**Chapter Eleven**

*From Ember to Bursting Flame*

**THE NEXT MORNING**

“Good morning, all.” I said making my way into the dining room.

“Good morning, Ana.” The girls and Bev said as I sat down in my seat.

“Did you sleep well?” Jasmine asked.   
“Yes but I’m still exhausted.”  
“I bet.” Marie said trying to sound neutral.   
“Where is Michael, Bev?”

“He woke up early and left with Mr. Branca for an important business meeting.”  
“Did he say when he’d be coming back?”  
“He didn’t but did say it would only be for a few hours.”

Once Bev finished setting up our breakfast buffet, the girls and I grabbed our plates and made our way towards the coffee, juice and food. Marie and Jasmine couldn’t look me in the eye for some reason. I had no idea why they were being passive and questioned them about it.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.” Jasmine said.

“Marie, what’s going on?”  
“Ana…”

Silence filled the room for more than 30 seconds.

“WHAT IS IT?”

“What is wrong with you?” Jasmine finally asked.   
“ME? What did I do?”  
“You went out with Cameron last night, Diana.” Marie replied.

“Oh my god not you two now.”

“Diana, Michael is obviously hurt that you didn’t listen to him.”

I explained to the girls that nothing happened between me and the CEO but to no surprise, they didn’t believe me. Jasmine informed me of her spying and saw our hands touching before we left the restaurant and Marie also confessed her spying on Michael but didn’t know who the mystery visitor was. I rolled my eyes as I placed a devilled egg, sausage and English muffin on my floral china plate.

“You girls are reading way too much into this.” I said as we all grabbed our drinks and sat down.

“Are we really, Diana?” Jasmine asked.   
“YES. We just went out to dinner. It’s not like he rented a hotel room.”  
“NOT YET.” Marie said.   
“What is THAT supposed to mean?”

“I warned you about him, Diana.”  
“I know you did Jas. But I’m a grown woman with a career. I need to make sure my business stays where it is and Cameron is just trying to move things to the next level.”  
“You can say that again.” Jasmine said under her breath.

“I can’t believe you two! Why are you two giving me such a hard time? Marie, why aren’t you at work today? And Jasmine don’t you have a few meetings to attend on my behalf?”  
“We came to see how you were doing first.” Marie said. “We’re your friends before your workers, Ana.”  
“We also wanted to know how things went last night even though we don’t agree with the fact that you went.” Jasmine added. “If we had known you were going to be like this we wouldn’t have bothered coming here this morning.”

I apologized to the girls and asked them to change the subject. Of course, that didn’t last very long and Jasmine kept pestering me with questions about my ‘dinner date’ with the President of Capital Records.

“He’s amazingly hot, isn’t he?” Jasmine asked.

“He’s a very handsome man, no doubt about that.”  
“Soooo…tell us about him.”  
“Marie, there really isn’t much to tell. We just discussed business all night.”  
“Oh come on!” Jasmine said. “You mean to tell me he took you to one of the most exquisite places in Los Angeles and all you two did was talk about your boring careers?”  
“Our careers are not boring, Jasmine. We both enjoy doing what we do.”  
“Did he kiss you?” Marie asked.   
“On the cheek, yes.”  
“THAT CHARMER!” Jasmine yelled. “So what else did he do?”  
“NOTHING! Now let’s eat.”  
“Ana…did he hit on you?”  
“If you call over complimenting hitting then yes he did.”  
“I KNEW IT!” Jasmine said. “He’s as smooth as chocolate. So, what else happened?”  
“You girls really need a life.”  
“SO?” They both said in unison.

I shook my head and laughed as they kept asking questions that were clearly none of their business.

“Enough about Cameron.” I said getting up from the table to get more eggs and a piece of toast. “What’s going on with Michael? Did you two find out anything at all about his mystery guest?”  
“Not a thing.” Marie said. “I tried to find out who she was but then Mac called and the bugger distracted me.”  
“I’m glad he’s still keeping in touch with you.”  
“Pfft, whatever.”  
“Marie? I thought you liked Mac.” Jasmine said drinking her warm, mocha flavored beverage.

“I did but he’s taken so what’s the point?”  
“That doesn’t mean you two can’t be friends, Marie.” I explained. “Cameron and I are friends and I’m taken too.”  
“You won’t be for long if you don’t work things out with Mr. Moonwalker.”  
“I don’t know if I want to yet or not.”  
“WHAT?” The girls said together. “Why?”

I told the girls about the note I found on the coffee table and the one Cameron gave me and they both looked as if they had just been on a roller coaster.

“Cameron is being sneaky, Diana.” Jasmine explained. “Michael was right – he IS trying to seduce you.”  
“Don’t be ridiculous. I’m engaged and pregnant. Why the hell would he try something like that with me now?”  
“He’s planning it all out.” Marie said. “I’d be extra cautious if I were you.”  
“Yeah, yeah enough about me. Do you two have any idea who Dita is?”  
“Dita? That doesn’t sound familiar to me. What about you, Jas?”

“No idea.” Jasmine said. “We could try and do an internet search but it’d be hard to find her without a description of what she actually looks like and no last name.”

“I don’t know any famous people with that name either.” Marie added. “I wish I had seen her face.”

“It doesn’t matter.” I said finishing my morning refreshments. “If Michael wants to play that game, I can play it too.”

“Mike, are you sure about this?” John asked as the two gentlemen sat in a large conference room.

“I’ve never been surer of anything.” Michael said. “I really need to do this, John.”  
“Let’s just see what they offer.” John said. “Once they have an idea as to what you have in mind, I’m certain they will come to an agreement with you.”

“Good morning gentlemen.” An older looking man in a dark blue suit with a black shirt and blue tie said as he came in the room. “I’m Martin Bandier, CEO of Sony/ATV Music Publishing. It’s a pleasure to meet you both.”

“Likewise, Mr. Bandier.” John said as Martin shook both men’s hand.   
“Please call me Marty. What can I do for you two?”

“We are here because Mr. Jackson has requested a new contract negotiation with Sony.”  
“What does he have in mind?”

John, Michael and Martin talked about the King of Pop’s desire to switch to Sony as a record label as well as come up with an entirely new project with brand new material. Michael then showed his plans to the CEO and he was lost for words. Michael’s ideas were clearly unique and nothing he had ever seen or heard of before. John smiled in confidence as he heard his client discuss his upcoming plans with pride in his voice.

“Mr. Jackson, I must say you have an incredible mind.”  
“Thank you, sir.”  
“However, with that being said I must say this does inflict a severe conflict of interest on your part.”  
“In what way?” John asked.

“Mr. Jackson, as you know your decision to merge Sony with ATV two years ago granted you half ownership of the entire company garnering you $95 million dollars. In addition to this, you are also the sole owner of the entire Beatles catalogue which was assigned to you for $47.5 million dollars.”  
“I’m fully aware of those details.” Michael said. “But how will any of that affect my record label contract?”  
“If you were to get one you could face legal repercussions.”  
“Such as?”

“You may have difficulties with decision making and acquiring certain licenses to fully establish your own work.”  
 “You mean as far as promoting the project is concerned?” John asked.   
“That is just one aspect of it.” Martin continued. “There is also the possibility that if your new project fails to launch the way you would like it to, you may require an early exit from your contract resulting in serious legal action and excessively high fees.”

“If that were the case, Mr. Bandier, what would be the best solution?”

“If things were to go that route, you would be highly persuaded to sell your shares in Sony music.”

“Absolutely not!” John yelled. “My client owns 50% of this company and has been involved with it since 1985!”   
“John…” Michael whispered.   
“We will NOT allow that to happen, Mr. Bandier.”  
“Again, Mr. Branca these are just facts being said to you in advance. With Michael’s talent and unbelievable power in the performing arts industry, I have no doubt in my mind that his latest project will be a complete success.”

“If my client was to proceed further, how would we go about it?”  
“I will inform my Head of Operations whom Mr. Jackson has met in the past to meet with you two and you can discuss all of the details with him.”  
“Oh god, not him.” Michael said under his breath.

“Very good, Mr. Bandier.” John said as he stood up from his chair. “May I ask the name of the gentlemen you will be referring us to?”  
“Mr. Tommy Mottola.”

“Good morning beautiful.” Cameron said as I walked into his office.   
“Good morning, Cameron.”  
“How are you? Please sit.”

“I’m well. I can’t stay long so I will stand.”

“I hope you slept alright.”  
“I did. I came here to return your classified documents.”  
“Did you review all of them already?”  
“Yes. I wanted to bring them back as soon as possible.”  
“I appreciate that Ms. Dean.”  
“It’s no problem at all.”

“How is your fiancé?”   
“I’m sure he’s fine. Haven’t seen him yet today.”  
“I look forward to meeting him.”  
“Is that so?”

“Absolutely. I am very eager to discover what it is Michael Jackson has that I don’t.”  
“Are you referring to having a successful career?”  
“Possibly.”  
“Cameron, you are lethal.”  
“I can be at times.”

“I suddenly feel the need to be worried.”  
“Don’t be, Diana.” *Although I can’t say the same about your significant other*. He thought to himself.   
“I won’t take up more of your time.” I said heading for the door. “I will be in touch with you again in a few weeks.”

“I will count the days until then, Ms. Dean.”

“You are a man of many faces, Mr. Garivey.”  
“If you only knew how true that is.” He said winking at me. “Have a good day, Diana.”  
“You as well, Cameron.”

I left his office and stood outside his building trying to catch my breath. What is it about Cameron Garivey that constantly pulls me towards him?

*“What are you doing to me, Mr. CEO?”*

“I know you’ve had problems with Tommy in the past, Michael…” John said as the two of them entered the main house at Neverland. “But if you want this project to happen with Sony you have no choice but to go through him.”  
“I know that, John.” Michael said as they both sat in his living room. “I know all about him. When I recorded Dangerous he was in my face giving me orders and not respecting my wishes. He’s nothing but a racist white devil.”

“At least we’ve got your foot in the door with Martin. I’ll keep you posted when I hear about the appointment date and time. By the way, Rick contacted me yesterday. Your final case papers will be ready by tomorrow afternoon. I’ve already informed Waleed and he’ll meet us both at the courthouse by ten.”

“Thank you, John.”  
“Get some rest today. You definitely need it.”  
“I have something else I need to take care of now.”  
“More project work?”  
“No. I need to deal with my fiancé.”

“Mr. Jackson? Your father is at the gate.” Javon said from the living room doorway.

“Oh god… Michael said rubbing his forehead. “This day just keeps getting better and better.”  
“Should I ask him to leave, sir?”  
“No, it’s fine. Let him in.”

Javon left the room and John grew worried. Michael looked overly stressed and the last thing he needed was his father coming to his home causing an unnecessary argument. John offered to stay with his client for moral support but Michael insisted he could handle his father alone. The Pop star had been dealing with Joseph’s unruly character his entire life and didn’t want any one from his inner circle to come in contact with Joseph unless it was absolutely necessary. As John stood up to leave, Joseph stormed into the house yelling at the top of his lungs:

“WHAT THE FUCK IS WRONG WITH YOU, BOY? HAVE YOU LOST YOUR DAMN MIND?!”

Michael closed his eyes and covered his ears. He knew all about his father’s uncontrollable temper and feared that, even now, at 39 years old he would still be brutally abused by him.

“Michael…I’ll stay with you.” John whispered.   
“Who the hell are you to get involved?” Joseph asked angrily. “Get out of my son’s house!”  
“It’s ok, John.” Michael whispered. “Just go. I’ll see you in court tomorrow.”

“Call me if you need me to come back today.”

Without saying another word, John left the room and Joseph waited until he left the grounds before speaking to his seventh child demanding answers to his questions about his son’s unusual behavior.

“I want an answer from you.” Joseph said as he came closer to Michael who was seated on the couch with his eyes closed and head down. “I don’t know what the hell you see in that damn moll but this fling you have going on with her ends NOW. Do you hear me, Michael?”  
“Joseph, why did you come here?”  
“ARE YOU LISTENING TO WHAT I’M SAYING TO YOU?”

“Yes and I suggest you get your hearing checked. Diana isn’t going anywhere and we’ve both told you that numerous times but it’s not getting inside your ears. I love her and she’s carrying my child.”  
“Is that why she went out with another man last night?”  
“I am aware that she did that. This is really none of your business, Joseph.”

Both father and son argued back and forth about Michael’s future and the ‘poor choices’ he was making in his life. Michael explained to his father who Cameron was and why the dinner date took place but of course, Joseph wasn’t buying any of it and was convinced that Diana was setting Michael up for a nasty fall.

“She is nothing but poison for you, Michael.” Joseph said. “You need to open your damn eyes and see the world for what it is. Diana is not the woman you think she is. It’s time for you to grow up and be a man for once in your sorry life. I bet she didn’t even tell you about my phone call.”  
“You called her?” Michael asked completely stunned.

Joseph chuckled.

“That’s what I thought. Conniving little bitch.”  
“Joseph, why did you call her behind my back?”  
“Why did she talk to me behind yours, Michael?”

Feeling overwhelmed, Michael put his head in his hands and sulked. Joseph continued screaming at him and all his son could do was cry. His entire world was crumbling before his eyes and all he could do was watch.

“I’m not going to keep pulling your ass out of danger.” Joseph said. “Get rid of her before she gets rid of you.”

“I would never do that, Joseph.” I said walking into the living room. “I didn’t tell Michael about our phone conversation because, unlike you, I care about his feelings. Certain things just aren’t worth mentioning. Especially when they involve toxic people like yourself.”

“You always know how to play with the cards you are dealt with, little girl.” Joseph said staring daggers into my eyes.   
“I will find out whatever it is you are up to and why you met with that man last night. And when I do, you will be sorry you ever crossed paths with my son.”

“You are such a funny man, Joseph.”  
“Am I?”

“You’ve done absolutely nothing but talk shit and threaten me since the first day we met. You have never once acted upon your words or found anything wrong with me that you could use as valid proof that I am not the one for your son and yet you continue to run your mouth. It makes me laugh how you enjoy making a fool out of yourself. No wonder Michael fired you as his manager years ago.”

“Diana…” Michael whispered. “Don’t talk to him like that.”  
“Why not? Everyone knows you never will.”

“I don’t say or do things impulsively.” Joseph said. “I attack when the time is right.”  
“I’m guessing that is how Jo’Vonnie was conceived?”

“DIANA!” Michael yelled. “Stop it.”  
“From what I’ve heard, I’m not the only one good at keeping secrets for a long time.” Joseph said devilishly as he made his way closer towards me near the living room doorway. “Someone else is just as good at it. Isn’t that right, Diana?”

I laughed loudly and walked right up to my future father in law staring directly into his blue eyes. Michael gasped as he saw the two of us standing closely together with no space whatsoever between us and immediately stood from his couch ready to pounce on his father if he tried to harm me or his growing daughter.

“Once again, you don’t scare me Joseph.” I said watching him slightly flinch. “You can try and call my bluff as many times as you want but we both know you have nothing on me. If you think blackmailing me in front of my future husband is going to make me crack then you are dead wrong. NO ONE intimidates me. Not even a 69 year old man standing in his own son’s living room that he designed just to get the hell away from you!”

“Diana, that’s enough.” Michael said.

Joseph angrily pushed his son out of the way and threw him onto the couch. As soon as I turned around to help him, Joseph grabbed my hair and pulled my head back violently.

“You love to push my buttons don’t you?” He said making me whimper in pain.   
“NO, JOSEPH!” Michael yelled getting up from the couch and pressing a button on his phone stand near the TV.

Javon and a few guards entered the house and forcefully removed Joseph hands from the back of my head. I landed on the couch and Michael came to my side putting his head against my stomach.

“You’re going to regret this, Michael!” Joseph yelled as the guards took him out of the house. “She will betray you. DON’T TRUST HER! GET RID OF HER NOW!”

Michael sobbed uncontrollably pressing his head against my stomach. In that moment, I knew he was only thinking about his daughter and how she would be the only reason for him to continue living especially since he and I weren’t exactly getting along with each other.

“I’m sorry, cupcake.” He said whispering into my expanding belly. “Your grandfather wasn’t mad at you. Please don’t be hurt. Please, please don’t be hurt baby…”

“Michael, she’s fine and so am I.”

“I have to find out for sure.” He said wiping his tears. “I’m going to call Dr. Klein over.”  
“Michael, it’s ok.”  
“Is your head ok?”  
“Yes, it’s fine. Thank you for asking.”  
“Let me see it. He pulled your hair really hard.”  
“I know that. I felt it. I’m fine. We need to talk.”

Joseph’s angry voice was heard all over the property. Kai and Bev came running into the house (they were both outside somewhere) checking to make sure we were alright. When Michael said we were, both of them left and their employer requested not to be bothered again unless he asked them for something. After shoving Joseph into his car and Javon threatening to call the police, he left his son’s property speeding in haste leaving a trail of smoke behind.

“Why did he come here?” I asked.   
“I have no idea. He wanted to talk to me.”  
“And you just casually let him in?”  
“He’s my father, Diana.” Michael said trying to pull himself together. “I wanted to know why he was here.”  
“I’m surprised you didn’t already know.”

“Enough about him. We need to talk about US.”  
“Yes, we do.”  
“Why were you out so late?”

“I lost track of time.”  
“Were you too busy mingling with your date?”  
“He is a potential business partner, Michael. It was not a date.”

“Right.”  
“How was your evening with Dita?”

Michael widened his eyes.

“How do you know her name?”

I eyed the coffee table signaling Michael about the piece of paper that was still sitting on it. He saw it and told me he already read it and left it there on purpose because he knew his fiancé would obviously read it too and overreact. Michael giggled as he knew his instincts about me were right.

“Don’t play dumb with me.”  
“Diana, I have no idea what you’re talking about.”  
“Was she good, Michael?”

“PARDON?”

“You heard me. Did she please you better than me?”  
“Diana, you are taking this the wrong way.”  
“Am I?”  
“Yes. She is just a friend and if you knew who she really is—“

“I DON’T GIVE A SHIT ABOUT WHO SHE IS, MICHAEL!”  
“Please don’t yell at me. I’ve had enough screaming for one day.”

“Why did you keep her a secret from all of us, Michael?”  
“Because I knew if I told you and the girls you all would go crazy.”  
“Why would we do that? Is she a man in disguise?”

Michael snickered under his breath.

“Not exactly.”  
“I didn’t keep my business dinner with Cameron a secret and you deliberately planned an evening alone with some woman that we don’t even know. If you’re not happy with me anymore then tell me. I won’t hesitate to walk away from you again like I did almost six years ago.”  
“Diana…you would seriously leave me over this?”  
“If I had to.”  
“We both know you aren’t innocent either.”  
“What are you talking about?”

“You are the queen of secrets.”  
“Excuse me?”  
“Why didn’t you tell me about Joseph calling you?”  
“Did you not hear my explanation in front of him?”  
“And when were you planning on telling me about YOUR note from Cameron?”  
“Did you snoop in my purse?!”  
“No, you dropped it on the floor in the bedroom. I found it this morning when I was getting dressed.”  
“I wasn’t going to hide that from you either. It’s up to you to believe me or not and if you read it you would know he didn’t write anything derogatory. He complimented you for being with me.”  
“I know. I wasn’t accusing you of anything.”  
“Good. You have no reason to.”  
“You still have to tell me something from the past, Diana.”  
“I realize that. However, you were informed about that a long time ago. I’ve been waiting on Jasmine and David so that we can all sit together and tell you.”

“I know. Jasmine told me that too.”

The girls came through the door and saw the extreme tension between us. Wanting to leave the house, Michael welcomed them both and told them it was ok to join us.

“Is everything ok?” Marie asked.   
“Fine.” I said as they both sat on the couch. “Michael was just about to tell me about his lady friend.”  
“OH YES, DO TELL!” Jasmine said excitedly.

“Ana, Javon told us about Joseph when we were coming through the gate. Are you alright?”  
“I’m fine. He was just being his usual self.”

“SOOOOOO…” Jasmine said wanting to change the subject. “Know that we know you’re okay, who was she, Michael?”  
“Someone I’ve known for a long time.”  
“Yeeeaaahhh….”

Michael giggled adorably. As cute as he was, my anger did not allow my affection for him to take over.

“She’s a very interesting person.”  
“Yeeaaahhhhh…”  
“Have you ever heard of Dita in the music industry?”  
“Nope. Doesn’t ring a bell.” Marie said. “Who is she? A singer?”  
“Does she have a brother?” Jasmine asked.   
“JAS!”

“What? I was asking for Marie.”  
“Yeah right.”

“ANYWAYS…please please tell us!” Marie yelled.

“I don’t even want to know.” I said turning around heading towards the staircase. “We are not finished talking, Michael.”

“Diana, wait.”  
“No. I’ve had a busy morning and I don’t feel well. I’m going upstairs to take a nap.”  
“Diana, she’s—“  
“I DON’T CARE, MICHAEL!”

“I’ll be sure to let Madonna know that.”

“MADONNA WAS HERE LAST NIGHT?” Jasmine and Marie asked looking at each other in shock.

“MADONNA? AS IN MADONNA LOUISE CICCONE?”  
“Yes.” Michael said smiling.   
“LIKE A VIRGIN MADONNA?”

“Yes.”  
“EXPRESS YOURSELF MADONNA?”

‘”Yes.”  
“LIKE A PRAYER MADONNA?”

“YES!”

“OH MY GOD!” Jasmine said as she and Marie jumped up and down like children.

“GIRLS!”

“Ana, Madonna was here!!”  
“I heard him and he’s lying.”  
“No, I’m not.”  
“If she was here then who is Dita?”

“Dita is her—“  
“WAIT!” Jasmine said. “OF COURSE! EROTICA!”

Michael laughed hysterically.

“OH MY GOD! DITA PARLO!” Marie yelled finally putting the pieces to the puzzle together. “How could I miss that?”  
“I’m guessing you two are fans?”  
“FAN? FAN? FAN?!” Jasmine yelled. “I’ve loved her since birth. Marie’s a Michael fan. I’m a Madonna fan!”

“Is anyone going to fill me in here??” I asked sounding more confused than ever.

“Ana, Dita is Madonna’s alter ego.” Jasmine explained. “I can’t believe I forgot about that.”  
“I’m still confused.”

The girls explained to me that Dita Parlo was from Madonna’s album ‘Erotica’ released in 1992. Michael was blushing like a tomato the entire time and admitted he and the female legend were close friends in the early 80’s and mentioned going to the Academy Awards with her. For reasons Michael didn’t want to disclose, they both fell out of friendship and eventually parte d ways but Michael confessed to thinking about Madonna for a long time and wanted to clear the air with her. After filling us in about how he found her phone number and wanted to see her again, everything seemed to fall perfectly in place.

“I get it now.” I said standing near the living room doorway. “I’m not mad about the fact that she was here. I just wish you hadn’t done it the way you did. It felt like you were trying to get back at me.”  
“Believe me, if I was I would’ve done something much worse.” He said kissing my forehead.

“So now that everything’s out in the open. I assume we can put this nightmare behind us?” Jasmine asked.   
“We can about Dita.” I said. “We still have other issues. I’m going to take a nap now.”

“Diana, I hate when you’re angry with me.”  
“Stop making me mad then.”  
“Please don’t be like that.”

“I’ll talk to you all later.”

I made my way upstairs and closed the bedroom door.

**A FEW HOURS LATER**

“I’ve never seen you so happy.” Erica said as she stepped into her boss’s office. “I’m assuming your dinner date with Ms. Dean went well?”  
“It went GREAT.” Cameron said. “I got her right where I want her for now.”  
“I’m happy for you, sir.”  
“Thank you. Please see to it that the files on my desk go into the office vault. They are not to be kept in the open.”  
“No problem. I will take care of it right away, sir.”

“That will be all.”  
  
As Erica left the room, an elderly man wearing a striped hat and tons of jewelry barged into his office. Cameron was not scheduled for any meetings that afternoon so who would be paying him a visit? Not wanting to be nosy, Erica thought nothing of it and left to put her boss’s files in his safe. After doing so, she saw an email from her boss requesting her to send two dozen red roses to Neverland with his attached name and message on the card. Erica smiled brightly. Her boss’s romantic style was something she and the other staff members had never seen before and realized Diana was more than lucky to have so many men admire her.

“What can I do for you, Mr. Jackson?”  
“It’s Joseph. I’ll get right to it – you don’t know me and I sure as hell don’t know you but I DO know that you want something my son has and that’s why I came to see you.”  
“What are you referring to?”  
“Diana Dean.”

Cameron snickered and bit his bottom lip.

“Joseph, Ms. Dean and I have a business relationship.”  
“Don’t think you’re fooling me, boy.” Joseph said. “I know you want that woman all to yourself.”  
“Mr. Jackson, I can assure you that Diana and I have no—“  
“You can have her.”  
“I beg your pardon?”  
“Take her away from my son and I’ll make you the happiest man in the world.”  
“And how are you going to do that?”  
“I’ll give you anything you want.”  
“Is that so?”  
“Yes. If you take that harlot away from Michael, I will reward you any way you want.”

“Mr. Jackson, I appreciate you taking the time to see me today. I assure you my plan will be a success.”  
“What plan?”  
“The one I’ve had in mind since the first day I laid eyes on her.”

“Well, Diana’s job is done for today.” Jasmine said closing her laptop on the coffee table. “Marie, let’s go shopping or something.”  
“I want to stay with Ana in case she needs something.”  
“Her fiancé is here. He’ll take care of her.”  
“Maybe we should wait until she wakes up.”

“I AM up.” I said coming into the room. “You two can do your thing. Thank you for everything you’ve both been doing for me at the office.”  
“It’s our pleasure, Diana.” Jasmine said. “We’re always here for you.”  
“I know. I’m sorry if I don’t thank you girls enough. Being pregnant, dealing with Michael, Joseph, Cameron and now this whole Dita thing has taken a huge toll on me.”

“It’s ok. We know it’s the hormones and not you talking.” Marie said as she and Jasmine grabbed their things and headed for the door.

“Call one of us if you need anything. Kai and Bev are with the animals. We’ll be back later tonight.”

“Bye!”

I made my way into the kitchen to get a snack when Michael suddenly grabbed me from the corner of the room and gently pushed me against the wall.

“What are you doing?”  
“I want you, Diana.”  
“Well, I don’t.”  
“Why not?”  
“Michael, we have issues we need to talk about.”  
“I thought we did that already.”  
“No, we didn’t. I just didn’t want the girls interfering in our problems.”

Michael sighed as he and I went to the living room. He closed the foyer doors to make sure no one would hear us or intrude in our conversation. Both of us sat on the couch and faced each other with serious expressions on our faces.

“What is it now, Diana?”  
“Michael, we are falling apart.”  
“I know, but we’ll work it out. We always do.”  
“I don’t want to keep going in circles like this.”  
“We won’t for much longer, Diana.” Michael said as he held my hand. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you about Madonna. I was just really angry that you didn’t listen to me about Cameron. Honestly, we didn’t do anything but sit here and talk. Nothing happened between us.”  
“I believe you. Nothing happened between Cameron and I either. We ate dinner, drank some cider, talked business and briefly about each other and that was it. The note from him was just a compliment. Nothing more.”  
“So he didn’t try anything with you?”

As I opened my mouth to say no, Javon knocked on the foyer doors. Michael knew it was important since his staff was trained never to knock on any closed doors in his home unless it was urgent.

“I’m sorry to interrupt sir but there’s a floral delivery for Ms. Dean at the gate.”  
“From who?” I asked.

“Cameron Garivey.”

“Bring it in please. “ I said as Michael scoffed and rolled his eyes.

Javon brought the huge arrangement inside making my jaw fly open. Two dozen blood red roses were perfectly arranged in between white baby’s breath in a beautiful crystal vase with a black lace ribbon tied around it much like the shawl I wore to dinner. Javon placed the vase on the coffee table and left immediately, I thanked him as he closed the foyer doors and exited the main house.

“They are beautiful.” I said admiring each flower.

Michael was fuming. His face literally turned red and it looked like he was about to scream. I opened the attached card and the message was simple and sweet:

*“Another way to express my gratitude for last night.*

*Have a wonderful day.*

*Cameron.”*

“He’s way too sweet.” I said putting the card back in its envelope.

Michael was so angry he grabbed the entire vase and threw it across the room demolishing it to pieces. The impact was so loud I screamed in agony and covered my ears.

“MICHAEL! WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU?”

“HOW DARE HE? I TOLD YOU HE WANTS TO GO TO BED WITH YOU!”  
“WHAT? YOU ARE TOTALLY INSANE! I CAN’T BELIEVE YOU JUST DID THAT!”

“Diana, you are NOT seeing him again. Your business deal with him is not happening.”  
“Who the hell are you to tell me—“  
“I PUT THOSE RINGS ON YOUR FINGERS, NOT HIM! I’M THE FATHER OF THAT CHILD INSIDE OF YOU, NOT HIM! I’M THE ONE WHO’S BEEN PINING FOR YOUR LOVE FOR SIX YEARS, NOT HIM! I WILL NOT LET THAT WOMANIZER COME INTO YOUR LIFE AND SWEEP YOU OFF YOUR FEET AFTER JUST TWO MONTHS AND ALLOW HIM TO DESTROY EVERYTHING I HAVE WORKED SO HARD FOR!”

“FIRST OF ALL, YOU WILL NOT SPEAK TO ME THAT WAY.”  
“You are no queen Elizabeth, Diana.”  
“And who are you? The king of the world?”  
“No, Pop.”

“Please, Michael. Just because Liz called you that at an award show once doesn’t mean it’s the truth.”  
“Tell all of my fans that including Marie. I’d love to hear their response.”

“This isn’t about you or your fans! Why are you so jealous of Cameron?”  
“ME? JEALOUS? I DON’T EVEN KNOW THE GUY!”  
“Exactly which is why I can’t figure out why you hate him so much.”  
“I don’t know him well enough to hate him. All I know is I hate what he’s doing to you and you are so blinded by his charm that you can’t see his deception behind it.”  
“Isn’t that how you fell for Lisa Marie?”  
“Don’t compare my ex-wife to some guy you barely know, Diana.”

“I don’t tell you who you can and can’t associate with, Michael. I expect the same from you. As uncomfortable as I was about you having Madonna over, you know it was only because I didn’t know who she was. Did I ever say to you that you can’t have her over again? Or that you can’t see her ever again?”  
“Madonna didn’t try to seduce me last night.”  
“That’s why she agreed to meet you in private.”  
“Diana, I CALLED HER. She came in secret because she knew the tabloids would have a field day if they found out she was here with me.”  
“Then she shouldn’t have been.”

Michael rolled his eyes and rolled his right hand into a fist.

“Go ahead and hit something. I know you want to.”  
“Diana, why are you changing like this?”  
“Like what? I’m trying to advance my career with someone who happens to be a male and my fiancé is being a possessive, jealous, envious, temperamental child about it.”

“How would you feel if a woman asked me out to dinner and I went with her against your wishes?”  
“First of all, I would never tell you that you couldn’t go and secondly, I wouldn’t care if you did. I trust you completely, Michael.”  
“And what if she gave me flowers the next day?”  
“It wouldn’t bother me.”  
“I don’t believe you.”  
“Just goes to show how well you know me.”

“I wish I had met Marie first.”  
“WHAT?”  
“You heard me. She is the only one who truly cares about me. She would never treat me this way.”  
“She’s single. Go ahead and be with her.”  
“If you weren’t pregnant I probably would be.”  
“Don’t bring our child into this.”

“Diana, just go. I need to be alone.”  
“Typical Michael. Always wants to run away and be alone when he can’t win against the world.”  
“Diana, LEAVE.”

“NO.”  
“Fine, I’ll go.”

I stood directly in front blocking him from getting anywhere near the foyer doors.

“We’re not finished yet.”  
“Yes we are. I’m done with you for now.”  
“For now? What am I? Your surgical mask that you put on when you need it then put away when you don’t?”  
“Diana, you’re being really mean to me.”  
“And you weren’t being mean when you tossed my flowers across the room?”  
“THAT MAN WANTS YOU DIANA. WHY CAN’T YOU SEE THAT?”

“BECAUSE IT’S NOT TRUE! If he wanted me he would’ve tried to make a move last night.”

“Are you saying he didn’t once?”

Thoughts of the purse moment flashed through my mind. Was Cameron trying to make a move? Or was that really just a simple accident?

“No, nothing.”

“I don’t believe you again. You’re either denying it or weren’t paying attention.”  
“And what makes YOU such an expert on moves, Michael? Did Dita try them on you?”  
“As a matter of fact, YES.”

“Really? And when did this happen? Last night?”  
“No. When we were friends before. She tried to seduce me too and did a lot of things that this CEO is doing with you. I’ve also seen my brothers do similar things with other women. I may not have a lot of actual experience, but I have enough knowledge to last me a lifetime, Diana. Don’t test me on this subject.”

“I’m not testing anything. You don’t control me, Michael. I am no one’s TV remote.”  
“Why are you always so dominant?”  
“I’ve always been that way. A successful career woman and orphan has no other choice.”

“I’ve told you how I felt. Don’t let me down again, Diana. I can only take so much heartache from you.”  
“What do you mean AGAIN? And don’t even get me started on heartache, Michael. I wasn’t the one who married someone else trying to forget you.”

“You’re right. You didn’t because it was easier for you to move on then it was for me. I didn’t trick you into believing a lie like you did with me.”

“Are you EVER going to let that go?”  
“Are you EVER going to listen to me for once?”

“I DO LISTEN TO YOU.”  
“You didn’t listen to me last night. I accepted it. You made me believe you had memory loss for five years. I accepted it. You promised never to hurt me. I believed you. You said you would always be mine and never do anything to jeopardize our relationship. I trusted you.”

“Are you finished?”   
“No, but this conversation is.”  
“No, only YOUR side of it is.”  
“I need to be alone, Diana.”

“You can’t keep running away from your problems, Michael. Your genius creativity isn’t going to save you this time. This is reality you’re facing. You may have lived in a fantasy world before you met me, but that world has come to an end. Welcome to the rest of your life.”

“I don’t need you telling me how to live my life if you’re not going to listen to me telling you how to do the same thing.”  
“Dictating isn’t the same as giving advice, Michael.”

“Leave me alone.”  
“Fine. But I will see Cameron again.”  
“Not if I can help it.”  
“What does that mean?”

Without answering, Michael flung his foyer doors open and marched out of the main entrance. I quickly ran to the door and called out to him but he completely ignored me. I closed the door and slid down the wall sobbing to myself completely devastated about what just happened between me and my future husband wondering if it was still okay for me to even call him that.

“JAVON!”

“Yes, sir?” He said as he jumped up and saw Michael barge into his security shed near the main gate.

“I need you to take me somewhere NOW.”

“Alright. Where sir?”  
“Cameron Garivey’s office.”