What happened?”

Viki’s eyes closed, her tears rolling down her cheeks. “He was hurt protecting me. He spent several years in a coma before he,” she bit her lip when it trembled. “I needed a heart transplant, he was a perfect match,” she finished quietly.

Stephanie wiped at a tear that had escaped. “And so you now have his heart beating inside you, reminding you of how much he loved you,” she whispered.

Viki rested her hand over her heart. “Yes.”

“Have you found love again? Is that why you want to spend one more day with your Ben?” Jessica asked as she dabbed at her eyes with her napkin.

“I thought I had, was married again for a short while, but,”

Stephanie narrowed her eyes. “He cheated.”

Viki looked up. “Yes,” she chuckled drily. “With the same woman my second husband cheated with.”

Stephanie snarled her nose. “Ouch. At least my husband was original.”

“Your husband cheated on you?” Clarisse asked.

Stephanie smirked. “Several times. As a matter of fact, I believe he’s on the verge of it again.”

“Oh my.”

Stephanie sighed and shrugged her shoulders. “I’m to blame for most of it. I’ve grown accustomed to it over the years.”

“And yet you’re still married to him.” Jessica commented.

Stephanie laughed. “No, actually we’re not married. This time we’re just living together.”

“You mean, you’ve been divorced and remarried before this?” Clarisse asked, a bit confused why any woman would do such a thing.

Stephanie smiled at the confusion on the Queen’s face. “One’s heart does things that reason just can’t fathom.”

Clarisse blinked and looked down at her hands. “I’ve heard that before. Or something much the same.”

“The man that makes you wish you weren’t a queen?” Jessica asked.

Clarisse nodded. “My,” she looked around and lowered her voice. “My Head of Security. I love him, he loves me, but we aren’t free to express that love.”

“Duty.” Viki whispered as she looked at the woman.

“Have you noticed,” Jessica spoke up. “we all have blue eyes?”

“And, if we had met a few years ago, we all would have blonde hair.”
Stephanie smiled.

Jessica raised an eyebrow at that. “Do you think Mr. Roarke was setting us up?”

Viki smiled and nodded. “I believe he was. We seem to have a lot in common as far as physical traits. And, we all seem to be here because of husbands or lovers,” she amended the last part after the looks she received from Jessica and Clarisse. “Or would be lovers.”

“I don’t know about that.” Jessica shook her head.

Clarisse did the same. “A lover? As Queen? Oh no. That could never be.”

“And just why couldn’t it?” Stephanie asked. “I know several royals that have lovers.”

“And all of them are male, right?”

“No. I know of at least two females.”

“But, they are royal by birth. I am royal by marriage. I am only the reigning queen because I was married to the king. And I can only remain on the throne as long as there is a legitimate heir to the throne. Which, thank Heaven, there is. She will take the throne when she turns twenty-one.”

“Didn’t you say the man you’re in love with is your Head of Security?” Viki asked.

“I did.”

“Well,” Stephanie picked up Viki’s line of thought. “If he’s head of your security, then surely he could arrange it so that you wouldn’t be caught if you decided to become lovers.”

Clarisse sighed and nodded. “He could, but,” she bit her lip. How do you explain the relationship you had with your husband to women who obviously had been in love with theirs?

“But?” Viki prompted. “It’s alright, Your Majesty. We won’t repeat what you’ve said.”

“It’s Clarisse.” Clarisse smiled at her new friend.

“Fine then, Clarisse.” Stephanie smiled when Clarisse looked at her. “Tell us what that hesitation was about.”

Clarisse took a deep breath. “My marriage was an arranged marriage. I was never in love with my husband. We were lovers as long as it took to produce the heir and a spare required and then that was it. He took a lover and I spent my time being a mother and doing my duties as first the Prince’s wife and then as the reigning king’s queen.”

“Oh my.” Jessica whispered. “You poor dear.”

Stephanie shook her head. “Your husband sounds like my Eric. How could the King have you and take a lover? Was he blind?” she asked causing Clarisse to sputter then laugh.

“Oh my.” Clarisse chuckled. “No, Mrs. Forrester, he wasn’t blind.”

“It’s Stephanie, and I say the man was a fool.”

“Thank you.” Clarisse smiled. “I didn’t mind, really. As I said, I wasn’t in love with him.”

“Was he in love with you?” Jessica asked before taking a sip of her water.

“Yes.” Clarisse nodded her head. “At least he always said he was.”

“Then how could he have taken a lover?”

“Some men are just like that, Mrs. Fletcher.” Stephanie sighed.

“It’s Jessica, Stephanie, and I’m sorry. I was lucky. My Frank loved me and was faithful. Even when he was away during the war.”

Viki caught the look in Jessica’s eyes. “What are you not telling us, Jessica?”

“Oh,” Jessica shrugged. “A few years ago a woman contacted me and asked to meet. Once we met, she told me she’d known Frank,” she paused, her eyes tearing as she thought about the pain from that time. “She told me that her son was Frank’s, that she and Frank had been lovers. I didn’t want to believe her, said that I didn’t, but she had a letter written to her by my Frank. I’ve never felt so,”

“So hurt? So betrayed? Like your heart has been ripped from your chest?” Viki asked.

“Like you’re drowning? Like someone has stabbed you and twisted the knife?” Stephanie chimed in.

“Yes.” Jessica nodded. “I was beside myself. But then the truth came out, she had known Frank, and he had written the letter to her, but he hadn’t been her lover. He’d only been a friend who wanted to help her take care of her son because she was on her own.”

Viki studied the woman. “You knew that your Frank hadn’t cheated deep down, didn’t you?”

“I did. Even though I felt all of those things, I still never fully believed my Frank had done that.”

“You’re a very lucky woman, Jessica.” Stephanie smiled at her. “When Eric had his first affair,” she closed her eyes. “I didn’t know with who at first. It hurt, but nothing like it did when I learned who the woman was.” Opening her eyes, she looked at her new friends. “The woman was the woman he’d been dating in college before I came along.”

Viki cringed. “Oh, ouch.” She sighed, “My second husband cheated on me only weeks after we were married with a woman that was the daughter of one of his former girl friends.”

“Well at least Eric and I had been married for over twenty-five years by the time his old love came back into the picture. Of course,” Stephanie rolled her eyes. “He’s since been married to both of her daughters.”

Clarisse frowned. “He what?”

Stephanie chuckled and nodded. “He never married Beth, the former college sweetheart. He did however marry her oldest daughter after their affair resulted in her getting pregnant. They have two children together. Then, a few years ago, Beth’s middle daughter seduced Eric away from me as part of her revenge against me. The Logan family have been the bane of my existence for years.”

“You mentioned that you thought he was on the verge of having an affair again. Do you think it’s with one of his former wives?”

Stephanie shook her head. “No. I think it’s with the woman he was engaged to before he married me the last time as per our youngest daughter’s dying wish.”

“You lost your daughter?” Viki asked.

“No, thank God, but she was dying. And we thought she had died.” Stephanie felt the pain tug at her as she remembered her baby going limp in

her arms. “She had cancer and the doctors had done everything possible but it hadn’t worked. We all gathered by her bed and,” she paused to swallow down the remembered pain. “I was holding her when she went limp and we all thought she’d died. I couldn’t let her go, so I went with them when they took her away. They found a very weak pulse by a mere fluke. Being the woman that I am, with the power I have because of my name, I used it to get them to take her to a clinic that I’d heard about that was doing an experimental treatment. The treatment worked and my baby lived. She’s now a very healthy and happy business woman raising her lively little boy.”

“I wish there had been something that would have saved my Megan.” Viki whispered. “She was my oldest child, a child that I missed out on so many years of her life thanks to my father. She had Lupus and needed a kidney transplant. I gave her one of mine, but her body rejected it. I was devastated when I lost her.”

“I was set to give part of my liver to my daughter at the risk of my own life and against the doctor’s advice.” Stephanie told them.

Viki nodded. “Oh yes. I understand that. My doctor, who also happens to be my former brother-in-law and my best friend, wasn’t going to let me. We argued and argued because I’d had a stroke years before after being shot.”

“You were shot too, huh?” Stephanie shook her head. “We have a lot in common, Viki.”

“Sadly.” Viki nodded.

Clarisse shook her head. “I’ve been shot at, but my guard was the one that took the bullet. That’s actually how I wound up with Joseph as my guard and then later my Head of Security.”

“I’ve been shot twice and had four strokes.” Stephanie told the group.

“I’ve been shot at a time or two, but I’ve been lucky to be healthy.” Jessica scowled as she finished. “Except for my back. Stupid thing.”

Viki chuckled, “I take it you don’t like being confined to bed.”

“No. I hate not being able to do things for myself and get out of my house.”

Stephanie nodded. “At least with my first stroke I only lost my memory. The third one was enough that it left me paralyzed on my right side and in a wheelchair. If it hadn’t been for Eric,” she shook her head. “I would have given up.” She smiled. “That was the first time we remarried. Well,” she amended. “the first time our remarriage actually happened.”

Viki arched an eyebrow. “What?”

Stephanie chuckled. “Two years before then Eric and I had been about to be married when a photo of him in another woman’s bed showed up in the minister’s Bible.”

“Oh my.” Clarisse breathed.

“Needless to say that ended the wedding. He did everything he could to woo me back, and we were growing close but things kept happening that prevented us from marrying.”

“Until you had the stroke and he realized just how much he loved and needed you.” Viki finished softly.

“Yes. When he saw me lying there in the hospital he didn’t know if I would make it or not. He told me he realized then how stupid he’d been.” Stephanie smiled as she remembered how wonderful Eric had been. “We were happy for several years after that. And then things fell apart again, this time because of a secret.”

“Secrets are deadly.” Viki murmured. “Keeping secrets is what ultimately led to Ben’s death.”

“Well, this one was only deadly to our marriage. I lost him to my secret, although I got him back for a while. Then things fell apart because another

woman came into the picture. We had a bad time of it until our youngest daughter came home, dying. Once he learned of that, we were sort of pulled together, and then she asked us to marry again. We did it because we couldn't deny her and planned to divorce after she was gone."

"But he fell back in love with you." Viki smiled even as she wiped a tear from her cheek.

"Yes. The woman he'd been with, been engaged to, wasn't very happy. Things were okay for a while and then I lost him again to a younger woman. Lost my home, lost everything."

"So why are you here if you're used to him doing this?" Clarisse asked.

"Because, while I may be accustomed to it, I'm tired of it. At every turn someone is always telling me that he would have been better off if he'd never met and married me. I want to know if that's true before I fight for him again."

"I understand." Viki commented. "I took Clint, my second husband, back after he cheated. I had two small children that needed a father. He was good to the boys and I couldn't take yet another father away from them. My youngest son wouldn't have had a father if I'd let Clint go. Joey was born after the death of my first husband."

Clarisse closed her eyes. "My husband died and six months later I lost my youngest son."

"Your youngest son. What happened to the oldest? Why isn't he king?" Jessica asked, confusion on her face.

"Pierre, the oldest, abdicated to become part of the Church."

"Ah. So then when the youngest was gone, that left you."

Clarisse nodded. “That left me, and a granddaughter I’d never met living in San Francisco with her mother. We’d agreed that she would be told her true heritage when she turned eighteen, but with the death of her father, it became necessary to break that agreement. She was fifteen, nearly sixteen, when I showed up and turned her world upside down.”

“I remember when that happened.” Stephanie shook her head. “The media went crazy with it. I had a meeting in San Francisco around that time. The person I was meeting cancelled because of all of the craziness. I had to lure him to LA with promises to have Eric design a complete new fall wardrobe for his wife.”

“Oh my.” Clarisse chuckled. “How did that go over with Mr. Forrester?”

“He wasn’t exactly happy with me, but he got over it. We needed the business.”

“I remember that time, too.” Viki commented. “One of my news staff was following the story religiously. The only time my paper ran anything about it was when the Princess accepted her position at the ball. I wasn’t about to run with a bunch of unsubstantiated rumors.”

Clarisse smiled. “You’re the kind of newspaper publisher I wish I dealt with more often. Unfortunately the majority of what I have to deal with will print anything that they think will bring them revenue.”

“That would be my brother’s newspaper.”

Clarisse looked at Jessica. “We’ve been so busy talking, we left you out.”

Viki smiled as she nodded. “How did you meet your gentleman?”

Jessica laughed at that. “My gentleman is a Chief Inspector at Scotland Yard.”

“Ah.” Viki chuckled. “Another murder case.”

Jessica nodded, a twinkle in her blue eyes. “Yes. One in which I was the prime suspect.”

Stephanie’s eyebrows went up at that bit of news. “What?”

Clarisse blinked in surprise. “You? Is he daft, your Inspector?”

Jessica laughed and shook her head. “Oh no. Not daft. He has a brilliant mind.”

“Which explains the Chief Inspector title.” Viki commented. “But I think I’m with Clarisse. He seems to have been a bit daft if he thought you were the murderer.”

“It was a friend of mine, a fellow writer. She was heralded as the Queen of Murder Mysteries. With her death, I was crowned with the title. The fact that my locket, one that Frank had given me years before, was found under my friend’s bed,” Jessica shrugged her shoulders. “George says he fell in love with me then, but I’m not so sure. How could he fall in love with a woman he barely knew? A woman that he suspected of murder?”

Viki snickered behind her hand. “Oh Jessica.”

Stephanie laughed and smirked. “I agree. Oh Jessica.”

Clarisse frowned and looked from one woman to the other before looking at Jessica, her face clearly showing she was just as confused. “I don’t know, either.”

“The man could have easily fallen in love with you. All that blonde hair, blue eyes,” Stephanie raised an eyebrow and lowered her voice. “One hell of a figure for a woman of mature years when gravity starts fighting us every step of the way.”

“Oh!” Jessica blushed and shook her head. “No.”

“Yes.” Viki nodded. “Red blooded men have a thing for blonde hair and blue eyes. Or so my Ben used to tell me.”

Stephanie grinned. “Yours fed you that line huh? So did mine when we first met.”

Clarisse blushed and looked down at her hands. “It would seem our men have something in common.”

Jessica shook her head. “Well mine has said it was my mind.”

Viki nodded. “Mine said that as well. Was always bragging to everyone how brilliant his Blondie was.”

“Blondie?” Stephanie asked. “You let him call you that?”

Viki cocked her head to the side. “Doesn’t yours have a nickname for you? One that you would slap someone else for?”

Stephanie nodded and looked down at her wedding band. “Sweet girl.”

“George calls me Lass.” Jessica added.

Clarisse shrugged. “Joseph calls me his queen.”

“That doesn’t seem like a nickname to me since you are in fact his queen.” Stephanie commented with a frown.

“Oh but, the way he says it,” Clarisse’s voice trailed off.

“Ah.” Viki whispered a knowing look in her eye. “Deep and husky, a bit breathy at times.”

Clarisse nodded. “Yes.”

“George just lets his accent show through.”

“British?”

Jessica shook her head. “Scottish. He keeps his brogue under control most of the time, but when he’s around me, he tends to let it slip.”

Viki snorted. “Ben used his dimples.”

“Eric sings to me.” Stephanie gave her own small snort. “Gets me every time, the damn fool.”

Viki laughed, “We all really do have a lot in common.”

“Yes.” Jessica laughed. “We seem to be pushovers for our men’s wheedling ways.”

Clarisse smiled. “Well, I haven’t given in to Joseph’s ways yet. Though he tries often enough.”

“I gave in easier than I thought with Ben. But how can a woman resist a low sexy voice and dimples that peek out just waiting to be touched?” Viki asked, her eyes misty with memories.

Jessica covered a yawn with her napkin. “Oh my. I’m sorry.”

“No need to apologize.” Stephanie told her as a yawn snuck up on her. “We’re all tired, I’m sure.” She looked down at the table. “We never did get any food.”

Viki chuckled and shook her head. “No, we didn’t, but making new friends was worth missing dinner.”

“I agree.” Clarisse smiled at the other women. “I don’t have friends.”

“You do now.” Jessica told her and reached over to pat her hand. “Shall we all meet for breakfast?”

Viki nodded. "That sounds like a wonderful idea."

"I'm agreeable." Clarisse told her even as she covered a yawn. "I really should be going. My guard is probably beside himself that I've been out so long."

Stephanie arched an eyebrow. "Doesn't he realize Mr. Roarke keeps this island secure?"

Clarisse shrugged. "The life of a queen."

"I would be extremely frustrated being followed around everywhere I go." Jessica frowned as she pushed back her chair. "What time shall we meet?"

"Eight?" Viki suggested earning nods from the other three women. Standing up, she picked up her clutch. "Then I will see you all in the morning. Goodnight and may we all have a restful sleep."

Chapter 3

Notes:

This chapter, and the following three, will be each of the ladies' fantasies. The end of the chapter will tell you who the next lady will be.

"Once you go through this door, you will be in the world you've requested." Roarke smiled at Viki. "Go on, your fantasy awaits."

Viki smiled at the man then looked at the door he'd indicated. "Crossroads," she whispered. Peeking in the window, she marveled at how perfect a replica Mr. Roarke had created. "It's exactly like the real one at home."

"I do my best, Mrs. Davidson."

Viki turned to thank him and frowned at finding him gone. “Where did he go?” she wondered then shook her head. Turning back to the bar where her life had taken such a drastic and wonderful turn, she reached out a trembling hand and turned the door knob.

“Hi ya, Blondie.” Ben greeted her with his trademark dimpled smile. “What took you so long?”

Viki, unable to speak, stood staring at the man she’d been missing for the last eight years. Tears filled her eyes and rolled down her cheeks, blurring her vision.

“Blondie?” Ben whispered as he moved to stand in front of her.

Wrapping her arms around him, Viki held tight and wept into his shoulder. Nothing she’d said or done had prepared her for the ache she’d feel seeing this wonderful man again. Seeing him alive, and healthy, had overwhelmed her senses and emotions. Knowing that his heart beat in her chest, she let one of her hands drift down over his shoulder coming to rest over the spot where she felt a steady thump, thump, thump rhythm.

“Baby? What is it? What’s making you cry?” Ben questioned as he pulled her back and cupped her face. “Did something happen at the paper? Are the kids alright?” he threw more questions at her as his thumbs wiped at her tears.

Shaking her head, Viki sniffed and blinked to clear her eyes. “I’m sorry, Ben. I don’t know what came over me.” She caressed his cheek. “I guess I’m just a little overwhelmed that you’re still in my life and have been my husband for so long now.” She smiled at him. “It’s hard to believe it’s been ten years since I said I do.”

Studying her, Ben knew she wasn’t telling him the truth, but he decided not to ask why she was lying. Giving her a dimpled smile instead, he wiped her tears away with his thumbs. “I’m one lucky man. I sometimes still find it hard to believe that you actually married me.”

“I feel the same way.” Viki smiled up at him, her fingers tracing the features she’d seen in her dreams a thousand times. “Ben,” she whispered his name on a breathy sigh. “Lock up.”

Ben closed his eyes at the sound of her soft voice. It had been a long day waiting to hold his wife in his arms and at this point he’d do anything she asked of him. Opening his eyes, he looked down at her and nodded. “You got it, Blondie.” Gently kissing her lips, he smiled at her when she hummed. “Go see what’s waiting for you in the back room.”

“Oh Ben.” Viki shook her head and smiled at him. “You do spoil me.”

“Isn’t that what I’m supposed to do?” he asked with a wink. “Now go on. I’ve some locking up to do.”

Viki felt tears return as she headed to the back room. Swiping at them, she huffed at herself, “Get yourself together, Victoria. If you keep crying, he’ll press for answers. And then what do you tell him?”

~*~

Viki sighed as she snuggled against Ben’s chest, his body swaying them slowly to the music from the jukebox. “This is nice,” she whispered.

“It’s always nice holding you.” Ben told her as he pressed a kiss to her head. “You look amazing. No matter how many times I buy you a dress, you always look better in it than I’d imagined when I bought it.”

Viki chuckled, “You’re such a flatterer, Mr. Davidson.”

“Flattery has always gotten me everything I want,” he whispered.

“Oh yeah?” she asked as she looked up at him, an eyebrow arched.

“Oh yeah,” he breathed as he cupped the back of her head, his lips pressing down on hers as he pulled her body flush against his.

“Ben,” she breathed.

“Yes, Blondie?”

Looking up at him, Viki caressed his cheek. “Don’t you think it’s time for bed?”

“Mmm,” he hummed as he scooped her up into his arms. “I believe you’re right.”

Viki smiled as she wrapped her arms around his neck, her lips pressing soft kisses along his jaw as he walked to the back room. Looking up at him when he let her slide to the floor, she traced his face, memorizing every feature, though she had no need to. His face, and every nuance of it, was burned into her memory.

Ben closed his eyes and let Viki’s fingers caress over his face, the feel of her soft touch making him sigh, “It’s been a long day waiting for this, Blondie.”

Feeling her eyes well with tears again, Viki pulled back and shook her head. “I,” she started then turned and rushed from the room. Running out of Crossroads, she stumbled and fell into Roarke.

“Mrs. Davidson?” Roarke asked as he held her arms to steady her.

“I thought I could do this. I wanted this so much, but,” she choked back a sob. “I can’t. He’s so sweet, so tender, but,” Viki shook her head as she wiped at the tears on her face. “It suddenly hit me. If he sees the scar, he’ll ask questions I won’t be able to explain.”

Roarke handed her a handkerchief and smiled. "I've thought of that, Mrs. Davidson. Dry your eyes and go back. He's waiting for you."

Viki wiped her cheeks and eyes then handed Roarke's handkerchief back to him as she looked into his dark eyes and studied them. All she found was kindness and mystery. Taking a deep breath, she turned and made her way back to Crossroads, her smile a bit wobbly when she found Ben standing in the doorway waiting for her.

"Blondie? What is it?"

"Me being a foolish woman is what it is." Viki whispered as she wrapped her arms around him. "Don't ask questions, just make love to me. It's been a long day of waiting for me, too."

Ben nodded and pulled her inside the bar, closing and locking the door behind them before lifting her into his arms once more. "Whatever it is, I'm here," he whispered as he set her on her feet by the bed.

"I know," she whispered as she reached up to unbutton his shirt. Roarke had even gotten the feel of the soft flannel of Ben's shirt right. Whatever the man was, he was good at what he did.

Ben's hands slid up Viki's back, the fingers of one gripping the tiny zip of her dress and slowly lowering it. Pushing the sequined indigo material off her body, he smiled at her as he reached up to unclasp her bra. "Beautiful," he breathed against the pulse point on her neck.

Viki shivered and let her head fall back, forgetting what she'd been doing. His kisses, his touch, had always done that to her. Feeling him nip at the lobe of her ear with his teeth, she gripped his arms. "Ben."

Finishing what he'd started, Ben gently pushed her back on the bed then quickly finished undressing himself. Joining her, he laid on his side and stared down at his beautiful wife, his fingers tracing the scars on her breast as he'd always done, his mind never really being able to let go of the fear he'd had while watching her fight the cancer. "I still can't believe that you came

into my life and stayed...that you became my wife. You're the strongest, most beautiful woman I've ever known, Blondie. Thank you for loving me."

Turning into him, Viki pressed close. "You helped me be strong by loving me," she whispered, wishing with all her heart that he wasn't just a fantasy, knowing that come the morning she would feel empty and alone once again.

Lifting her thigh up over his, Ben slowly thrust forward, sliding inside her, his hand resting on her hip. "I love you, Blondie. Happy anniversary."

Tucking her head beneath his chin, Viki's tears returned as she clung to him while he moved against her, making love to her slow and easy. "Happy anniversary, just Ben," she whispered.

~*~

Eyes slowly fluttering open, Viki stared at the empty space next to her, a note and a rose filling the void. Swallowing as she sat up, she read the note, Blondie, gone to get eggs for the omelets. Dumb me forget to get them yesterday. I'll be back shortly. Coffee is made and waiting for you. Love you, just Ben.

Sniffing the rose, tears filled her eyes. He wasn't coming back.

Her fantasy was over.

Her Ben was gone but for her memories of him.

A tear drop rolled down her cheek, landing on the rose, and she watched it slide down the petal. Swallowing back more tears, she got up and got dressed. She had to leave now. Maybe one of the ladies would be available

to have breakfast with. She could use a friend about now. She hoped it was Jessica because she'd lost the man she loved; she'd been in Viki's shoes.

Walking back out into the bar, Viki took one last look around, her hand trailing over the smooth surface of the bar, a smile appearing as she remembered the times Ben had lifted her up onto it so she could look down at him as they shared kisses.

Moving to the pool table, she felt her insides clench as she remembered the times they'd made love here. She'd always been amazed at what Ben could get her to do, but she'd never regretted any of it. She blushed. She'd always enjoyed it immensely, more than anyone of the people who knew her would believe.

Looking across at the jukebox, she could hear their song and see them dancing, and made up her mind. When she returned home, she was reopening Crossroads. Other people deserved the chance to come to the out of the way roadhouse for a chance that its magic would change their lives.

Walking out the door, Viki wiped at the tears and looked up to see Roarke standing waiting for her. "Mr. Roarke."

"Mrs. Davidson." Roarke greeted her with a nod.

"Thank you." Viki whispered as she walked alongside him. "I don't know how you did it, but I'm very grateful."

"You're welcome, Mrs. Davidson. I have something you need to see. Would you come to my office after breakfast?"

"I can come now."

"No need to. After breakfast will be sufficient." Roarke smiled at her. "I believe you'll find Mrs. Fletcher having breakfast by the pool."

Viki blinked as she looked up at the man. Now how had he known she wanted to have breakfast with Jessica specifically? Shaking her head, she smiled. “Thank you. I believe I’ll join her.”

Roarke bowed his head slightly. “I’ll see you in an hour then. Have a good breakfast, Mrs. Davidson.”

Viki watched the man walk away and frowned as she made her way to the pool. She was beginning to think all of the talk she heard about the man being some sort of mystical being was true. Too many things were happening without logical explanation. She shrugged.

Why shouldn’t such things exist?

If loving Ben had taught her anything, it had taught her that there were things in the universe that couldn’t be explained by rational thought. The connection they’d shared was one of those things. Neither of them could ever explain it, but neither had ever questioned, they’d just trusted and accepted.

Patting her chest over her heart, she sighed, “I love you, Ben,” before smiling when she caught Jessica waving her over to her table. From the look on the woman’s face, she’d just come from her own fantasy, and things had gone a different way than she’d expected.

Chapter 4

Jessica looked around the room Mr. Roarke had led her too. It was amazing how much it looked like the entry way at Sutherland Castle in Wick. While her mind had always been too analytical to believe in such things as mysticism, she’d seen enough unexplainable things over the years, to temper that belief. The dealings she’d had with Voodoo when visiting New Orleans and again with the unexplained in Wick, those were enough to make anyone change their mind. So she didn’t think twice about how this had come about.

Turning to say thank you to her host, she shook her head to find him gone. She wasn't even going to try and figure out how he did that. She had come here to learn if she and George could ever be more than just friends, but thanks to Mr. Roarke's advice, she'd already realized they could. She knew that George loved her and wished to marry her, but marrying again frightened her, something she hadn't admitted to even herself until just a few days ago. She intended to tell George that she loved him, and see if together they could work on getting her over her fears. Once that was done, then she could go and easily face the real George and give him the gift of her love.

Taking a deep breath when she heard George's unmistakable footsteps, Jessica smiled when he came into view.

"Hello, George," she greeted him when he looked at her, startled to find her standing in his home.

"Jessie, what are ye doing here?" George's brogue thickened as he wrapped his arms around her.

Jessica returned his embrace then pulled back to look up at him. "I came to see if you minded some company. I can only stay until tomorrow morning, but I couldn't pass up the opportunity to see you."

"I'll take any time I can have with ye, Lass." George smiled down at her before leaning forward to kiss her brow. "Come on then, I'll take you up to your room so you can settle and rest a bit before lunch."

"George?" Jessica tugged at his hand to stop him. "I don't want to rest. Take a walk with me?"

"Where to, Lass?"

"The gardens?"

George blinked. Jessica very rarely wanted to go to the gardens when she visited, not after he had confessed his love for her there. "Alright, Lass. I'll

leave your things for later. The staff are all on holiday so it's just the two of us."

"I had wondered when I was able to just walk in without someone greeting me."

"Sorry about that, Jess. I was in my office. You know that I can't hear a thing in there."

Jessica laughed and nodded. "I do, and it's quite alright. Now," she wrapped her arm through his. "Are you going to take me on that walk?"

"Yes, Ma'am." George laughed and squeezed her hand as he led them through to the back door and out into the bright sunshine. "Jessie?"

"Yes?"

"Why are you really here?"

Jessica sighed. She should have known the man would realize she hadn't told him the truth behind her visit. "I'm here because I," she stopped and walked away, pausing by the roses.

"What is it, Jessie?" George asked as he caught up with her, his hand taking hers and gently squeezing.

"I realized something about myself the other day."

"Oh?"

Jessica nodded. "I'm afraid of being in love again." Looking up at George, tears in her eyes, she smiled slightly. "But someone told me to stop over analyzing things, and when I gave in and listened to the advice," she bit her lip and stepped closer. "I am in love. I have been for a while now, I just didn't want to admit it."

Cupping her face, George smiled as his thumb brushed at the tear that rolled down her cheek. “Ah, Jessie,” he whispered before bending down to brush his lips against hers. “I told you I was perfectly fine with our friendship.”

“I know, but,” she bit her lip and looked away. “I wasn’t being fair to you; to either of us.”

“And now, Jessie? What happens now?”

“I don’t know, George. I only know that I’m willing to try.”

Pulling her against him, George pressed his lips to hers. His fingers tangled in her hair, as he felt her respond and wrap her arms around him. He could feel her trembling and broke the kiss. “Easy, Jessie.”

Jessica took a deep breath. “It’s been a long time since I’ve been kissed like that.”

“It’s been a long time since I’ve kissed like that.” George winked at her when she gave him a small smile and shook her head. “Come on, Lass. You must be tired and it’s lunch time. You can go up to your room and rest while I fix us something to eat.”

Taking his hand, Jessica followed George back towards the castle. “This is going to complicate things.”

George nodded. “It is, but I’m willing to deal with complicated. Are you?”

“I am.” Jessica smiled up at him. “Now that I’ve admitted that I love you, I’m not going to back down.”

George stopped and turned to face her. “Say it again, Lass,” he whispered.

Reaching up to cup his cheek, Jessica stared into his green eyes. “I love you.”

~*~

“What happened to lunch?” Jessica asked as she came into the kitchen. “I thought you were going to wake me hours ago.”

George shrugged and winked at her. “You looked so peaceful and comfortable, I just didn’t have the heart. You seemed to need sleep more than food.”

Walking up to him, Jessica wrapped her arms around his waist. “Thank you. I did need rest.” Sniffing the air, she hummed, “That smells wonderful.”

“It’s just a simple stew, Lass. Pour the wine?” he asked as he nodded his head toward the bottle sitting on the table by a couple of glasses.

“A simple stew is perfect,” she told him as she opened the wine. “So is this wine.” She looked at him with a raised eyebrow. “My favorite.”

“Oh?”

“George,” she warned playfully.

“Fine then, Jessie.”

“So did you make the stew to go with the wine? Or did you pick the wine to go with the stew?” she teased.

“Now, Lass.”

Smiling at him as she set his glass down beside him, she took a sip of her wine. “Is there a fire going in the den?”

“There is.”

“Can we eat there?”

“I had thought we might.”

“Reading my thoughts, Inspector?”

George chuckled and shook his head. “No. I just simply know that you like that room because it’s small and quiet. Besides, it’s much too cold not to have a fire.”

“And you hoped to have a wee bit of a cuddle?” Jessica asked in her best imitation of his brogue.

George laughed as he finished dishing up their stew. “Come on, Lass. Get my glass. We’ll see about the wee cuddle.”

Jessica shivered at the sound of his deep brogue. Darn the man anyway. Wee cuddle, bah. He’d have more than a wee cuddle if he kept that up.

~*~

“George.” Jessica breathed as she rested her head against his shoulder, her breathing a bit fast as she tried to catch her breath after the kiss he’d just given her.

George caressed Jessica legs as he held her close. It had taken a bit of sweet talking, but he’d managed to get her to sit across his lap, and it felt wonderful having her so very close. She was freer that she’d been in a very long time, and the weight she’d carried with her over her fears of their relationship had

slipped away. She was his bonnie lass again and it made his heart skip a beat at the thought of it.

“George? Where did you go?” Jessica asked as she turned his face to hers.

“Just thinking about how wonderful it is to have my bonnie lass back.”

“Your bonnie lass? George?”

Tucking a curl behind her ear, George smiled at her. “Things changed between us after I told you I loved you. You always seemed to have a weight on your shoulders and,” he shrugged. “You seemed different than when we’d first become friends. I was sorry for it, yet I wasn’t sorry for telling you how I felt.” He growled, “Oh that doesn’t make sense.”

“It makes perfect sense.” Snuggling closer, Jessica sighed in contentment. “George?”

“Yes, Lass?”

“Tonight,” she started then bit her lip. “Tonight can I stay with you?”

“Jessie?” George asked in surprise.

“I don’t want to sleep alone tonight.”

Putting his finger under her chin, George tilted her face up and looked down at her, his green eyes studying her blue ones. “Are you sure, Jessie?”

“I’m not ready for something more, but I don’t want to be alone.” Jessica answered honestly. “It isn’t fair to you, I know that, but,” she stopped and shook her head.

“I’ll tell you what I told you before, I’ll accept whatever you are comfortable giving me.” Smiling, he continued, “Falling asleep with you, waking with you, it’s enough, Lass. It’s enough.”

~*~

Jessica came out of her revelry in time to see Viki walking with Roarke. Smiling and motioning her new friend over, she sighed at the look on the woman's face. "Are you alright?" she asked when Viki settled across from her.

Viki looked down at her hands. "It was harder than I thought," she whispered. "It was all so real. I,"

Reaching across the table, Jessica laid her hand over Viki's. "You're still very much in love with him."

"I can't help it. I've tried." Viki looked back up at Jessica. "I don't know why it's so hard. I didn't have this much trouble getting over Joe and Sloan."

"Joe and Sloan?"

"Joe was my second husband. He died from a brain tumor. Sloan was my fourth husband. I lost him to cancer as well."

"You were expecting it with them." Jessica told her. "They were older than you? Same age?"

"Older."

Jessica nodded. "They were older, and then they were sick. With your Ben, he wasn't sick. And he was younger, right?"

"Yes, by several years."

"So you expected to be the one to go first."

“I did. Especially after the cancer.”

“And then he was gone instead of you. It’s no wonder you’re having a hard time.”

“What did you do? How did you manage?” Viki asked as she wiped at her eyes with her napkin.

“I lost myself in my writing. And it took me a long time to get over missing Frank. If I’m honest, I still miss him.”

“Even with George?”

Jessica smiled. “Even with.”

Viki noticed the change in the woman and smiled as she sniffed. “I take it your fantasy went well?”

“It did.” Jessica whispered. “I,” she bit her lip then continued. “I told him I love him.”

“Oh Jessica.” Viki breathed as she squeezed her friend’s hand. “And?”

“And we spent part of the evening snuggled in front of the fire,” her voice dropped and she blushed. “I haven’t done anything of that nature in years.”

Viki smirked. “Necking?”

“Viki!”

“Yes?” Viki chuckled. “That is what you were doing, isn’t it?”

Her blush deepening, Jessica nodded, a small smile on her lips. “Yes, I suppose it was. My word,” she breathed.

Viki laughed, “I’m so happy for you. Did the necking go any further?”

Jessica shook her head. “No. I’m not ready for that. I did spend the night with him.”

“And?”

“And it was wonderful not being alone in my bed. It’s been a long time since I’ve fallen asleep with a man’s arms around me.”

Viki nodded. “I understand.”

“But Viki, you said you remarried.”

“I did, but my marriage was never without problems. It’s a very long story, but things weren’t right between us long before he cheated. There were many nights I fell asleep without him, and even when he was there, we turned away from each other to sleep.”

“Oh Viki.” Jessica whispered. “And what about last night?”

Viki closed her eyes. “Last night was just as it always was. Ben made love to me slow and tender and held me all night.”

“And was gone when you woke.”

Viki nodded. “Was George?”

“Yes. I had a note that he’d gone down to fix breakfast.”

“Ben left me a note that he’d gone out to get ingredients he’d forgotten for our breakfast.”

Jessica sighed. “I wonder how Clarisse and Stephanie’s day and night went?”

“I hope they went as well as ours did.” Viki looked at her watch. “I must go. I have a meeting with Mr. Roarke. He said he had something to show me.”

“Hmm, that’s odd.”

“What is?”

“He said much the same thing to me.”

Viki raised an eyebrow at that. “And when are you to meet him?”

Jessica looked down at her watch. “In an hour.”

Viki shook her head. “I’m not going to try and figure the man out. I think that’s impossible.”

“I believe you’re right.” Jessica commented. “Oh, look,” she pointed. “It’s Clarisse.”

“She seems a bit,”

“Lost in thought.”

“Yes.” Viki nodded then stood up. “Maybe you can talk to her. I’ll see you later?”

“Yes. I’m staying through to tomorrow.”

“So am I. Maybe all of us can have dinner again, if the other ladies are staying as well.”

“Hopefully.” Jessica told her as she stood up. “Go on. Don’t want you to be late.”

Chapter 5

“Hello.” Joe smiled at Clarisse.

Clarisse smiled. “Hello.”

Reaching out to caress her face, Joe held her gaze. “You’re beautiful today. I love you in blue.”

Looking around to see if they were being watched, Clarisse sighed in relief before turning her attention back to Joe. “Thank you, and I know. You’ve told me several times over the years.”

“Thank you for agreeing to spend the day with me. I was just going to get some breakfast, care to join me?”

Clarisse smiled. “It will be nice to have a day away. And I’d love to join you for a bit of breakfast, thank you.” She took his offered hand, and gave a happy sigh that she was so easily falling into the fantasy. It felt wonderful to hold his hand in a room full of people and not fear the repercussions.

Leading her to a booth in the corner, Joe stood and let her take her pick of which seat then slid in next to her with a smile. “What would you like?” he asked when he noticed the waitress walking toward them.

“Tea and toast.”

“Always with the tea and toast.” Joe chuckled before ordering for them.

Clarisse traced his hand. “This is quite nice.”

“It is,” he agreed. “Would you like to go for a drive after?”

“That would be lovely. Where?”

“Oh. There’s a nice little amusement park nearby.”

“Joseph,” she frowned at him. “An amusement park?”

“Yes.”

“I’m not getting on a rollercoaster.”

“Did I say anything about a rollercoaster?”

Clarisse narrowed her eyes as she studied him. “I’m not dressed for an amusement park.”

“We can remedy that.” Joe smiled. “There’s a nice little clothing store right next door.”

Clarisse rolled her eyes. “Shoes?” she asked as she tapped his foot with her heel.

“Shoes.” He nodded with a wink.

“Oh very well then,” she laughed.

~*~

“Joseph!” Clarisse shouted. “No! I told you I wouldn’t go on a rollercoaster!”

“But this one is a mild one. No upside down twists. Just up and down and a few curves.” Joe smiled at her. “Come on then. You know you want to try it. Think of the exhilaration.”

Clarisse sighed, “You do manage to talk me into things, don’t you?”

Leaning close to her, his hand cupping her bottom, he whispered, “Maybe I’m testing the waters to see what kinds of things you’ll let me talk you into.”

“Joseph,” she breathed then swallowed and shook her head to clear her senses. “The rollercoaster, Joseph. The line is getting longer while we stand here.”

Pulling away, he offered his arm. “So you’re agreeing to the ride, then?” he asked as innocently as he could.

Clarisse knew he intended a different meaning with that question than it sounded like to anyone else that might have overheard, and she shook her head. “Cheeky bugger,” she murmured.

Joe laughed as they hurried to get in line. Seeing the glimmer in her eyes, he knew she was having fun, something that didn’t often happen in their line of work. Well, today wasn’t about work, it was about them, and he intended to make the most of it.

Clarisse stared up at the rollercoaster as they moved up in the line and felt her stomach flutter. Good lord, she thought. What have I let him talk me into?

Helping Clarisse into the car, Joe climbed in after her and helped her fasten the restraints before doing up his own. “Hold my hand. You’ll be fine. I think you’ll like it.”

Clasping his hand tightly in hers, Clarisse swallowed down the nervousness as they started to move. The first sharp dip caused her to cry out in startled surprise and tighten her grip on Joe’s hand, and the first sharp turn had her screaming in fright as she thought they weren’t going to make it before suddenly jerking around to go straight up and plummet back down.

Joe caressed the back of Clarisse’s hand with his thumb and smiled when she finally began to enjoy the ride. He felt his heart lurch when she closed her eyes and let her head fall back as she enjoyed the air on her face, blowing through her hair. It wasn’t often that he saw her that carefree, too much responsibility resting on her shoulders, though he often wondered why she let herself be so weighted down. Her husband hadn’t let the company rule his life, but he supposed she did because the board had been so very against the

idea of her stepping into her husband's shoes and had fought her every step of the way.

Opening her eyes when the ride stopped, Clarisse looked over at Joe. "That was amazing," she whispered a bit breathlessly.

"I told you," he whispered back then helped her out of the restraints. Getting out of the car with her, they walked down the stairs, pausing at the booth to buy a photo. "So you can put it on your desk to remember," he told her as he handed it over.

"I don't need a photo to remember, but this will be a nice addition to my desk." Clarisse studied the pose he'd chosen. "Why this one?" she asked.

Joe looked down at the picture of her, her head back, eyes closed, wind blowing through her hair. "Because it shows you relaxed and enjoying yourself, something I don't see very often these days."

"It's so hard, Joseph. I can't. You know how they feel about me being in charge. If I don't spend all my time at work, they'll think I'm not capable and try to take everything from me." She clasped his hand. "But I'm glad you talked me into taking today for myself."

"I'm glad you let me." Joe smiled at her and lifted her hand, kissing the back of it. "Now, do you want to ride the Ferris wheel?"

Her eyes lit up. "You remembered."

"I did. How could I forget? You had just as much, if not more, fun that the boys did."

"We could see forever that day it seemed."

"This one is taller."

Smiling, she nodded. "Yes, please. I'd enjoy it very much."

~*~

Clarisse sighed as she rested her head against Joe's shoulder. After the Ferris wheel, he'd taken her back to his apartment for dinner and now they were dancing to soft jazz playing on the stereo.

"Clarisse?"

"Mmm?"

"Spend the night with me," he whispered, his lips soft against her ear.

Clarisse pulled back a bit and looked at him. Studying the green eyes watching her, she raised an eyebrow at him. "Is this one of those things you're talking me into?"

Joe smiled at her bringing up his comment from earlier in their day. "If you'll let me," he nodded. "Though I won't ever force you to do something, or expect you to do something, you aren't comfortable with."

Clarisse smiled. "I know that." Snuggling back against him, she let her eyes close, thinking back to the conversation she'd had with the ladies. Viki had said potential lovers, and she'd denied that she could go there, but being here in Joseph's arms...she was sure she'd been wrong. "Joseph?"

"Hmm?"

Nuzzling his neck, she kissed his ear before whispering, "Yes."

Tangling his fingers in her hair, Joe tilted her head back and pressed his lips against hers, his mouth hungry as he used his free hand to press her lower

body against his. Not able to help himself, he ground against her when her mouth opened to his probing tongue.

Clarisse moaned into his mouth as she pushed herself tighter against him, her hands clasping his arms. Taking a deep breath then gasping when Joe lifted her into his arms, she wrapped her own around his neck, her teeth gently nibbling on his earlobe. “Sir Galahad,” she murmured.

“Carrying his lady fair,” he whispered. Smiling when he set her down by his bed, Joe kept his eyes focused on hers as his hands slowly undressed her, trembling as they did from the need to see and touch her.

Clarisse held her breath as the last piece of her clothes slid to the floor. Watching as Joe’s eyes moved from her face to take her in, she felt the air whoosh out of her in a rush when his heated gaze returned to lock with hers.

“Beautiful,” he murmured. “Lay on the bed for me.”

Doing as he asked, Clarisse shivered at the look he gave her and the moan that escaped him. “What is it?” she asked when he continued to stare.

“You and all that creamy skin against the black of my sheets,” he answered in a low, husky tone.

Blushing, Clarisse looked away and took a deep breath. “I’m lonely,” she finally whispered.

Sensing her nervousness, Joe hurriedly undressed then joined her. Gently turning her on her side, he caressed over her shoulder, down the curve of her hip, lifting her thigh over his. “I’ll never let you be lonely, Clarisse. Just promise to give me a chance to be more than just your guard. Promise that this won’t be a one time thing.”

Swallowing down the urge to tell him it could be nothing more, Clarisse followed her heart instead of her head for once in her life. “I can’t give you much, but I promise I’ll give you all that I can.”

Nuzzling her neck, Joe pressed closer gently rolling her onto her back, settling in the cradle of her thighs and pushing gently inside. “I love you, Clarisse. I love you.”

~*~

“Clarisse?” Jessica said the woman’s name softly, trying not to startle her.

Blinking and staring blankly at Jessica for a moment, Clarisse sighed and shook her head. “Yes?”

“Are you alright?”

“Oh Jessica,” she whispered.

“Why don’t we go sit under those trees. I’ve at least an hour before my meeting with Mr. Roarke.”

“You have a meeting with him, too?” Clarisse asked.

“Yes. Viki’s with him now.”

“What is going on?”

Jessica shook her head. “I don’t know. Right now, let’s concentrate on you. Hmm?”

Clarisse smiled at her new friend and nodded. “Fine then. The shade of those trees does seem inviting.”

Jessica led the way and settled onto the bench then smiled at Clarisse as she joined her. “Were you thinking of yesterday?”

“I was.”

“Was it everything you wanted it to be?”

“And more.” Clarisse answered quietly, her cheeks tingeing a bit.

“Oh.” Jessica’s eyebrows rose. “You mean,” but she didn’t finish the question.

“Yes. And Jessica it was,” Clarisse paused and bit her lip. “It was wonderful.” Tears filled her eyes. “He asked me to promise that it wouldn’t be a one time thing, and I promised to give him what I could, but it can never be like that for us as long as I am queen.”

“But the other ladies gave you the means to insure that it can be.” Jessica reached out and squeezed Clarisse’s hand. “Mr. Roarke gave me some advice that I think you could use as well.”

“What was that?”

“He told me to stop over analyzing everything, to just let myself enjoy my time here, that I would learn everything I needed to. And he was right. I told George that I love him in my fantasy, and when I leave here, I’m going to London to tell the real him.”

“But, Jessica, if we’re caught,” Clarisse started to argue.

Jessica interrupted, “No. If you love him, don’t continue to hold back. He’s the head of your security, Clarisse. From everything you’ve said about the man, he’s very good at his job. He knows every in and out of your world, your home. Let him use his knowledge to your advantage. Talk to him just like you did in the fantasy.” She stared off at the island children playing in the distance. “Don’t waste precious time, Clarisse. I had many happy years with my Frank by the time I lost him. It was very hard, but I don’t think I would have survived it if we hadn’t had those times, those years. Don’t let

your duty keep you from being with the man you love, not when he could be taken from you in the blink of an eye.”

“Thank you, Jessica.” Clarisse whispered as she looked toward the pool.

“Jessica, look.”

Jessica looked where Clarisse was pointing and felt her heart lurch at the look on their friend’s face. “Oh my.”

“Stephanie doesn’t look like things went well.”

“Out of all of us, she had the hardest fantasy.”

“I’ll go to her. You should be heading to your meeting with Mr. Roarke.”

“Viki and I hoped that we could all meet for dinner tonight.”

“I’d love to.” Clarisse stood. “I think we’re all going to need some girl time as my granddaughter would call it.”

“I think you’re right.”

Chapter 6

Notes:

Keep in mind that Stephanie's fantasy was different than the other women's. This chapter spans through the years of Stephanie's life as she finds out how Eric's turned out without her.

“When you step through that door, you’ll be as you were in college.”

“Young.” Stephanie whispered.

“Yes, Mrs. Forrester.” Roarke answered quietly, his voice gentle. “Are you sure this is what you want? I can’t change it or end it once you’ve walked inside.”

Swallowing down her nerves, Stephanie nodded. “I have to know, Mr. Roarke. I’ve lived with this all of our life together.”

“Fine then. I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Thank you.” Stephanie whispered, then frowned when she realized she was alone. Shaking her head, she took a deep breath. “Well, here goes.”

“Stephanie!” she heard as she stepped inside. Looking down, she blinked in surprise to see the blue dress she’d worn that day instead of her pant suit. “Wow,” she whispered.

“Steph! Over here!”

Smiling at her friend, Annabeth, she went over to her, catching sight of Eric out of the corner of her eye. He was every bit as handsome as he’d been the first time, but this time, she hadn’t paused and caught him looking at her so that they didn’t make the connection they’d made before. And she had no intention of doing anything to encourage him. This was about letting things play out as they would have if they’d never met that day at the party.

“Stephanie, I believe you know Clara and Iris.”

Stephanie nodded. “Hello. It’s been a while since I’ve seen the two of you. Down for the weekend?”

“AB invited us to the party and who were we to say no?” Iris giggled. “All these gorgeous guys. But I’m surprised to see you here. Usually freshman aren’t allowed.”

Stephanie smirked. “But what freshman are named Douglas?”

Clara laughed, “She has you there, Iris.”

Iris grinned. “Oh yeah. I forgot about that. Of course you being a knock out blonde doesn’t hurt.”

Stephanie rolled her eyes. “I’m not your type.”

Annabeth laughed when Iris spluttered. “She’s teasing, Iris.”

“Damn. That’s some sharp wit.” Iris finally managed, a grin on her face. “I think you need to bring her with you this summer, AB. She’ll make our trip even better.”

Stephanie shook her head. “While that sounds like fun, I’m afraid I can’t. My summer is committed to spending time with Massimo Marone in Italy.”

“Is he the man your father wants you to marry?”

“He’s the man I am going to marry. Father has said it will be, so therefore, it will be.” Stephanie shrugged. “Besides, Massimo has been my friend since we were children. And,” looking down at her handbag, she finished so quietly the others nearly didn’t hear her. “I love him.”

“So are you going to be allowed to finish school?”

“I’ve asked Massimo to let me even though Father says there is no use. We’ll see what happens. I may change my mind and decide not to.”

“Your father sounds,” Iris snarled her nose and shook her head, not sure how to finish her thought without hurting Stephanie’s feelings.

“Father just wants what’s best for me. And my marrying Massimo will be good for both of our families.”

“Have you, umm,” Clara asked quietly, blushing a bit.

“Yes.” Stephanie answered just as quietly. “But lets not talk about that here. I think a drink would be nice about now.”

“I think you’re right.” Annabeth agreed as they made their way to the drink table.

“Have you see the handsome male specimen over at the piano?” Clara asked as she chose what to drink.

“You mean the senior, Eric Forrester?” Annabeth asked.

“Yes.” Clara nodded. “I noticed him staring at Stephanie when she came in.”

“Oh?” Stephanie asked with a raised eyebrow before taking a sip of her drink. “I never noticed.”

“Well, he was just looking. He’s involved with Liz Henderson. Some say he’s going to ask her to marry him soon.”

“What is his major?” Iris asked as she studied the man. “He’s got a nice voice.”

“He’s an artist. His major is art and design. I’ve heard he wants to be a designer, but he’s here on scholarship and is struggling financially with that. His roommate, Jonathan, is dating my roommate, Daisy. Seems Mr. Forrester is working three jobs on top of doing his school work.”

“Then why did he hook up with Liz Henderson? She’s got nothing. He’d be better off with Stephanie here.”

“Oh no.” Stephanie quickly denied. “I’m with Massimo, thank you. Besides, Mr. Forrester looks like he’s a playboy.”

“Not from what Daisy has said. Seems he notices women, but only because he wants to design clothing for them. Jonathan says he’s completely faithful to Liz.”

Stephanie swallowed to try and control her reaction to that. “Enough of that. You girls need to find someone that’s not taken.”

“I’m not looking for anyone.” Annabeth smiled. “Tony wouldn’t like it.”

Stephanie smiled at her friend, knowing what she didn’t. Annabeth and Tony had gone on to marry and were still very happy with each other, all of their grandchildren running about and filling their house with their happiness. “I’m sure he wouldn’t.”

“Well, Iris and I aren’t so lucky.” Clara pouted.

“Oh don’t pout.” Stephanie laughed. “How about that one over there?” she asked as she pointed to James Calton, the man she knew Clara had met at this party and fell in love with. “He’s just broken up with his girlfriend and is in need of some cheering up. I think you could be just what he needs.”

Clara raised an eyebrow. “Really? You think I should be a rebound?”

“No. Be a friend to the poor guy.”

Annabeth nodded. “He’s a really good guy, Clara. What that witch did to him was awful. Go on. Introduce yourself.” She nudged the girl.

“And what about me?” Iris asked.

“That one over there.” Stephanie pointed to Carl, the man she knew Iris married and had many wonderful years with until she passed away only three short years ago.

“Carl?” Annabeth asked then nodded. “She’s right. He’s perfect for you. He’s a bit shy, but he’s very smart, and has a wonderful sense of humor. He’s also from a very well off family.”

“Is that how you know him, Stephanie?”

“It is. His father has done business with mine from time to time.” Stephanie smiled at her friend as they watched Iris make her way through the crowd.

“That just leaves the two of us. I still don’t know why I came. Mass will be furious.”

“I’d say he already is.” Annabeth murmured as she nodded toward the door.

“Oh my.” Stephanie breathed. “I’d better go take care of that.”

“I believe you’re right. I wouldn’t want him ruining the party.”

“I won’t let him. I promise. I’ll probably just leave with him. Meet me for lunch tomorrow?”

“I’ll bring the girls if that’s alright. They can tell us about James and Carl.”

Stephanie nodded. “I’ll see you at one then,” she called over her shoulder as she made her way to Massimo. This was turning out to be a very surreal experience.

~*~

“Massimo.” Stephanie called as she came into the living room of their penthouse.

“I’m in the study, Cara.”

“Come out here for a moment.” Stephanie called back. She had news and she didn’t want to tell him while he was working.

Massimo came out and frowned at her. “What is it? You couldn’t have come into the study?”

“I have something to tell you and I didn’t want to do it where you could be distracted with work.”

“Well?” Massimo asked, softening as he moved to take her in his arms.
“What is it, Cara?”

“A baby,” she whispered.

“Baby?” Massimo asked as he pushed her back and stared down at her.

Stephanie nodded and smiled at the look on his face. “Are you alright?”

Massimo shook his head. “Shouldn’t I be asking you that?”

“I’m fine, Mass. I’m just very happy that I didn’t find this out until after we were married. Father would have killed us.”

Massimo laughed and pulled her to him. “I can handle your father. Oh Cara,” he whispered as he caressed her face. “I’m so happy. I’ll take you on a trip to celebrate. Anywhere you want to go.”

“On the yacht? Maybe just sail around the coast for a few days.” Stephanie sighed as she settled her head against his shoulder.

“Cara, what is it?” Massimo asked having heard the melancholy in her voice.

“Nothing. Just hormones, Mass,” she lied easily. She’d read of Eric’s marriage to Liz Henderson. She’d been shocked they hadn’t married when he graduated, but now they had, and the picture that had been published with the announcement had shown a very happy couple.

“Can you take the trip? Will you be alright?”

“I’ll be fine. I’m not fragile, Mass.” Stephanie assured him, holding him a bit tighter. She may not be in love with him, had never been in love with

him, but he had always been her friend, and the comfort of his arms was what she needed at the moment.

“I ran into an old classmate today.”

“Oh?”

“Yes. Eric Forrester. Do you remember him? He was in some of my classes, graduated the same year I did.”

“Played the piano, always had the girls swooning at parties, was dating Liz Henderson?”

“Yes, that’s him.”

Stephanie pulled out of their embrace and walked over to the small bar. “I didn’t realize the two of you were friends,” she commented as she poured herself a bit of soda water.

“We weren’t necessarily.”

“What did he want?”

“He was wondering if I could recommend him for a position in the company. He’s looking for a good paying job to help him earn enough to start a fashion house of his own. It would seem Liz’ catering business isn’t bringing in a lot of money and he’s still working three jobs.”

“If I remember correctly, the man was a very talented artist.”

“He is. I gave him the name of a friend that could use a man with Eric’s talents. It’s better than putting him behind a desk doing something he doesn’t enjoy.”

“I’m sure he was very appreciative.”

“He was.” Massimo agreed. “Now, why don’t you rest while I finish the rest of the business you interrupted earlier and then I’ll call and have the crew get the yacht ready for us to leave early tomorrow morning. We can go out to dinner tonight to celebrate our news.”

“I am rather tired. A nap sounds wonderful. You do realize I’m going to be napping a lot the next few months.”

“Whatever is good for you,” he whispered as he kissed her gently. “I love you, Cara.”

“I love you too, Mass.”

~*~

“This dress is beautiful, Mass.” Stephanie told her husband as she came down the stairs of their Italian villa. She knew who the designer was, though the fashion house it had been purchased from didn’t bear his name.

“You make it beautiful, Cara.” Massimo smiled at her as he held out his hand. “Ridge’s fiancée is going to be hard pressed to outshine her future mother-in-law.”

“Oh Mass. She’s young, that gives her the advantage.” Stephanie whispered with a smile as she squeezed his hand.

“We know the designer of your dress.”

“Oh?”

“Eric Forrester. Seems he’s the lead designer for that particular fashion house.”

“Not his own fashion house, but still,” Stephanie smoothed her hand over the dress. “It is the premier fashion house of Paris at the moment. I’m sure Liz is enjoying the life.”

Massimo shook his head. “She left him.”

“What?” Stephanie asked a bit startled by the news.

“Seems she didn’t like how much time he was spending on his work. From what I’ve heard, she found herself another man.”

“Poor Eric.”

Massimo nodded. “I can’t imagine losing you. I know I’m busy a lot, but you’ve always been very understanding.”

“You love your business, Mass, and you’ve provided well for me and our son. I can’t complain.”

Caressing her cheek, Massimo studied her. “Have you been happy all these years, Cara?”

“You know that I have,” she answered, though she hadn’t been as happy as she had been in the good times with Eric, but she couldn’t think about that. What she knew was that Mass loved her and had never once cheated on her.

“Our anniversary is coming up soon. Where would you like to go?”

“On the yacht.”

“You love being on the water.”

“I do. It’s peaceful. Just take me sailing, Mass. That’s all I want.”

“Then that’s what we’ll do.”

“Promise no work this time.”

Massimo laughed and nodded. “I promise, Cara. I’ll tell Carter that I’m not to be bothered unless it’s an emergency.”

Stephanie nodded. “Then come on, Mass. We have a party to go to.”

~*~

“Hello, Mrs. Marone.” Eric greeted her with a smile, his hand out for her to shake.

Stephanie steadied herself as she reached out to take his hand. “Hello, Mr. Forrester. I’m surprised to see you here.”

“I wasn’t going to come, but Massimo insisted. He said that I needed to get out and meet some new people.” Eric shrugged. “I’m not really good at parties.”

“Oh? I seem to recall you were always the highlight of the parties when we were in college. The girls were always following you about or gathered around the piano listening to you play and sing.”

Eric shook his head. “That was too many years ago to think about.”

“You’re not that old, Mr. Forrester.”

“It’s Eric. And I’m not that young, either.”

Stephanie shook her head and smiled. “I wanted to thank you for the beautiful dress you designed for me for my son’s wedding. And this dress, they’re both wonderful.”

“I’m glad you like them.” Eric smiled at her. “I see Massimo signaling me to tell you he wants you.”

Stephanie laughed, “He’s probably been cornered by Elsa Hanley.”

“Tall woman, hideously red hair piled on top of her head?”

“Yes, that’s her.” Stephanie shook her head. “There are some lovely ladies here, Mr. Forrester, maybe go play a bit on the piano like you did when we were young.” She winked at him before turning and making her way to Massimo.

~*~

“Stephanie?” Clarisse whispered the woman’s name as she reached out and touched the woman’s arm.

Stephanie started then looked up at Clarisse, wiping her eyes. “Clarisse,” she whispered.

“What is it? Has something happened?”

Stephanie laughed hollowly. “I came here to learn if Eric would have been better off without me and,”

“And? He was? Is that why you’re upset?”

Stephanie shook her head. “I lived my life over again. I married the man my father wanted me to, we had a child together, a lovely life. But...he wasn’t Eric.”

“And what about Eric?”

“He married his college sweetheart, the one he always regretted not being with, but they had no children. He never became a internationally recognized designer with his own fashion house. He was designing for another fashion house. And his wife left him.”

“I don’t understand why you’re upset then. Doesn’t that prove that you should go home and fight for him?”

Stephanie looked down at her hands. “He was faithful to her,” she whispered. “He never cheated. She was the one who cheated.”

Clarisse arched an eyebrow at that. She could understand how learning that would hurt. “I’m so sorry, Stephanie. So, what are you going to do?”

“I don’t know.” Stephanie whispered. “I just don’t know.”

“Do you love him?”

“I always have. Ever since I saw him staring at me across a crowded room. We were at a Frat Party. I had been invited even though I was only a freshman. My last name got me invited to a lot of parties most freshmen weren’t allowed at. Money talks.”

“Yes, it does.” Clarisse sighed. “I see that every day in trade negotiations. Blasted politicians.”

Stephanie chuckled a bit at that. “I’m sure you grow weary of it. I know I grew weary of everyone wanting to be my friend just because of my name.”

“But what about Eric?”

Stephanie closed her eyes. “I suppose my name had influence over him as well. After all, it was the money my father gave us that started Forrester Creations. Eric never would have married me if I hadn’t been pregnant,” she whispered, not bothering to go into the fact that the baby hadn’t been Eric’s.

“But that’s all in the past. Do you love him now, not just the memory of him?”

“I love him.” Tears rolled down her cheeks. “I can’t help myself. He gave me something, and still gives it to me, that no one else ever had or has.”

“And what was that?”

“Safety.” Stephanie answered then sighed, “There’s so much you don’t know about me, Clarisse. So very much.”

“If you love him, no matter what happened in your fantasy, fight for him.”

“I don’t know if I have the strength to. There’s something wrong with me if he never cheated on her. Maybe someone who’s been through what I have, can’t ever have a faithful love. Maybe I’m too damaged.”

“I don’t believe that, Stephanie.” Clarisse sighed when she looked at her watch. “I hate to leave you, but I need to start making my way toward the main house. Mr. Roarke said that he had something he needed to talk to me about.”

“He wanted to see me, too.” Stephanie looked at her watch. “I’m to meet him in about an hour.”

Clarisse shook her head. “Something odd is going on. He’s wanted to see all of us. Jessica was going to her meeting when we spotted you.”

Stephanie frowned. “Do you get the feeling that Mr. Roarke is,” she paused, trying to find the right word.

“I get the feeling Mr. Roarke is more than we can ever figure out.” Clarisse finished for her. “Now, I’ve really got to be going. I’ll see you at dinner, alright? Maybe with the other two, we can help you.” She winked. “Even if it’s just listening to our fantasies. You’d be amazed at what happened with me.”

Stephanie raised an eyebrow. “You didn’t?” she breathed.

“I did.” Clarisse laughed.

Stephanie watched the queen walk away and shook her head. Maybe she was right. Maybe hearing the other women’s fantasies would at least distract her. As for help, well, she wasn’t sure there was anything that could help her make a decision.

Chapter 7

Notes:

This chapter is shorter than the others but well...

“What is it, Tattoo?” Roarke looked at his assistant, an eyebrow raised as he waited for a response.

“Why didn’t you tell Mrs. Davidson everything before her fantasy?”

“I wasn’t supposed to. Everything was set up by Mr. Buchanan to happen just the way it has.”

“Well why did he do it this way? If Mrs. Davidson loved his son so much, why make her wait?”

Roarke smiled at his curious friend. “Do you remember when Mrs. Buchanan came to us? When she brought her son here?”

“Yes, Boss. He was close to death. She told us they’d said he was dead at the hospital and was going to give his heart to his wife.” Tattoo frowned at the thought.

“Yes my dear friend, that’s right. She begged me to help Mr. Davidson. Offered to pay me anything I asked.”

“And you said you wouldn’t do it unless she told you the reason.”

“That’s right.”

“She told you how she’d given him up for adoption and how she’d only just found him five years before only she didn’t know that he was her son until two years after.”

“And her heart had been broken by a con man pretending to be her son the years in between.”

Tattoo nodded. “That’s when you agreed.”

“It was indeed, my friend.”

“But I still don’t understand why Mrs. Davidson had to wait so long.”

“This part you don’t know because you weren’t here the day Mr. Buchanan came to see me.” Roarke picked up his pipe and lit it, take a puff or two before continuing. “He asked that I not tell Mrs. Davidson until I thought it was an appropriate time, until his son was truly well.”

Tattoo’s eyes widened. “You’ve been spying on her?”

“Tattoo!” Roarke growled. “Of course not. I’ve just kept track of what was going on in her life so that I could fulfill Mr. Buchanan’s request.”

Tattoo wasn’t sure how that was different, but who was he to question the boss? “Sure, Boss.”

Roarke nodded and took a puff on his pipe. “Mrs. Davidson remarried which kept me from telling her that Mr. Davidson had recovered fully. The

marriage was troubled and didn't last long and she's been very sad. I felt the time was right to fulfill my obligation."

"Do you think she'll be angry?"

Roarke smiled and turned in his chair to look out the window. "No, Tattoo, I don't think she will." Seeing Jessica coming up the walk, he turned back to his assistant. "Go let Mrs. Fletcher in."

"Yes, Boss."

~*~

Viki stared at the dvd in her hand and the letter attached to it. She recognized the handwriting, would recognize it anywhere.

Asa.

Mr. Roarke had told her that he'd been given these six years ago which made no sense. Asa had been gone for five years, and she had no clue how Asa knew about Mr. Roarke and Fantasy Island. This wasn't his type of thing. He was all cowboy, oil baron. No fairytale endings or unexplained fantasies.

But, here she sat, the evidence of his acquaintance with Mr. Roarke in her hands.

"Just put it in the player, Victoria," she scolded herself.

Laying the letter down, she stood up and walked over to the tv, turning it on before putting the disc into the player. Taking a deep breath, she backed up a bit before hitting the play button on the remote.

“Hello, Darlin’.” Asa’s booming voice echoed in the room around her. “I know you’re probably wonderin’ what in the world is that old coot up to now.” He winked at her.

Viki chuckled, “Yes, I am.”

“Well, Darlin’, if you aren’t sitting down,” he paused and looked down at his hands. “You’d better.”

Viki swallowed at that, his actions making her more nervous than his words. “Oh Asa, what did you do?”

“You’re sayin’, “Oh Asa, what did you do?” But this time, Darlin’, it wasn’t me. I know you’re probably confused and yelling at me to get on with it, so here it is. When you needed a heart transplant, and were talked into takin’ Ben’s,” he paused and stared at her through the screen. “Ah, don’t look at me like that. I know that you didn’t want to take his heart and that you were talked into it by the family and that she-devil, Dorian. What you don’t know, is that I had been on the phone trying to get you a heart. I was willing to pay any amount asked. I had a callback, but it was too late, they were already prepping you for surgery. As I was explaining to the man that I no longer needed the heart, a nurse came rushing by crazy as she could be. When I realized she’d been one of the nurses I’d seen goin’ into Ben’s room to get him ready for surgery, I asked the man I was talking to on the phone to hold and stopped the girl. She didn’t want to tell me anything, but you know how I am.”

“Oh yes I do.” Viki mumbled, wondering where this was going.

Asa smirked. “I know, Darlin’. Anyway, she finally gave in and told me that Ben was missin’.”

Viki’s eyes widened as she stared at Asa. Her hand went to her heart, its rhythm steady and strong. “But if Ben was missing,” she started then stopped when Asa continued.

“They couldn’t find him, Sweetheart,” he whispered as he looked at her. “I told the man I had on the phone that we needed the heart after all. I know you don’t like that sort of thing, but we were desperate, Viki. You were my daughter-in-law, my grandchildren’s mother, and my wife’s best friend. I had to do what I had to do. And yes, I know, I should have told you. But,” he shook his head. “I was afraid to. I was afraid of what it would do to you. Those first weeks, and even years after the transplant, were so tricky with your health, I just made the decision not to ever tell you.”

“Damn it, Asa!” Viki nearly screamed as she threw the remote. “Controlling my life once again!”

“Calm down now.” Asa told her quietly as though he was there. “Let me finish. Renee had been making frequent trips out of town, of course being busy with BE, I didn’t pay attention to it. I just thought it was to get away because of how much she was missing Ben. But the trips kept getting longer, and then I got sick. When the doctors told me I had run out of time, I decided to follow Renee on one of her trips.” Taking a drink of the bourbon sitting next to him, Asa looked up and held Viki’s gaze through the video. “I found her where you are now. In that same room. She was angry with me for following her, but when I told her why, she broke down and confessed.” He stopped to take another drink then continued, “Viki, she was the reason Ben was missing. She paid for him to be whisked away from the hospital. She loves you, but she’d spent so many years without her son, that she just couldn’t let him go like that. She knew that I’d been looking for a heart, and well, she trusted that I’d get my way like I always did. Don’t hate her, Sweetheart. Remember how you felt with Megan.”

“Oh Asa, I don’t hate her.” Viki whispered and wiped at her eyes. “But why was she here?”

“You’re asking why she was here, well, I asked the same thing. I knew about the island, and I’d heard the stories about the man that owns it, but you know me. That was all hogwash. Except...it isn’t. Renee brought Ben here, knowing that no one would ever find him. There’s something about this island, something about Mr. Roarke. Renee took me to see Ben.” Asa smiled. “Look behind you, Darlin’.”

Viki gasped and turned around, stumbling back into the tv. “Oh my god,” she breathed, her heart pounding in her chest.

“Hello, Blondie.”

Chapter 8

“Did you learn all that you needed to, Mrs. Fletcher?” Roarke asked as he looked at her over his desk.

Jessica smiled and nodded. “I did, but I suspect you already knew the answer.”

Roarke raised an eyebrow at her. “Oh? How do you come to that conclusion?”

“Mr. Roarke.” Jessica shook her head at him. “I’m not going to ask questions that invade the mystery you’ve created around this island and yourself, but don’t try to fool me.”

Roarke laughed and nodded. “Fine then, Mrs. Fletcher. Yes, I did know the answer. Pardon me for not remembering who I am dealing with.”

Jessica nodded and smiled. “No need to apologize. Now, what did you need to see me about?”

“That.” Roarke told her as he nodded behind her.

Jessica turned and gasped. “George? What in the world?”

“Hello, Lass.”

“I don’t think I understand.” Jessica whispered as she turned to look at Roarke.

“He’ll explain everything, Mrs. Fletcher.”

George held out his hand. “Come take a walk with me, Jessie.”

~*~

Jessica stared out over the water. “I don’t understand, George. How,” she bit her lip, frustrated at the catch in her voice. “How could you do this? I,”

“You what? Never would have done what you did had you known it was me?” George asked, a bit of anger tingeing his voice.

Jessica blinked at the tone of his voice. She heard the anger, but she also heard the hurt which made her feel ashamed of herself. “I’m sorry, George.”

George sighed, “And I’m sorry too, Lass.”

Turning to look up at him, Jessica reached out to cup his cheek. “Now that I know it was you, I don’t take anything back.”

Covering her hand with his, George pulled her closer with his free hand. “I’m glad, Jessie. I didn’t know that it was really you until after the fantasy had started.”

“You didn’t?”

“No.”

“So you came here for you own answers?”

“Not exactly.”

Settling her head against his chest, Jessica sighed, “What do you mean?”

“I came to have a fantasy where you, well,” George paused and shrugged when she looked up at him. “What I came for is exactly what happened.”

Jessica blinked in surprise. “Really?”

“Yes,” he answered, his voice low as he smoothed her hair where it had gotten mussed from leaning against him. Cupping her face, he leaned down to capture her lips with his. They were in an area that was secluded enough that he knew no one would see them, not that being seen kissing the woman he loved would bother him, but it might bother her.

Jessica hummed as she gripped the sleeves of his shirt and lost herself in the kiss. Feeling her knees grow weak, she pulled back and took a deep breath. “Oh.”

“Mmm.” George murmured as stared down into her sparkling blue eyes.

“George?” Jessica finally managed to speak.

“Yes, Lass?”

“Come with me.” She held out her hand, smiling when he winked at her and took it. “We’ve a few hours before I have to meet friends for dinner and I can think of a more comfortable place to continue this discussion.”

“Dinner with friends?” George asked as he walked alongside her.

“There are three other ladies here that Mr. Roarke introduced me to. We are all here for similar reasons.”

George raised an eyebrow. “Men?”

Jessica laughed and nodded. “Men.”

Following her into her bungalow, George pulled her close after she closed the door. “Now what do we do?”

Jessica winked as she wrapped her arms around him. “Pick up where we left off last night?”

George nodded and lifted her into his arms causing her to nearly squeal, “George!”

~*~

Jessica hummed as she settled her head against George’s chest, her body stretched out along his on the sofa. “Now I understand why I have such a large sofa.”

George chuckled and gently squeezed her. Nuzzling his nose in her hair, he sighed, “I rather like this. I enjoyed last night, but we’ve more room now.”

“And just why do we need more room, George Sutherland?”

“Now see here, Lass, I,” George started to defend himself then noticed the twinkle in her eyes when she looked up at him. “Jessie Fletcher!” he scolded before pulling her into a heated kiss.

Jessica gripped his shoulders as her head began to spin from the kiss. Gasping for breath when he broke away, she blinked up at him. “George,” she panted.

George grinned as he caressed a hand over the curve of her hip. “Yes, Lass?” he asked innocently.

“Oh,” she huffed and smacked his chest before snuggling her head under his chin.

“I really do like this. It’s nice holding you.” George caressed her back. “Now, tell me about these ladies you’re to meet for dinner.”

“Well, now that I know you’re here, I’m taking you with me.”

“Oh no, Lass. I wouldn’t want to intrude on your dinner. I’ll be just fine waiting for you.”

Jessica nodded. “Well, then I’ll just tell you about them. There is Viki Davidson, she owns and publishes a newspaper in Pennsylvania.”

“Why does the name sound familiar?”

“She’s written a book.”

George nodded. “A Survivor’s Story. You have it in your collection.”

“I do, and I cried when I read it. I didn’t mention to her that I’d read her book. I’ll have to do that tonight at dinner.”

“You cried? What is the book about?”

“Her battle with breast cancer.”

“Oh.” George rubbed Jessica’s shoulder. “Tell me about the other two ladies,” he asked to change the subject to something less sad.

“Believe it or not, you’ve heard of this lady as well.”

“Oh?”

Jessica nodded. “Her name is Clarisse Renaldi, Queen of Genovia.”

George blinked in surprise. “Her Head of Security is Joseph Elizaldo. We’ve coordinated with him on a couple of occasions when she’s visited London for an event.”

“Impressive, Mr. Inspector, Sir.”

“Oh.” George nudged her and pecked her on the cheek. “Now, the other lady.”

“Is Stephanie Forrester.”

“Forrester.” George said the name and frowned. “I know that name.”

“You should. You wanted to buy me one of their dresses.” Jessica blushed when she thought of what else they’d seen that day.

George recalled that day and grinned when he saw the blush on Jessica’s cheeks. “I remember now. Seems there was something else that we saw that day.”

“George.” Jessica hissed as she blushed again.

“Some day, Lass,” he whispered. “Some day.”

“It’s going to be a long time before you see my in anything like that. If you ever see me in anything like that. Goodness.”

“If you’re thinking you’re too old, you’re not.” George scolded gently. “All in good time, Lass.”

“Maybe we’ll just stay with a dress from Forrester.”

“I’d like that. From what we saw that day, the man is a genius when it comes to dressing women.”

“So it would seem.”

“I know that the queen has blonde hair, which is something the two of you have in common. And Viki is a writer, but, what could you possibly have in common with Forrester’s wife?”

“For starters, Stephanie isn’t his wife, she’s his ex. And, Viki also has blonde hair. We all would be blondes if it had been a few years ago according to Stephanie.” Jessica laughed a bit. “Believe it or not, we all have several things in common. We all have blue eyes. We’ve been shot at or in two cases, shot. Three of us are widows. Two of us have been divorced and remarried and had husbands cheat. We’re all here because we need help with our relationships with the men in our lives, though in Viki’s case it isn’t the man in her life now, it’s her late husband.”

George frowned down at her. “Now, Jessie, don’t tell me the woman is being haunted.”

Jessica laughed and shook her head. “No, George. Heavens.” She laughed again then cleared her throat. “She’s missing him and yesterday would have been their anniversary.”

“And she wanted to spend one more day with him.”

“Yes.” She nodded.

“That must be very hard for her.”

“She’s struggling, yes. Though I talked to her this morning at breakfast and the fantasy helped her.” Jessica yawned. “Excuse me.”

“Why don’t you rest?” George suggested as he settled her against him again. “We’ve both had a long day.”

“Mmm, sounds lovely.”

“You are lovely.”

“You say the sweetest things.”

“I love you, Lass.” George whispered as he kissed her head.

“Mmm, that’s a good thing. I love you, too.”

Chapter 9

“Joseph? What in the world are you doing here?” Clarisse stared at her Head of Security in total surprise. “Surely my bodyguard didn’t feel the need to call you after Mr. Roarke assured him I was perfectly safe.”

Joe shook his head. “He did call me, but that isn’t why I’m here.”

Clarisse felt anger rising at the impertinence of the young man who had been sent to guard her. “I know that I angered you, Joseph, but did you have to send such a,” she shook her head and took a deep breath to calm herself. “Just explain why you are here. I would like to rest before dinner.”

“I’ve been here the entire time, Your Majesty.”

Clarisse blinked in surprise. “What?”

“I arrived shortly after you.”

“I don’t understand. Explain, please.”

Joe could hear the controlled anger in her command and sighed, this wasn’t how things were supposed to go. “I had a wish of my own, Your Majesty. I didn’t send the idiot along as your guard to punish you. I really had no idea he would act that way. He’s been taken care of and will no longer be a problem.”

“Fine. That still doesn’t explain your presence. You said you had a wish of your own.”

“I did. And I lived it yesterday and last night.”

Clarisse stared at him in confusion. “You did? And what was your wish?”

“The same as yours, my queen.”

Finally understanding what he meant, Clarisse’s eyes widened as she realized that the man she’d been with last night wasn’t a fantasy. “It was you,” she breathed.

“Yes. It was me.”

“I don’t understand. How could you,” she started then turned away and stared out the window. “Why didn’t you tell me it was you before,”

“Before I made love to you?” he finished for her.

“Yes. How could you do that, Joseph? I don’t understand.”

“I had intended to tell you at the end of the night, but then things went beyond what I expected. I never dreamed you would allow me to make love to you. I should have told you before, but I was so lost in the feel of you that,” he shrugged. “I have no excuse, Your Majesty. I’ll hand my resignation in as soon as I’ve seen you safely home.” Seeing no reaction, Joe turned to leave.

Clarisse heard the door close and let her forehead bump against the glass.

“This isn’t at all how it was supposed to be,” she whispered.

“Why are you angry, Your Majesty?”

Clarisse started at the deep, resonant voice of her host. Turning to see the man standing beside her, she vaguely wondered how he managed to get in. “Mr. Roarke,” she breathed.

“Sorry to have startled you.”

“No need to apologize.”

“You haven’t answered my question.”

“I never would have,”

“Never would have made love with him if you’d known it wasn’t a fantasy? But what about the promise you made? Was that not a promise you made in your heart to the real Joseph?”

Clarisse blinked in surprise as she stared up at the man that always seemed to know everything. “I,”

“Go. He’s in his cottage.”

Clarisse smiled and nodded. “Thank you, Mr. Roarke.”

~*~

Joe sighed as he stared out the window. His bags were packed, and he’d thought about going to talk to one of the men he’d met two days before, one of which seemed to be in nearly the same situation, but he’d decided against it for the moment.

Why must women be so damned stubborn? How had Clarisse thought he would be able to keep enough of his wits about him when she was offering him her body, kissing him, touching him?

Of course he was to blame. He had enough training, he should have held onto his control and wits, and told her the truth.

He knew that it would have stopped their love making.

Ah, there it was. The truth of it all.

She'd have pushed him away again.

His subconscious mind had known this.

“Damn it all.”

“Joseph?” Clarisse broke into his frustrated thoughts.

“I beg your pardon, Your Majesty. I didn't realize you were here or I would have held my tongue.”

“I've heard you curse before, Joseph, no need to apologize.” Clarisse told him quietly. “I'm the one that should be apologizing.”

Joe stared at her blankly, not fully understanding what she could possibly be talking about. She'd been angry at him, and now she was apologizing.

“I can see you're confused.” Clarisse told him, a small smile on her face. “We women have a way of doing that to the men in our lives.”

“Am I the man in your life?”

“You are.” Clarisse nodded as she moved to stand in front of him. Resting a hand on his chest, she looked up at him. “Mr. Roarke reminded me of the promise I made.”

“The promise that you would give me what you could?”

“Yes,” she answered quietly. “He reminded me that as I was saying the promise aloud, I was also making it in my heart.”

Joe’s anger left him as he pulled her into his arms. “Do you mean it, Clarisse?”

Clarisse nodded. “The ladies suggested that I use your position to our advantage.”

“Ladies?”

“The ladies Mr. Roarke introduced me to the day I arrived. We had dinner and then breakfast together. It’s amazing how much the four of us have in common. I’m to have dinner with them tonight. Would you like to come?”

Joe smiled and shook his head. “No. You go and enjoy your time with them, so long as you promise to come back to me.”

“I promise.” She smiled as she caressed his cheek. “We should take advantage of our time here. Mr. Roarke is very good at being discreet.”

“Yes, he is. And we will be too. Your new friends were right to suggest using my position to our advantage. Remember that there are secret passage ways between our rooms.”

“And because there are guards always outside mine,” she smiled.

“Exactly.” Joe returned her smile. “We’ll make it work, Clarisse. For as long as we need to. We’ll make it work.”

Clarisse nodded and settled against his chest. “There are still a few hours before dinner.”

“Yes, there are.”

“What do you suggest we do with them?”

“Maybe you could tell me about the ladies you met. They sound like very smart women.”

Clarisse looked up at him and nodded. “They are. We have a lot in common, most notably our hair and eye color.”

“Oh?”

“Uh hum. We’re all blue eyed, and three of us are blonde. The other was a blonde before she let her hair go white.”

“And what else do you have in common?” Joe asked as he led them to the sofa, settling down with her snuggled against him.

“Well, we’re all strong women. Three of us have been widowed. We’ve all been shot at, two of us have even been shot. Three of us have children. Hmm,” she paused then continued. “While I run a country, one of the other ladies runs the business her father left her. And while it’s not on the same scale, she’s still responsible for the well being of her employees.”

“True. What else?”

“I believe you’ve heard of Stephanie Forrester.”

“The woman behind Eric Forrester?”

“Yes. She’s the brains of the business.”

“While he’s the artist.”

“Yes. And you might know of Jessica Fletcher.”

“The writer?”

“Yes. She’s involved with an inspector from Scotland Yard.”

“What’s his name? You know that we’ve worked with them in the past.”

“George is all that I know.”

“I wonder if the last name is Sutherland?”

Clarisse shook her head. “I’ll ask tonight at dinner.”

“And what is the other lady’s name?”

“You won’t know of her. She’s Victoria Lord Davidson.”

Joe blinked as he thought for a moment. “Her father was Victor Lord. Newspaper owner.”

“You knew him and her?”

“Of them anyway. He wasn’t a man I cared for, but when it came to news, he knew what he was doing and was always press we could trust. He happened to be in Europe at the time of your wedding and was invited to be one of the few from the press allowed. I’m sure if Mrs. Davidson went back in the archives, she’d find the story.”

“She did mention having had a few stories printed about us. She might have even been there with him. She told me that she’d only printed one story during that whole mess with Mia. Viki said that she would print the unsubstantiated rumors. It seems she learned well from her father.”

Joe nodded. “You said two of the ladies had been shot.”

“Yes. Stephanie and Viki.”

“Why would a designer’s wife have been shot?”

“I didn’t ask either of them. Jessica said she’d been shot at, but we both know why in her case.”

Joe couldn’t help but chuckle at that. “She does seem to get involved in an inordinate amount of murders.”

“Yes, she does. It’s almost as if they follow her.”

“If you stop and think, Mrs. Davidson being shot at makes sense as well. I’m sure she’s upset her fair share of people since she sounds like she’s every bit the reporter her father was. It’s just Mrs. Forrester that doesn’t make any sense.”

Clarisse shrugged. “Maybe I’ll ask tonight,” she told him then yawned.

“Why don’t you rest a bit? I’ll wake you in time to change for dinner.”

“I could do with a bit of a nap. Someone kept me up late.”

Joe laughed and kissed the top of her head. “Rest well.”

“Thank you.” She snuggled closer. “I will.”

Chapter 10

“Hello, Stephanie.” Eric greeted her the moment she stepped inside Mr. Roarke’s office.

Stephanie frowned as she looked from Eric to Mr. Roarke. “Why is he here?”

“He’s been here the whole time, Mrs. Forrester.” Roarke informed her.

“What?” she asked then turned her attention to Eric. “Why?”

“Because I needed answers, too, Stephanie.” Eric answered her.

“Answers? Answers so that you would know it’s always been my fault? So that you wouldn’t feel any guilt leaving me?” Stephanie sighed and looked away from him. “It’s fine, Eric. I only wanted to know how your life would have been if I’d left you alone. I know now. I also know your cheating has always been my fault. I’m not going to bother you anymore. As soon as I get home, I’ll pack and leave. Maybe I’ll come back here for a while. It’s quiet and I think I’ll need that. That is, if Mr. Roarke doesn’t mind.”

“I don’t mind, Mrs. Forrester. Many people come here for quiet. I think you should let Mr. Forrester explain his presence a bit more before you make any decisions.”

Stephanie turned back to Eric. “What else is there to explain?”

“Just that I was there with you in your fantasy. From beginning to end. I noticed you come in, just as I did all those years ago, but when I tried to get your attention, you turned away and went with your friends.”

“It’s what I should have done then.”

“And what? Lived your life as Massimo Marone’s trophy?” Eric scowled.

“Mass loved me, would have been very good to me. We would have raised our son together. I would have been happy.”

“Happy with just settling for being nothing more than his wife? You forget how well I know you, Stephanie. You never would have been happy not using your business acumen. You’re too brilliant at what you do to have just been on the sidelines. He didn’t even let you plan parties, something you can do better than any professional he could have ever hired.”

“I was only that person with you, Eric. I had to be.” Stephanie whispered.

“Because all I was ever good at was designing. You’re right,” Eric told her. “You did have to be that person, but you can’t deny that you enjoyed it. You enjoyed having that power and control.”

Stephanie stared up at Eric, hurt in her eyes. “I suppose I did enjoy the power and control. That was always my problem wasn’t it? But I never seemed to have control or power outside of the company. If I had,” she shook her head.

“I’m sorry, Stephanie. I didn’t mean to hurt you.”

“Oh, but didn’t you, Eric? Isn’t that what it’s always been about? I came into your perfect little world, stole you away from Liz, and passed another man’s baby off as yours, and then it was my father’s money and my business sense that gave you the opportunity for the world to see your talent. Deep down you’ve hated me all of these years, and everything you’ve ever done was designed to hurt me in the only way you could...cheating.” Sighing, she turned away. “It’s alright, really. I understand. I was too controlling with you, our children. What my father did to me is no excuse.” Taking a deep breath to steady her trembling voice, Stephanie turned back to face him. “Go home, Eric. Go be with Jackie. I’m not going to fight.”

Eric shook his head as he walked over to Stephanie and gripped her shoulders. “I’ve never hated you, Stephanie.”

“Oh?”

“Never. I was wrong to always say how my life would have been better with Liz.” Cupping her face, Eric caressed her cheeks. “It wouldn’t have, Stephanie. You saw what happened.”

“Yes, I did.”

“Then you know that I was always supposed to be with you.”

“Do I? All I know is that you didn’t cheat on her.”

Eric sighed and let her go. “How do you know it’s Jackie?”

“What?” Stephanie asked, confused at the change of subject.

“You told me to go home to Jackie.”

“Who else would it be? Unless you’ve found a new one. Or have you gone back to Donna?” Stephanie shook her head. “I don’t want to know. I still don’t understand why you came here. You’re angry with me. Why would you care one way or the other about how things would have been?”

“I’m not angry, Stephanie. I was never really angry with you. I was angry at myself.”

“Angry at yourself?”

Eric nodded and pulled her into his arms. “I welcomed you home, I promised, and then I found myself doing what I always had. We argued and I turned to another woman. Yes, it was Jackie. We didn’t do anything other than talk, but I shouldn’t have gone to her. I should have stayed and worked it out with you.”

Stephanie felt herself relaxing against him. His embrace was never something she could refuse, no matter how angry or hurt she was. He was safe. Even when he was hurting her, he was safe.

“I’m sorry, Stephanie. So very sorry for all of the years I hurt you pining away for a woman I never would have been happy with.” Nuzzling her neck, Eric pressed a kiss behind her ear. “Let me make it up to you.”

“Why?”

“Because I love you, Stephanie. I always have. No matter how stupid I’ve been. It’s always been you.”

Stephanie looked up at him, seeing the truth in his warm brown eyes. “I can’t go through it all again, Eric. I love you, but I just can’t go through you cheating on me again.”

“I won’t be, Stephanie. Let me take you back to your bungalow and show you how much I love you. Let me start to make this right.” Kneeling down, he pulled out a ring. “Marry me, again, Sweet girl. Let me spend the rest of my life making everything up to you. We’re on this beautiful island, what better place to start over than somewhere that’s so magical.”

Stephanie blinked in surprise as she stared down at the ring then Eric. “Eric, I don’t know. I,”

“I know you’re not sure, but I promise, Stephanie. I’ve learned a lot the last two days. Not just from the fantasy, but from conversations I’ve had with some of the other men here this weekend. Look into my eyes, Stephanie. See the truth in them.”

Looking into his eyes as he’d asked, Stephanie saw the truth. Saw the love he had for her, the desire he had to show her how much she meant to him, to make up for all of the times he’d hurt her in the past. “Yes,” she whispered. “Yes.”

Slipping the ring on her finger, Eric stood and pulled her close. “I love you, Stephanie.”

“I love you, too.” Stephanie whispered as she tilted her head to receive his kiss. Pulling back, she cupped his cheek. “Do you really want to get married here?”

“I do.”

“But what about the children?”

“I don’t care. I want this to be about us. I don’t want to wait for them to all get here. Besides, I don’t think Mr. Roarke would appreciate all of the media descending on this place.”

“You are correct, Mr. Forrester. I would not.” Roarke spoke from behind the couple, startling them into remembering he was there.

Stephanie took a deep breath and smiled a bit at their host. “We forgot you were here.”

Roarke smiled. “I wasn’t here the whole time. You simply did not notice when I left.”

Eric chuckled and shook his head. “One day I’d like to know how you do that, but for now, I want to ask if it would be alright for Stephanie and I to marry here.”

“If that is what you wish.”

“Is there a minister? A judge?” Stephanie asked.

“I am all that you need, Mrs. Forrester.”

“Somehow I knew that’s what you would say.” Stephanie smiled then looked at Eric. “And what am I to wear?”

“I’ve brought you something.” Eric smiled down at her surprised face.

“Why would I bring the ring and not the outfit?”

Shaking her head, Stephanie laughed and kissed him quickly. “I have dinner with a few friends. Come with me?”

Eric shook his head. “No, Sweet girl. Go on. I’m going to be meeting a few friends myself. Just hurry back to me, hmm?”

Caressing his cheek, Stephanie smiled up at him as she nodded. “I will. The ladies will be very surprised.”

“Invite them to the wedding. You seem to have grown very close to them.”

“We have a lot in common.”

“You’ll have to tell me about it. Now go on.” Eric kissed her nose, laughing when it twitched. “I’ve a few things to discuss with Mr. Roarke. Enjoy your dinner.”

“You’re sure you want them to come to the wedding?”

“We’ll need witnesses. They might as well be your friends.”

“Thank you.” Kissing him once more, Stephanie smiled at him then Mr. Roarke before leaving the room, heading off to meet the ladies to tell of her good news.

Chapter 11

Viki held Ben, her arms wrapped so tight around him, he nearly couldn’t breathe. “Blondie, you have to let me go just a little bit,” he told her as he tenderly loosened her embrace.

“Sorry.” Viki whispered as she pulled back. “I just,” she shook her head, reaching out to caress his face. “I’m still trying to convince myself that you’re real.”

Smiling at her, Ben leaned forward, nuzzling her neck just behind her ear, his hand moving down to cup a taut buttock. Flicking at the spot just below her earlobe that he knew made her crazy, he kneaded the flesh he held. “Am I real?”

“Oh god,” she moaned as she gripped his shoulders. “Yes. Most definitely real.” Her body trembled, unaccustomed to the sensations.

“Oh Blondie, what kind of man was he? You’re trembling.”

Viki shook her head. “It’s alright. Even if he’d been a better man, no man has ever made me feel the way you did and still do apparently,” she laughed.

Cupping her face, Ben caressed her cheeks with his thumbs. “He was a fool. Seems I’m always winning when the fools in your life screw up.” Kissing her nose, he smiled. “I’m here and I’m not going anywhere, but there are some things you need to know. The most important thing is that I was the one in your fantasy.”

Viki blinked in surprise then smiled and nodded. “I should have known. I felt too much for it to have been fantasy Ben.”

Ben smiled and winked at her then grew serious again. “The other important thing you need to know is, I can’t leave the island, at least not yet. Mr. Roarke will explain everything. I’ll have to stay here when you go home.”

“I’m not leaving you here.”

“You’ll have to, Viki. I can’t leave and you can’t stay here.”

“Oh yes I can. I can work from anywhere and no one would really think anything of my staying away for a while. No one questioned my taking time to come here, I’ll just simply tell them that I’ve decided to take a long vacation to clear my thoughts and heal my heart. It won’t be a lie.”

“But the kids, Blondie.”

“Are grownups, they’ll be fine. If they need someone, Clint, Bo, and Renee are there.” Viki sighed and shook her head. “I can’t keep fixing things, Ben. I’m tired. I,” she swallowed and turned away.

“Blondie, no.” Ben whispered, knowing what she didn’t say. “Alright. Stay here. Mr. Roarke will understand. Maybe he can even help.”

Viki turned into Ben’s arms, burying her face against his chest. “I feel so weak for letting them take over again.”

“Stop.” Ben commanded as he squeezed her. “I won’t let you do that to yourself.”

Viki sighed as she wiggled further into his embrace. He’d always scolded her for doing that, but she’d never been able to stop. “I have a dinner to go to.”

“We’re not going to forget this conversation, Viki.” Ben warned, holding her gaze. “I’ve got my own dinner to go to.”

Viki bit her lip as she stared at Ben. “I know it upsets you, Ben, but,”

“No, Blondie. No buts.” Ben told her sternly as he cupped her face. “You know I don’t like it when you do that to yourself. You aren’t weak, Victoria Davidson.”

Viki’s lips trembled as she smiled up at him. “You called me Davidson.”

“Of course I did, that’s what you are. I never died, Blondie.”

Viki smiled. “I’ll try not to do it again, but you know how hard it is for me.”

“I do, but I’m here to remind you.” Ben nuzzled her nose then kissed her. “You should get ready for dinner, Blondie. We both should actually.”

“You don’t want to join me?”

“I would love to, but I suspect the people you’re meeting for dinner are new friends and you need time with them.”

Viki nodded. “Ladies that Mr. Roarke introduced me to the first night I was here. Who are you meeting? Friends from your time here?”

“Men I met just a couple of nights ago. They’re a mixed bunch. A Scotland Yard man, a Royal bodyguard, and a designer – one I know you own several of his dresses.”

Viki’s eyes widened. “Eric Forrester?”

“Yes. Why so surprised?”

“Because one of the lady’s I’m meeting is his ex wife, Stephanie.”

“Oh.”

“Yes, oh. And I know the other men as well. Joe from Genovia, the Head of Security and personal body guard to the Queen, and George Sutherland, Chief Inspector with Scotland Yard.”

Ben frowned. “How do you know that?”

“Because, the other ladies are Jessica Fletcher who is involved with the inspector and the Queen, Clarisse Renaldi.”

“Oh my.” Now it was Ben’s eyes that were wide.

“Oh my indeed.” Viki pursed her lips then shook her head. “Now I really must go to dinner. The ladies don’t know the men are here.”

“The men definitely know the ladies are here.”

Viki shook her head. “I hope Mr. Roarke knows what he’s doing,” she mumbled as she headed for her bedroom to change.

“Mr. Roarke always knows what he’s doing.” Ben called after her.

~*~

Clarisse noticed Viki first. “There’s Viki.”

Jessica studied the younger woman and smiled. “She’s glowing.”

“Hmm.” Stephanie murmured, wondering just what had made her new friend so happy in such a short time since she’d last seen her.

“Hello.” Viki greeted them as she took her seat at their table.

“Hello.” Stephanie returned the greeting, her blue eyes studying Viki. “I suspect that whatever Mr. Roarke had to speak to you about has something to do with why you seem to be glowing.”

Viki’s eyes watered as she looked down at her hands which lay trembling in her lap. “He gave me a dvd.”

“A dvd?” Clarisse asked a bit puzzled.

“Yes. It was of my Ben’s father. He explained a few things to me. I,” Viki paused to swallow down the tremor in her voice.

Jessica reached over and rested her hand on one of Viki’s. “What is it?”

“My Ben,” she shook her head as she looked up, a smile trembling on her lips. “He was never gone.”

Clarisse frowned. “I don’t understand.”

“He didn’t die. I never received his heart. Ben’s mother stole him away before that could happen and his father found another heart for me.”

Clarisse shook her head and looked at the other two. “Are you as confused as I am?”

Stephanie shook her head. “Not really. Jessica?”

“A little, but only by the fact that Mr. Roarke gave you the dvd. Why wouldn’t your father-in-law have simply told you?”

“Because I was so sick.”

“So, are you saying that Ben isn’t dead?” Clarisse asked, still a bit confused.

Viki nodded, tears rolling down her cheeks. “He’s been here all these years I thought he was dead.”

Jessica smiled, her own eyes fill with tears as she squeezed Viki’s hands. “He was there for your fantasy, wasn’t he?”

“Yes.” Viki answered quietly. “I have something else to tell you.”

“What in the world could you possible have to tell us that’s more than your husband is alive?” Clarisse asked.

Viki laughed and reached out to pat Clarisse’s hand. “I’m sorry you’re so confused.”

“What I want to know is why you aren’t? And why Stephanie isn’t? At least Jessica was a bit.”

Stephanie smiled and shrugged. “You would be amazed at the things that have happened. My son and my ex daughter-in-law were both thought to be dead, and we’d had a funeral, all of that. Both are alive and doing very well.”

Viki nodded. “The things that have happened to me. An underground city full of gold, a daughter I gave birth to and forgot because my father had me hypnotized to forget,” she shook her head. “Well, things like this don’t

confuse me. Though I will admit that I was shocked when I realized what my father-in-law was telling me. And then when I turned around and my Ben was there,” she shrugged and smiled.

“I’m so very happy for you, Viki.” Jessica told her.

“Thank you.” Viki smiled then dug around in her purse for a tissue. “What did Mr. Roarke want with all of you?”

“George was in my fantasy with me.”

“So was Joseph.”

“So was Eric.”

Viki blinked at the other ladies. “I was going to tell you they were here. Ben told me, but I never dreamed they were all involved as he was. Oh my.”

“It would seem Mr. Roarke was way ahead of us all.” Stephanie shook her head. “The man,” she shrugged and gave up.

“I was angry when I learned it was Joseph in my dream. I couldn’t understand how he could,” Clarisse blushed and shook her head. “He explained and we talked. We’ve worked things out.”

“I wasn’t very happy to see Eric and learn that he’d been in my fantasy. He’s been so angry with me, I couldn’t understand why he’d want to be here.” Stephanie’s eyes watered as she smiled. “He told me he wasn’t angry with me, but at himself.”

“And are you going to fight for him?” Jessica asked with a smile.

“I don’t have to.” Stephanie smiled.

“And you, Jessica?” Viki asked, turning her attention to the older woman.

“I was surprised, but not angry. Learning it was the real George in my fantasy made it easier.”

“Our men are all having dinner together.” Viki informed the group.

Stephanie nodded. “Eric told me he was meeting a few friends.”

“Joseph never said a thing.”

“Neither did George, though George did know who everyone was with the exception of Viki’s Ben.”

“Stephanie!” Viki said the name in a near shout. “What is that?” she asked as she pointed to Stephanie’s left hand and the ring glinting in the lantern light.

Stephanie laughed and blushed. “It is what it looks like.”

“Oh my.” Clarisse breathed.

“Why didn’t you tell us before?” Jessica asked.

“I wanted to wait until we’d all had our chance to tell what was going on with Mr. Roarke.”

“It’s wonderful, Stephanie.” Viki smiled at her new friend.

“I’m very happy for you.” Clarisse patted Stephanie’s hand.

Jessica nodded. “Your fantasy was the hardest one of them all, I was worried how it would turn out. I never thought it would end this way.”

“Well, it hasn’t exactly ended.” Stephanie smirked at the arched eyebrows she received. “Seems that’s something else we all have in common,” she laughed.

“Stephanie.” Viki grumbled.

“Fine. Eric and I are going to be married here on the island by Mr. Roarke. You’re all invited. I’m sure Eric will invite the men. They’re probably all doing what we are right now.”

~*~

“Do you know how hard it was not to give away that I knew you?” George asked as he sipped at his scotch. “Joe was the easiest as I had met him some years ago during one of the Queen’s visits to London.”

Joe smiled. “I didn’t tell that I was having dinner. I just simply said I would be waiting for her to return.”

Ben laughed, “I told Viki I was meeting friends, but she didn’t ask about them. I never dreamed the women she said she was meeting for dinner would be the women all of you had been telling me about.”

“Mr. Roarke has been busy.” Joe frowned.

“Yes, he has, but I’m grateful.” Eric smiled. “Stephanie and I are getting married again and it’s thanks in part to him.”

“Congratulations, Eric.” Ben grinned at the man, the others nodding their agreement.

“Thank you. You’re all invited. It’s to be here on the island with Mr. Roarke. Stephanie was going to invite the ladies.”

“That will give us all a chance to meet.” George told them, smiling as he looked at Ben. “Was your Blondie surprised?”

Ben nodded. “Very surprised.”

“I still can’t believe you’ve been alive all this time.” George shook his head.

Eric shrugged. “I’m not surprised. It’s happened before.”

George gave Eric a puzzled look. “What?”

“My son was presumed dead, so was his ex-wife – twice.”

Ben shook his head and chuckled a bit. “Just more we have in common. My father was presumed dead more times than I care to think about.”

“Was?”

“The last time was real. It was my turn instead.”

“How did you feel when you woke up and learned what had happened?”

“I only thought of Viki. She’d been barely living her life when I’d briefly woke up Valentine’s Day a few years ago.”

“You woke up?”

“On Valentine’s Day?”

“Blimey, mate. Did your friends ever tell you to lay off the romance?”
George finished the other men’s reactions, causing Ben to laugh.

Ben shrugged. “My brothers were always getting in trouble with the women in their lives because of it. They were constantly telling me to stop being so damned perfect in the romance department. I’d never been good with romance before, but with Viki,” he shook his head. “I couldn’t help it. There’s just something about her, maybe her past, but I just wanted to make her feel special and loved. That’s all. Besides, I don’t think I had anything to do with waking up on Valentine’s Day. I’m good, but I’m not that good.”

Chapter 12

Notes:

This is the end of this story. I've ideas for a sequel, and maybe separate one-shots for each couple to see how things go for them when they return home.

Ben smiled across at Viki, George repeating the same with Jessica, Joe with Clarisse, as they all stood up as witnesses for Eric and Stephanie. The air was perfect around them, a light breeze gently ruffling the ladies' dresses and hair, mesmerizing their respective men.

Tattoo looked from one couple to the next and rolled his eyes. He'd never seen so many people completely gone on each other in one place with so many things in common. Handing the rings to the appropriate person when prompted, he sighed. Weddings were usually something he enjoyed, but this one was just more mush than he could handle.

Roarke nodded at Eric, signaling him to speak. As he listened to the heartfelt words, he smiled in satisfaction. It wasn't often that he got to help so many couples at one time, and never had any of them been quite like these.

Stephanie sniffed, laughing slightly when Eric reached up to wipe at her tears. "I've always loved you, from the moment I caught you looking at me at that party," she whispered as she slipped his ring on his finger. "This time,"

"This time is for keeps." Eric finished for her as he kissed the back of her hand.

Stephanie nodded. "Keeps," she whispered, tears once again on her cheeks as Roarke pronounced them man and wife. Her eyes closed when Eric leaned toward her, touching his lips to hers in a gentle kiss.

Everyone gathered around the couple to offer their congratulations. Each lady took their turn hugging Stephanie and kissing Eric's cheek. The men shook Eric's hand and kissed Stephanie's cheek.

"You're beautiful, Stephanie." Viki told her friend. "An Eric Forrester Original."

"Of course." Stephanie smiled as she brushed her hand over the gauzy material of her dress.

"You came prepared." Ben laughed as he looked at Eric. "See? I'm not the only one."

Stephanie frowned. "What?"

Viki laughed and patted Ben's cheek. "He's a romantic, and I'm guessing the men found that out."

"Yeah." Ben nodded. "Told them about waking up on Valentine's Day," he whispered as he looked down at Viki.

Viki's eyes watered as she stared up at Ben. "Did you tell them what Valentine's Day means to us?"

Wiping at a tear that rolled down her cheek, Ben shook his head. "No."

Viki turned to look at their friends, a soft smile on her face. "We fell in love on Valentine's Day in a blizzard that trapped me where Ben was working at the time."

George shook his head. "So that's why you woke up on Valentine's Day."

Ben shrugged. "Maybe it was."

Eric clasped Stephanie's hand and smiled at her then looked at their friends. "I suppose it's the lady that makes us romantic."

Ben nodded. “That’s what I always tried to tell my brothers and my friends when they’d rag on me about being ridiculously romantic. I was never a romantic before Blondie.”

Clarisse blinked. She felt that. “No wonder,” she murmured.

“What?” Joe asked.

Jessica nodded, knowing that Clarisse meant – she’d felt it too. “Now I understand why you like to hear him call you that,” she whispered, looking at Viki.

George frowned. “What?”

Ben was even confused and looked at Eric who wore the same confused look. “Don’t ask me. I don’t know this one.”

Stephanie laughed and agreed with the other ladies. “It’s the same as Eric calling me Sweet girl.”

Eric smiled, finally understanding. “The ladies must have discussed our nicknames for them. You just called Viki by your nickname for her,” he explained.

Ben shrugged. “It’s all I knew when we first met. She wouldn’t tell me her name.”

Stephanie laughed, “I think we need to hear more of the story. We know how everyone met but the two of you.”

“Well, they can tell us over dinner. Mr. Roarke has prepared a special wedding celebration for us.”

Stephanie kissed his cheek. “And are we going to honeymoon here?”

“I thought we might. It’s beautiful here and somewhere we’ve never been before.”

“Well then Ben and I will be seeing you more.”

Stephanie looked at Viki, an eyebrow arched. “You aren’t going home? Surely Ben’s family will want to know he’s alive.”

“They will. We’ve asked Mr. Roarke to send for Ben’s mother and ask her to bring his brother. The oldest brother,” Viki shook her head. “That wouldn’t be a good idea. He’s never cared for Ben.”

“And Sammy is gone.” Ben whispered.

“Yes, Darling, he’s gone.” Viki soothed, caressing his arm.

“Sammy?” Clarisse asked.

“Ben was adopted. Sam was his brother from the Davidson family. Renee is Ben’s mother, his other brothers are half brothers. One of which is one of my exes.”

“Oh.” Clarisse murmured.

“I know. Crazy and mixed up. My kids were a little confused at first. Was Ben, uncle? Was he, step-dad?”

“We settled on forgetting all of that. No way do I want to be called Uncle Ben.”

Everyone laughed at that, the ladies shaking their heads. No wonder Viki was so in love with the man.

Stephanie sat with her head on Eric's shoulder, watching his fingers moving along the piano keys, their friends dancing to the soft sounds of the song he was playing. "You always know the right song to play," she whispered.

Eric pressed a kiss to her head. "This is as much for all of them as it is us. Look at them, Sweet girl. Watch how they move together. It's just like us."

Stephanie watched their friends dancing. "You're right. We have always moved wonderfully on the dance floor."

"Even when we weren't very happy with each other, we always danced like that." Eric pressed another kiss to her head. "That should have told me something."

"You're here, you love me, it's all that matters."

"I've always loved you, Sweet girl."

Viki smiled as Ben turned them so that she could see Eric and Stephanie. "We didn't think things would turn out well for Stephanie."

"Eric wasn't sure, either. He's hurt her a lot in their years together."

"Yes, he has, but she's always loved him." Viki snuggled closer to Ben when he twirled them around. "I think she was abused, Ben."

"What makes you say that, Blondie?"

"She said that Eric had given her something she'd never had, safety."

Ben squeezed Viki, pressing a kiss to her head. "I think you're right. Seems Mr. Roarke knew more than we thought."

"Because of my abuse," she whispered.

“Yes, Blondie. You can be a great help to her if she needs it.” Ben caressed her cheek.

Jessica smiled as she and George moved passed Ben and Viki. “It’s wonderful,” she whispered.

“What is, Jessie?” George asked.

“Them,” she answered as she nodded toward Ben and Viki.

George looked at the younger couple then looked down at the woman in his arms. “You wish it were you,” he murmured.

Jessica blinked up at him and shook her head. “At one time, yes, I would have, but not now. I’m happy right where I am.”

Caressing a curl behind her ear, George leaned down and gently kissed her soft lips. “I love you, Jessie.”

“Mmm.” Jessica hummed then winked. “That’s very good because I love you.”

Pulling her closer, George moved them around the dance floor. “Did you know Eric could play the piano?”

Jessica shook her head. “No clue. Stephanie only told us that he sings,” she answered just as the swirled passed Joe and Clarisse.

Clarisse sighed as she settled closer to Joe. “This is nice.”

“It’s wonderful not having to worry about how close we’re dancing.” Joe whispered as he kissed her cheek. “I love being able to kiss you.”

Turning her head, Clarisse caught his lips with hers. “Oh yes,” she murmured then settled her head on his shoulder. “Do you think we can really be together at home?”

“I do, if it’s what you want.”

“After our time here, I couldn’t go back to the way it was before.”

“I couldn’t either, Clarisse. Making love to you, holding you, kissing you – I’m addicted.”

Clarisse laughed, “You make me sound like a drug.”

“You are. A very lovely drug.” Joe kissed her nose, winking at her when she gently pinched his arm.

Roarke watched the couples as they stopped dancing and moved back to their table, laughing and happy as they drank their champagne and ate the meal he’d provided. He’d known the couples would all be great friends to one another.

“Another happy ending, Boss?” Tattoo asked as he looked up at Roarke.

“A happy beginning, my dear friend. A happy beginning.”