

The Greek
Prince's
Chosen Wife

*Sandra
Marton*

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Sandra Marton

The Greek Prince's Chosen Wife

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Ivy Madison claims she's pregnant with Prince Damian Aristedes' baby, but he's never even met her! Is she just another gold digger, exploiting his wish for a son and heir? But Ivy is expecting Damian's child – as a surrogate mother! The arrogant Greek is furious, but he's not about to let Ivy go. After all, he missed the pleasure of bedding her to conceive his baby. ..

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Sandra Marton
THE GREEK PRINCE'S CHOSEN WIFE

BILLYBONNARIES' BRIDES Pregnant by their princes...



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My special thanks to Nadia-Anastasia Fahmi
for her generous help with Greek idioms.
Any errors are, of course, entirely mine!
Sandra

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CHAPTER ONE

DAMIAN was getting out of a taxi the first time he saw her.

He was in a black mood, something he'd grown accustomed to the last three months, a mood so dark he'd stopped noticing anything that even hinted at beauty.

But a man would have to be dead not to notice this woman.

Stunning, was his first thought. What he could see of her, anyway. Black wraparound sunglasses covered much of her face but her mouth was lusciously full with enough sexual promise to make a monk think of quitting the cloister.

Her hair was long. Silky-looking. A dichromatic mix of chestnut and gold that fell over her shoulders in a careless tumble.

And she was tall. Five-nine, five-ten with a model's bearing. A model's way of wearing her clothes, too, so that the expensive butterscotch leather blazer, slim-cut black trousers and high-heeled black boots made her look like she'd stepped straight out of the pages of *Vogue*.

A few short months ago, he'd have done more than look. He'd have walked up to her, smiled, asked if she, too, were lunching at Portofino's...

But not today.

Not for the foreseeable future, he thought, his mouth thinning.

No matter what she looked like behind those dark glasses, he wasn't interested.

He swung away, handed the taxi driver a couple of bills. A driver behind his cab bleated his horn; Damian shot a look at the car, edged past it, stepped onto the curb...

And saw that the woman had taken off her sunglasses. She was looking straight at him, her gaze focused and steady.

She wasn't stunning.

She was spectacular.

Her face was a perfect oval, her cheekbones sharp as blades, her nose straight and aristocratic. Her eyes were incredible. Wide-set. Deep green. Heavily lashed.

And then there was that mouth. The things that mouth might do...

Hell!

Damian turned hard so quickly he couldn't believe it but then, he'd gone three months without a woman.

It was the longest he'd gone without sex since he'd been introduced to its mysteries the Christmas he was sixteen, when one of his father's many mistresses had seduced him.

The difference was that he'd been a boy then.

He was a man now. A man with cold hatred in his heart and no wish for a woman in his life, not yet, not even one this beautiful, this desirable...

"Hey, dude, this is New York! You think you own the sidewalk?"

Damian swung around, ready and eager for a fight, saw the speaker...and felt his tension drain away.

"Reyes," he said, smiling.

Lucas Reyes smiled in return. "In the flesh."

Damian's smile became a grin. He held out his hand, said, "Oh, what the hell," and pulled his old friend into a bear hug.

"It's good to see you."

"The same here." Lucas pulled back, his smile tilting. "Ready for lunch?"

"Aren't I always ready for a meal at Portofino's?"

"Yeah. Sure. I just—I meant..." Lucas cleared his throat. "You okay?"

"I'm fine."

“You should have called. By the time I read about the, ah, the accident...”

Damian stiffened. “Forget it.”

“That was one hell of a thing, man. To lose your fiancée...”

“I said, forget it.”

“I didn’t know her, but—”

“Lucas. I don’t want to talk about it.”

“If that’s how you want it—”

“It’s exactly how I want it,” Damian said, with such cold surety that Lucas knew enough to back off.

“Okay,” he said, forcing a smile. “In that case...I told Antonio to give us the back booth.”

Damian forced a smile of his own. “Fine. Maybe they’ll even have Trippa alla Savoiarda on the menu today.”

Lucas shuddered. “What’s the problem, Aristedes? Pasta’s not good enough for you?”

“Tripe’s delicious,” Damian said and just that easily, they fell into the banter that comes with old friendships.

“Just like old times,” Lucas said.

Nothing would ever be like old times again, Damian thought, but he grinned, too, and let it go at that.

The back booth was as comfortable as ever and the tripe was on the menu. Damian didn’t order it; he never had. Tripe made him shudder the same as Lucas.

The teasing was just part of their relationship.

Still, after they’d ordered, after his double vodka on the rocks and Lucas’s whiskey, straight up, had arrived, he and Lucas both fell silent.

“So,” Lucas finally said, “what’s new?”

Damian shrugged. “Nothing much. How about you?”

“Oh, you know. I was in Tahiti last week, checking out a property on the beach...”

“A tough life,” Damian said, and smiled.

“Yeah, well, somebody has to do it.”

More silence. Lucas cleared his throat.

“I saw Nicolo and Aimee over the weekend. At that dinner party. Everyone was sorry you didn’t come.”

“How are they?” Damian said, deliberately ignoring the comment.

“Great. The baby’s great, too.”

Silence again. Lucas took a sip of his whiskey.

“Nicolo said he’d tried to call you but—”

“Yes. I got his messages.”

“I tried, too. For weeks. I’m glad you finally picked up the phone yesterday.”

“Right,” Damian said as if he meant it, but he didn’t. Ten minutes in and he already regretted taking Lucas’s call and agreeing to meet him.

At least mistakes like this one could be remedied, he thought, and glanced at his watch.

“The only thing is,” he said, “something’s come up. I’m not sure I can stay for lunch. I’ll try, but—”

“Bull.”

Damian looked up. “What?”

“You heard me, Aristedes. I said, ‘bull.’ Nothing’s come up. You just want a way to get out of what’s coming.”

“And that would be...?”

“A question.”

“Ask it, then.”

“Why didn’t you tell Nicolo or me when it happened? Why let us hear about it through those damned scandal sheets?”

“That’s two questions,” Damian said evenly.

“Yeah, well, here’s a third. Why didn’t you lean on us? There wasn’t a damned reason for you to go through all of that alone.”

“All of what?”

“Give me a break, Damian. You know all of what. Hell, man, losing the woman you love...”

“You make it sound as if I misplaced her,” Damian said, his voice flat and cold.

“You know I didn’t mean it that way. It’s just that Nicolo and I talked about it and—”

“Is that all you and Barbieri have to keep you busy? Gossip like a pair of old women?”

He saw Lucas’s eyes narrow. Why wouldn’t they? Damian knew he was tossing Lucas’s concern in his teeth but to hell with that. The last thing he wanted was sympathy.

“We care about you,” Lucas said quietly. “We just want to help.”

Damian gave a mirthless laugh. He saw Lucas blink and he leaned toward him across the table.

“Help me through my sorrow, you mean?”

“Yes, damn it. Why not?”

“The only way you could help me,” Damian said, very softly, “would be by bringing Kay back.”

“I know. I understand. I—”

“No,” he said coldly, “you do not know. You do not understand. I don’t want her back to ease my sorrow, Lucas.”

“Then, what—”

“I want her back so I can tell her I know exactly what she was. That she was a—”

The men fell silent as the waiter appeared with Damian’s second double vodka. He put it down and looked at Lucas, who took less than a second to nod in assent.

“Another whiskey,” he said. “Make it a double.”

They waited until the drink had been served. Then Lucas leaned forward.

“Look,” he said softly, “I know you’re bitter. Who wouldn’t be? Your fiancée, pregnant. A drunk driver, a narrow road...” He lifted his glass, took a long swallow. “It’s got to be rough. I mean, I didn’t know Kay, but—”

“That’s the second time you said that. And you’re right, you didn’t know her.”

“Well, you fell in love, proposed to her in a hurry. And—”

“Love had nothing to do with it.”

Lucas stared at him. “No?”

Damian stared back. Maybe it was the vodka. Maybe it was the way his old friend was looking at him. Maybe it was the sudden, unbidden memory of the woman outside the restaurant, how there’d been a time he’d have wanted her and not despised himself for it.

Who knew the reason? All he was sure of was that he was tired of keeping the truth buried inside.

“I didn’t propose. She moved in with me, here in New York.”

“Yeah, well—”

“She was pregnant,” Damian said flatly. “Then she lost the baby. Or so she said.”

“What do you mean?”

“She’d never been pregnant.” Damian’s jaw tightened. “The baby was a lie.”

Lucas’s face paled. “Hell, man. She scammed you!”

If there’d been one touch of pity in those words, Damian would have gotten to his feet and walked out. But there wasn’t. All he heard in Lucas’s voice was shock, indignation and a welcome hint of anger.

Suddenly the muted sounds of voices and laughter, the delicate clink of glasses and cutlery were almost painfully obtrusive. Damian stood, dropped several bills on the table and looked at Lucas.

“I bought a condo. It’s just a few blocks from here.”

Lucas was on his feet before Damian finished speaking.

“Let’s go.”

And right then, right there, for the first time since it had all started, Damian began to think he’d be okay.

A couple of hours later, the men sat facing each other in the living room of Damian’s fifteen-room duplex. Vodka and whiskey had given way to a pot of strong black coffee.

The view through three surrounding walls of glass was magnificent but neither man paid it any attention. The only view that mattered was the one Damian was providing into the soul of a scheming woman.

“So,” Lucas said quietly, “you’d been with her for some time.”

Damian nodded. “Whenever I was in New York.”

“And then you tried to break things off.”

“Yes. She was beautiful. Sexy as hell. But the longer I knew her... I suppose it sounds crazy but it was as if she’d been wearing a mask and now she was letting it slip.”

“That’s not crazy at all,” Lucas said grimly. “There are women out there who’ll do anything to land a man with money.”

“She began to show a side I hadn’t seen before. She cared only for possessions, treated people as if they were dirt. Cabbies, waitresses...” Damian drank some of his coffee. “I wanted out.”

“Who wouldn’t?”

“I thought about just not calling her anymore, but I knew that would be wrong. Telling her things were over seemed the decent thing to do. So I called, asked her to dinner.” His face turned grim and he rose to his feet, walked to one of the glass walls and stared out over the city. “I got one sentence out and she began to cry. And she told me she was pregnant with my baby.”

“You believed her?”

Damian swung around and looked at Lucas. “She’d been my mistress for a couple of months, Lucas. You’d have done the same.”

Lucas sighed and got to his feet. “You’re right.” He paused. “So, what did you do?”

“I said I’d support her and the baby. She said if I really cared about the baby in her womb, I would ask her to move in with me.”

“Dear God, man—”

“Yes. I know. But she was carrying my child. At least, that’s what I believed.”

Lucas sighed again. “Of course.”

“It was a nightmare,” Damian said, shuddering. “I guess she thought it was safe to drop the last of her act. She treated my staff like slaves, ran up a six figure charge at Tiffany...” His jaw knotted. “I didn’t want anything to do with her.”

“No sex?” Lucas asked bluntly.

“None. I couldn’t imagine why I’d slept with her in the first place. She thought I’d lost interest because she was pregnant.” He grimaced. “She began talking about how different things would be, if she weren’t...” Damian started toward the table that held the coffee service. Halfway there, he muttered something in Greek, veered past it and went instead to a teak cabinet on the wall. “What are you drinking?”

“Whatever you’re pouring.”

The answer brought a semblance of a smile to Damian’s lips. He poured healthy amounts of Courvoisier into a pair of crystal brandy snifters and held one out. The men drank. Then Damian spoke again.

“A couple of weeks later, she told me she’d miscarried. I felt—I don’t know what I felt. Upset, at the loss of the baby. I mean, by then I’d come to think of it as a baby, you know? Not a collection

of cells.” He shook his head. “Once I got past that, what I felt, to be honest, was relief. Now we could end the relationship.”

“Except, she didn’t want to end it.”

Damian gave a bitter laugh. “You’re smarter than I was. She became hysterical. She said I’d made promises, begged her to spend her life with me.”

“But you hadn’t.”

“Damned right, I hadn’t. The only thing that had drawn us together was the baby. Right?”

“Right,” Lucas said, although he was starting to realize he didn’t have to say anything. The flood gates had opened.

“She seemed to plummet into depression. Stayed in bed all day. Wouldn’t eat. Went to her obstetrician—at least she said she’d gone to her obstetrician—and told me he’d advised her to get pregnant again.”

“But—”

“Exactly. I didn’t want a child, not with her. I wanted out.” Damian took another swallow of brandy. “She begged me to reconsider. She’d come into my room in the middle of the night—”

“You had separate rooms?”

A cold light flared in Damian’s eyes. “From the start.”

“Sure, sure. Sorry. You were saying—”

“She was good at what she did. I have to give her that. Most nights, I turned her away but once...” A muscle knotted in his jaw. “I’m not proud of it.”

“Man, don’t beat yourself up. If she seduced you—”

“I used a condom. It made her crazy. ‘I want your baby,’ she said. “And then—”

Damian fell silent. Lucas leaned forward. “And then?”

“And then,” Damian said, after a deep breath and a long exhalation, “then she told me she’d conceived. That her doctor had confirmed it.”

“But the condom—”

“It broke, she said, when she—when she took it off me—” He cleared his throat. “Hell, why would I question it? The damned things do break. We all know that.”

“So—so she was pregnant again.”

“No,” Damian said flatly. “She wasn’t pregnant. Oh, she went through all the motions. Morning sickness, ice cream and pickles in the middle of the night. But she wasn’t pregnant.” His voice roughened. “She never had been. Not then, not ever.”

“Damian. You can’t be sure of—”

“She wanted my name. My money.” Damian gave a choked laugh. “Even my title, the ‘Prince’ thing you and I both know is nothing but outdated crap. She wanted everything.” He drew a deep breath, then blew it out. “And she lied about carrying my child to get it.”

“When did you find out?”

“When she died,” Damian said flatly. He drained his glass and refilled it. “I was in Athens on business. I phoned her every night to see how the pregnancy was going. Later, I found out she’d taken a lover and she’d been with him all the time I was gone.”

“Hell,” Lucas said softly.

“They were on Long Island. A narrow, twisting road on the Sound along the North Shore. He was driving, both of them high on booze and cocaine. The car went over a guardrail. Neither of them survived.” Damian looked up from his glass, his eyes bleak. “You talked about grief before, Lucas. Well, I did grieve then, not for her but for my unborn child...until I was going through Kay’s papers, tying up loose ends, and found an article she’d clipped from some magazine, all about the symptoms of pregnancy.”

“That still doesn’t mean—”

“I went to see her doctor. He confirmed it. She had never been pregnant. Not the first time. Not the second. It was all a fraud.”

The two friends sat in silence while the sun dipped below the horizon. Finally Lucas cleared his throat.

“I wish I could think of something clever to say.”

Damian smiled. “You got me to talk. You can’t imagine how much good that’s done. I’d been keeping everything bottled inside.”

“I have an idea. That club of mine. Remember? I’m meeting there with someone interested in buying me out.”

“So soon?”

“You know how it is in New York. Today’s hotspot is tomorrow’s trash.” Lucas glanced at his watch. “Come downtown with me, have a drink while I talk a little business and then we’ll go out.” He grinned. “Dinner at that place on Spring Street. A pair of bachelors on the town, like the old days.”

“Thank you, my friend, but I wouldn’t be very good company tonight.”

“Of course you would. And we won’t be alone for long.” Another quick grin. “Before you know it, there’ll be a couple of beautiful women hovering over us.”

“I’ve sworn off women for a while.”

“I can understand that but—”

“It’s what I need to do right now.”

“You sure?”

Inexplicably an image of the woman with green eyes and sun-streaked hair flashed before Damian’s eyes. He hadn’t wanted to notice her, certainly didn’t want to remember her...

“Yes,” he said briskly, “I’m positive.”

“You know what they say about getting back on the horse that threw you,” Lucas said with a little smile.

“I told Nicolo almost the same thing a year ago, the night he met Aimee.”

“And?”

“And,” Damian said, “it was good advice for him, but not for me. This is different.”

Lucas’s smile faded. “You’re right. Well, let me just call this guy I’m supposed to meet—”

“No, don’t do that. I’d like to be alone tonight. Just do a little thinking, start putting this thing behind me.”

Lucas cocked his head. “It’s no big deal, Damian. I can meet him tomorrow.”

“I appreciate it but, honestly, I feel a lot better now that we talked.” Damian held out his hand. “Go have your meeting. And, Lucas—Thank you.”

“Para nada,” Lucas said, smiling. “I’ll call you tomorrow, yes? Maybe we can have dinner together.”

“I wish I could but I’m flying back to Minos in the morning.” Damian gripped Lucas’s shoulder. “Take care of yourself, filios mou.”

“You do the same.” Lucas frowned. Damian looked better than he had a few hours ago but there was still a haunted look in his eyes. “I wish you’d change your mind about tonight. Forget what I said about women. We could go to the gym. Lift some weights. Run the track.”

“You really think it would make me feel better to beat you again?”

“You beat me once, a thousand years ago at Yale.”

“A triviality.”

The men chuckled. Damian slung his arm around Lucas’s neck as they walked slowly to the door. “Don’t worry about me, Reyes. I’m going to take a long shower, pour myself another brandy and then, thanks to you, I’m going to have the first real night’s sleep I’ve had in months.”

The friends shook hands. Then Damian closed the door after Lucas, leaned back against it and let his smile slip away.

He'd told Lucas the truth. He did feel better. For three months, ever since Kay's death, he'd avoided his friends, his acquaintances; he'd dedicated every waking minute to business in hopes he could rid himself of his anger.

What was the point in being angry at a dead woman?

Or in being angry at himself, for having let her scam him?

"No point," Damian muttered as he climbed the stairs to his bedroom. "No point at all."

Kay had made a fool of him. So what? Men survived worse. And if, in the deepest recesses of his soul he somehow mourned the loss of a child that had never existed, a child he'd never known he even wanted, well, that could be dealt with, too.

He was thirty-one years old. Maybe it was time to settle down. Marry. Have a family.

Thee mou, was he insane?

You couldn't marry, have kids without a wife. And there wasn't a way in hell he was going to take a wife anytime soon. What he needed was just the opposite of settling down.

Lucas had it right.

The best cure for what ailed him would be losing himself in a woman. A soft, willing body. An eager mouth. A woman without a hidden agenda, without any plans beyond pleasure...

There it was. That same image again. The green-eyed woman with the sun-streaked hair. Hell, what a chance he'd missed! She'd looked right at him and even then, trapped in a black mood, he'd known what that look meant.

The lady had been interested.

The flat truth was, women generally were.

He'd been interested, too—or he would have been, if he hadn't been so damned busy wallowing in self-pity. Because, hell, that's what this was. Anger, sure, but with a healthy dollop of Poor Me mixed in.

He'd had enough of it to last a lifetime.

He'd call Lucas. Tell him his plans for the night sounded good after all. Dinner, drinks, a couple of beautiful women and so what if they didn't have green eyes, sun-streaked hair...

The doorbell rang.

Damian's brows lifted. A private elevator was the sole access to his apartment. Nobody could enter it without the doorman's approval and that approval had to come straight from Damian himself.

Unless...

He grinned. "Lucas," he said, as he went quickly down the stairs. His friend had reached the lobby, turned around and come right back.

Damian reached the double doors. "Reyes," he said happily as he flung them open, "when did you take up mind-reading? I was just going to call you—"

But it wasn't Lucas in the marble foyer.

It was the woman. The one he'd seen outside Portofino's.

The green-eyed beauty he hadn't been able to get out of his head.

CHAPTER TWO

OH, WHAT a joy to see!

Damian Aristedes's handsome jaw dropped halfway to the ground. Seeing that was the first really good thing that had happened to Ivy in a while.

Obviously his highness wasn't accustomed to having his life disrupted by unwanted surprises.

Damian's unflappable, Kay had said.

Well, okay. She hadn't said it exactly that way. Nobody can get to him, was probably more accurate.

Not true, Ivy thought. Just look at the man now.

"Who are you? What are you doing here?"

She didn't answer. The pleasure of catching him off guard was wearing off. She'd prepared for this moment but the reality was terrifying. Her heart was hammering so hard she was half afraid he could hear it.

"You were outside Portofino's today."

He was gaining control of himself. His voice had taken on authority; his pale gray eyes had narrowed.

"Are you a reporter for one of those damned tabloids? I don't give interviews."

He really didn't know who she was. She'd wondered about that, whether Kay had ever shown him a photo or pointed out her picture in a magazine, but she'd pretty much squelched that possibility at the restaurant, where she'd followed him from his Fifty-Seventh Street office.

He'd looked at her, but only the way most men looked at her. With interest, avarice—the kind of hunger she despised, the kind that said she was a plaything and they wanted a new toy.

Although, when this man had looked at her today, just for a second, surely no more than that, she'd felt—she'd felt—

What?

She'd seemed to lose her equilibrium. She was glad someone had joined him because she knew better than to confront him with another person around.

This discussion had to be private.

As for that loss of equilibrium or whatever it was, it only proved how dangerous Damian Aristedes was.

That he'd been able to mesmerize Kay was easy to understand. Kay had always been a fool for men.

That he'd had an effect on Ivy, even for a heartbeat, only convinced her she'd figured him right.

The prince of all he surveyed was a sleek jungle cat, constantly on the prowl. A beautiful predator. Too bad he had no soul, no heart, no—

"Are you deaf, woman? Who are you? What do you want? And how in hell did you get up here?"

He'd taken a couple of steps forward, just enough to invade her space. No question it was a subtle form of intimidation. It might have worked, too—despite her height, he was big enough so that she had to tilt her head back to meet his eyes—but Ivy was not a stranger to intimidation.

Growing up, she'd been bullied by experts. It could only hurt if you gave in to it.

"Three questions," she said briskly. "Did you want them answered in order, or am I free to pick and choose?"

He moved quickly, grasped her wrist and forced her arm behind her back. It hurt; his grip was strong, his hands hard. She hadn't expected a show of physical strength from a pampered aristocrat but she didn't flinch.

"Take your hand off me."

“It’ll take me one second to phone for the police and tell them there’s an intruder in my home. Is that what you want?”

“You’re the one who won’t want the police involved in this, Your Highness.”

His gray eyes focused on hers. “Because?”

Now, Ivy thought, and took a steady breath.

“My name is Ivy.”

Nothing. Not even a flicker of interest.

“Ivy Madison,” she added, as if that would make the difference.

He didn’t even blink. He was either a damned good actor or—A tingle of alarm danced over her skin.

“You are—you are Damian Aristedes?”

He smiled thinly. “A little late to ask but yes, that’s who I am.”

“Then—then surely, you recognize my name...”

“I do not.”

“I’m Kay’s sister. Her stepsister.”

That got a reaction. His eyes turned cold. He let go of her wrist, or maybe it made more sense to say he dropped it. She half expected him to wipe his hand on his trousers. Instead he stepped back.

“Here to pay a condolence call three months late?”

“I’d have thought you’d have been the one to call me.”

He laughed, although the sound he made had no mirth to it.

“Now, why in hell would I do that? For starters, I never knew Kay had a sister.” He paused. “That is, if you really are her sister.”

“What are you talking about? Certainly I’m her sister. And, of course you know about me.”

The woman who claimed to be Kay’s sister spoke with authority. Not that Damian believed she really was who she claimed to be.

At the very least she was up to no good. Why approach him this way instead of phoning or e-mailing? What the hell was going on here?

Only one way to find out, Damian thought, and reached for his cell phone, lying on the marble-topped table beside the door.

“What are you doing?”

“Calling your bluff. You won’t answer my questions? Fine. You can tell your story to the cops.”

“You’d better think twice before you pick up that phone, Mr. Aristedes.”

His intruder had started out full of conviction, like a poker player sure of a winning hand, but that had changed. Her voice had gone from strong to shaken; those green eyes—so green he wondered if she were wearing contact lenses—had gone wide.

A scam, he thought coldly. She was trying to set him up for something. The only question was, what?

“Prince,” he said, surprising himself with the use of his title. Generally he asked people to call him by his first or last name, not by his honorific, but if it took royal arrogance to shake his intruder’s self-control, he’d use it. “It’s Prince Damian. And I’ll give you one second to start talking. How did you get up here?”

“You mean, how did I bypass the lobby stormtroopers?”

She was trying to regain control. Damned if he’d let it happen. Damian put down the phone, angled toward her and invaded her space again so that she not only stepped back, she stepped into the corner.

No way out, except past him.

“Don’t play with me, lady. I want straight answers.”

She caught a bit of her lower lip between her teeth, worried it for a second before releasing it and quickly touching the tip of her tongue to the flesh she’d gnawed.

Damian's belly clenched. Lucas had it right. He'd been too long without a woman.

"A delivery boy at the service entrance held the door for me." She smiled thinly. "He was very courteous. Then I used the fire stairs."

"If you're Kay's sister, why didn't you simply ask the doorman to announce you?"

"I waited all this time to hear from you but nothing happened. Telling your doorman I wanted to see you didn't strike me as useful."

"Let me see some ID."

"What?"

"Identification. Something that says you're who you claim to be."

"I don't know why Kay loved you," Ivy said bitterly.

Damian decided it was the better part of valor not to answer that. Instead he watched in silence as she dug through the bag slung over one shoulder, took out a wallet and opened it. "Here. My driver's license. Satisfied?"

Not satisfied, just more puzzled. The license said she was Ivy Madison, age twenty-seven, with an address in Chelsea. And the photo checked out. It was the woman standing before him. Not even the bored Motor Vehicle clerks and their soulless machines had been able to snap a picture that dimmed her looks.

Damian looked up.

"This doesn't make you Kay's sister."

Without a word, she dug into her purse again, took out a business-card size folder and flipped it open. The photo inside was obviously years old but there was no mistaking the faces of the two women looking at the camera.

"All right. What if you are Kay's sister. Why are you here?"

Ivy stared at him. "You can't be serious!"

He was...and then, with breathtaking speed, things started to fall into place.

The sisters didn't resemble each other, but that didn't mean the apple had fallen far from the tree.

"Let me save you some time," Damian said coolly. "Your sister didn't leave any money."

Those bright green eyes flashed with defiance. "I'm not here for money."

"There's no jewelry, either. No spoils of war. I donated everything I'd given her to charity."

"I don't care about that, either."

"Really?" He folded his arms. "You mean, I haven't ruined your hopes for a big score?"

Her eyes filled with tears.

Indeed, Damian thought grimly, that was exactly what he'd done.

"You—you egotistical, self-aggrandizing, aristocratic pig," she hissed, her voice shaking. "You haven't spoiled anything except for yourself. And believe me, Prince or Mr. or whatever name you want, you'll never, ever know what you missed!"

It was an emotional little speech and he could see she was determined to end it on a high note by shoving past him and striding to the door.

There was every reason to let her go.

If she was willing to give up so easily and disappear from his life as quickly as she'd entered it, who was he to stop her?

Logic told him to move aside.

To hell with logic.

Damian shifted his weight to keep her trapped in the corner. She called him another name, not nearly as creative as the last, put her arms out straight and tried to push him away.

He laughed, caught both her wrists and trapped her hands against the hard wall of his chest. Anger and defiance stained her cheeks with crimson.

"Damn it, let go!"

“Why, sweetheart,” he purred, “I don’t understand. How come you’re so eager to leave when you were so eager to see me?”

She kicked him in the shin with one of her high heeled boots. It hurt, but he’d be damned if he let her know that. Instead he dragged her closer until she was pressed against him.

He told himself it was only to keep her from gouging his shin to the bone.

And that there was no reason, either, for the hot fist of lust that knotted in his groin as he looked down into her flushed face.

Her eyes were wild. Her hair was a torrent of spun gold. Her lips were trembling. Trembling, and full, and delicately parted, and all at once, all at once, Damian understood why she was here.

What a thickheaded idiot he was!

Kay had obviously told Ivy about him. That he had money, a title, an eye for beautiful women. And now Kay was gone but Ivy—Ivy was very much alive.

Incredibly alive.

His gaze dropped to her mouth again. “What a fool you must think me,” he said softly. “Of course I know why you’re here.”

Her eyes lit. Her mouth curved in a smile. “Thank God,” she said shakily. “For a while there, I thought—”

Damian silenced her in midsentence. He thrust his hands into her hair, lifted her face to his and kissed her.

She cried out against his mouth. Slammed her fists against his chest. A nice touch, he thought with a coldness that belied his rising libido. She’d come to audition as her sister’s replacement. Well, he’d give her a tryout, all right. Kiss her, show her she had no effect on him and then send her packing.

Except, it wasn’t happening that way.

Maybe he really had been without a woman for too long.

Maybe his emotions were out of control.

Sex, desire—neither asks for reason, only satiation and completion. He wanted this. The heat building inside him like a flash-fire in dry brush. The deep, hungry kiss.

The woman struggling for freedom in his arms.

She was pretending. He knew that. It was all part of the act. He nipped at her bottom lip; she gave a little cry and he slid his tongue into her mouth, tasted her sweetness, caught the little sound she made and kissed her again and again until she whimpered, lifted herself to him, flattened her hands against his chest...

Thee mou!

Damian jerked away. The woman stumbled back. Her eyes flew open, the pupils so enormous they’d all but consumed the green of her irises.

What the hell was he doing? She was just like Kay. A siren, luring a man with sex—

Her hand flew through the air and slammed against his jaw.

“You bastard,” she said in a hoarse whisper. “You evil, horrible son of a bitch!”

“Don’t bother with the theatrics,” he snarled. “Or I’ll call you some names of my own.”

“I don’t understand why Kay loved you!”

“Your sister never loved anything that didn’t have a price tag on it. Now, go on. Get the hell out before I change my mind and call the police.”

“She loved you enough to let you talk her into having this baby!”

Damian had swung away. Now he turned around and faced Ivy Madison.

“What are you talking about?”

“You know damned well what I’m talking about! She lost the first baby and instead of offering her any comfort and compassion, you told her to get out because she couldn’t give you an heir.”

Could a woman’s lies actually leave a man speechless? Damian opened his mouth, then shut it again while he tried to make sense of what Ivy Madison had just said.

“You would have tossed away the woman who loved you, who adored you, just because she couldn’t give you a child. So my sister said she’d give you a baby, no matter what it took, even after the doctors said she couldn’t run the risk of pregnancy!”

“Wait a minute. Just wait one damned minute—”

Ivy stared at him, emerald eyes bright against the pallor of her skin.

“You used her love for you to try to get your own way and you didn’t care what it did to her, what happened to her—”

Damian was on her in two strides, hands gripping her shoulders, fingers biting into her flesh, lifting her to her toes so that their faces were inches apart.

“Get out,” he said in a low, dangerous voice. “Do you hear me? Get out of my home and my life or I’ll have you arrested. And if you think you’ll walk away after a couple of hours in jail, think again. My attorneys will see to it that you stay in prison for the next hundred years.”

It was an empty threat. What could he charge her with besides being a world-class liar? He knew that. What counted was that she didn’t.

But it didn’t stop her.

“Kay was in love with you.”

“I just told you what Kay loved. You have five seconds, Miss Madison. One. Two—”

“She found a way to have your child. You were happy to go along with it but now, you refuse to acknowledge that—”

“Goodbye, Miss Madison.”

Damian spun Ivy toward the door. He put his hand in the small of her back, gave her a little push and she stumbled toward the elevator.

“I’m going to call down to the lobby. If the doorman doesn’t see you stepping out of this car in the next couple of minutes, the cops will be waiting.”

“You can’t do this!”

“Just watch me.”

The elevator door opened. Damian curled his fingers around her elbow and quick-marched her inside.

Tears were streaming down her face.

She was as good at crying on demand as Kay had been, he thought dispassionately, though Kay had never quite mastered the art. Her face would get red, her skin blotchy but despite all that, her nose never ran.

Ivy’s eyes were cloudy with tears. Her skin was the color of cream. And her nose—damn it, her nose was leaking.

A nice touch of authenticity, Damian told himself as he stepped from the car and the door began to close.

“I was a fool to come here.”

Damian grabbed the door. Her words were slurred. Another nice touch, he thought, and offered a wicked smile.

“Didn’t work out quite the way you’d planned it, did it?”

“I should have known. All these months, no call from you...”

“I’m every bit the son of a bitch you imagined I’d be,” he said, smiling again.

“I tried to tell Kay it was a bad idea, but she wouldn’t listen.”

“I’ll bet. Two con artists discussing how to handle a sucker. Must have been one hell of a conversation.”

She brushed the back of her hand over her eyes but, more credit to her acting skills, the tears kept coming.

“Just be sure of one thing, Prince Aristedes.”

“It’s Prince Damian,” he said coolly. “If you’re going to try to work royalty, you should use the proper form of address.”

“Don’t think you can change your mind after the baby’s born.”

“I wouldn’t dream of…” He jerked back. “What baby?”

“Because I won’t let you near this child. I don’t give a damn how many lawyers you turn loose on me!”

Damian stared at her. He’d let go of the elevator door and it was starting to close again. He moved fast and forced it open.

“What baby?” he demanded.

“You know damned well what baby! Mine. I mean, Kay’s.” Ivy’s chin lifted. “Kay’s—and yours.”

The earth gave a sickening tilt under his feet. There was a baby? No. There couldn’t be. Kay had never really been pregnant. Her doctor had told him so…

“You’re a vicious little liar!”

“Fine. Stay with that idea. I told you, I won’t let my baby—Kay’s baby—near a son of a bitch like—”

She let out a shriek as he dragged her from the elevator, marched her into his apartment and all but threw her into a chair.

“What the hell are you talking about?” He stood over her, feet apart, arms folded, eyes blazing with anger. “Start talking, and it better be the truth.”

She began sobbing. He didn’t give a damn.

“I’m waiting,” he growled. “What baby are you talking about? Whose is it? And where?”

Ivy sprang to her feet. “Get out of my way.”

He grabbed her again, hauled her to her toes.

“Answer me, goddamn it!”

Ivy looked up at him while the seconds seemed to turn to hours. Then she wrenched free of his hands.

This baby,” she said, laying a hand over her belly. “The one in my womb. I’m pregnant, Prince Damian. Pregnant—with your child.”

CHAPTER THREE

PREGNANT?

Pregnant, with his child?

Damian's brain reeled.

Thee mou, a man didn't want to hear that accusation from a woman he didn't love once in a lifetime, let alone twice...

And then his sanity returned.

This woman, Ivy, might well be pregnant but it didn't have a damned thing to do with him. Not unless science had come up with a way a man could have sex with a woman without ever seeing her or touching her.

She was looking at him, defiance stamped in every feature. What was she waiting for? Was he supposed to blink, fall down, clap his hand to his forehead?

The only thing he felt like doing was tossing her over his shoulder and throwing her out. But first—but first—

Damian snorted. Snorted again and then, to hell with it, burst out laughing.

Ivy Madison gave him a killing look.

"How can you laugh at this?" she demanded.

That only made him laugh harder.

He'd heard some really creative tall tales in his life. His father had been especially adept at telling them as he took his company to the edge of ruin but nothing, nothing topped this one.

It was funny.

It was infuriating.

Did she take him for a complete fool? Her sister had. Yes, but at least he'd had sex with the sister. There'd been a basis—shaky, but a basis—for Kay claiming she was pregnant.

Hell, the hours the two women must have spent talking about what a sucker he was, how easily he could be taken in by a beautiful face.

"Perhaps you'd like to share what's so damned amusing, Prince Damian?"

Amusing? Damian's laughter faded. "Actually," he said, "I'm insulted."

She blinked. "Insulted?"

"That you'd come up with such a pathetic lie." He tucked his hands in his trouser pockets and sighed dramatically. "You have to have sex with a man before he can impregnate you, Miss Madison, and you and I..."

Suddenly he knew where this was heading. He'd heard of scams like it before.

A beautiful woman chooses a man who's rich. Well-known. A man whose name would garner space in the tabloids.

When the time is right, she confronts him, tells him they met at a party, on a yacht—there were dozens of places they could have stumbled across each other.

That established, she drops the bomb.

She's pregnant. He's responsible. When he says That's impossible, I never saw you before in my life, she starts to cry. He was drinking that night, she says. He seduced her, she says. Doesn't he remember?

Because she does.

Every touch. Every sigh. Every nuance of their encounter is seared in her memory, and if he doesn't want it all over the scandal sheets, he'll Do The Right Thing.

He'll give her a fat sum of money to help her. Nothing like a bribe, of course. Just money to get her through a bad time.

Some men would give in without much of a fight, even if they could disprove the story. They'd do whatever it took just to avoid publicity.

Damian's jaw tightened.

Oh, yes. That was how this was supposed to go down... Except, it wouldn't. His beautiful scam artist was about to learn she couldn't draw him into that kind of trap.

He'd already been the victim of one Madison sister. He'd be damned if he'd be the victim of the second sister, too.

Damian looked up. The woman had not moved. She stood her ground, shoulders squared, head up, eyes glittering with defiance.

God, she was magnificent! Anyone walking in and seeing her would be sure she was a brave Amazon, overmatched but prepared to fight to her last breath.

Too bad there wasn't an audience. There was only him, and he wasn't buying the act.

Damian smiled. Slowly he brought his hands together in mocking applause.

"Excellent," he said softly. "An outstanding performance." His smile disappeared. "Just one problem, kardia mou. I'm on to you."

"What?"

"You heard me. I know your game. And I'm not going to play it."

"Game? Is that what you think this is? I come to you after my sister's death because you didn't have enough concern to come to me and you think—you think it's a game?"

"Perhaps I used the wrong word. It's more like a melodrama. You're the innocent little flower, I'm the cruel villain."

"I don't know what you're talking about!"

Damian started slowly toward her. He saw her stiffen. She wanted to back away or maybe even turn and run. Good, he thought coldly. She was afraid of him, and she damned well ought to be.

"Don't you want to tell me the rest? The details of our passionate encounter?"

She looked at him as if he were crazy. "What passionate encounter?"

"Come now, darling. Have you forgotten your lines? You're supposed to remind me of what we did when I was drunk." He stopped inches from her, a chill smile curling across his lips. "Well, I'm waiting. Where did it happen? Here? Athens? A party on my yacht at the Côte d'Azur? Not that it matters. The story's the same no matter where we met."

"I didn't say—"

"No. You didn't, and that's my fault. I never gave you the chance to tell your heartbreaking little tale, but why waste time when it's so trite? I was drunk. I seduced you. Now, it's—it's—How many months later, did you say?"

"Three months. You know that, just as you know the rest of what you said isn't true!"

"Did I get the facts wrong?" His eyes narrowed; his voice turned hard. "Frankly I don't give a damn. All I care about is seeing the last of you, lady. You understand?"

Ivy understood, all right.

This man her sister had worshipped, this—this Adonis whose face and body were enough to quicken the beat of a woman's heart...

This man Kay had been willing to do anything for, was looking at her and lying through his teeth.

How could Kay have loved him?

"Shall I be more direct, Miss Madison?" Damian clamped his hands on her shoulders. "Get out of here before I lose my temper."

His voice was low, his grasp painful. He was furious and, Ivy was sure, capable of violence.

That wasn't half as important as being certain she understood exactly what he was telling her.

He didn't want the child she was carrying.

She'd figured as much, when she hadn't heard from him after the accident. She'd waited and waited, caught up first in shock at losing Kay, then in growing awareness of her own desperation until, finally, she'd realized the prince's silence was a message.

Still, it wasn't enough.

He had to put his denial of his rights to his child in writing. She needed a document that said he didn't want the baby, that he'd rather believe her story was a lie than acknowledge he'd fathered a child.

Even that was no guarantee.

Damian Aristedes was powerful. He could hire all the lawyers in Manhattan and have money left over. He could not only make his own rules, he could change them when he had to.

But if she had something on paper, something that might give her a legal edge if he ever changed his mind—

“I can almost see you thinking, Miss Madison.”

Ivy blinked. The prince was standing with his arms folded over his chest, narrowed eyes locked on her face.

It was disconcerting.

She was accustomed to having men look at her. It went with the territory.

When you had done hundreds of photo shoots, when your own face looked back at you from magazine covers, you expected it. It was part of the price you paid for success in the world of modeling.

Men noticed you. They looked at you.

But not like this.

The expression on Damian Aristedes's face spoke of contempt, not desire. How dare he be disdainful of her? She'd made a devil's bargain—she knew that, had known it almost from the beginning—but she'd been prepared to stand by that bargain even if it tore out her heart.

Not him.

He was the man who'd started this. Now, he was pretending he didn't know what she was talking about.

That was fine. It was perfect. It meant she'd kept her promise and now she was free to put the past behind her and concentrate on the future. On the child she'd soon have.

Her child, not his.

It was just infuriating to have him look at her as if she were a liar and a cheat.

Except, there'd been a moment, more than one, when she'd caught him watching her in a different way, his eyes glinting not with disdain but with hunger.

Hunger only she could ease.

And when that had happened, she'd felt—she'd felt—

“You're as transparent as glass, Miss Madison.”

Years of letting the camera steal her face but never her thoughts kept Ivy from showing any reaction.

“How interesting. Do you read minds when you're not busy evading responsibility, Your Highness?”

“You're trying to come up with a way to capitalize on that moment of shock I showed when you told me I was your baby's father.” He smiled thinly. “Trust me. You can't.”

He was partly right. She was trying to come up with a way to capitalize on something, but not that.

Ivy took a steadying breath.

“I'll be happy to leave, happier still never to see you again, Prince Damian. But first—”

“Ah. But first, you want a check for...How much? A hundred thousand? Five hundred thousand? A million? Don't shake your head, Miss Madison. We both know you have a price in mind.”

Another steady breath. “Not a check.”

“Cash, then. It doesn’t matter.”

The icy little smile slipped from his lips and she repressed a shudder. The prince would be a formidable enemy.

“I don’t want money. I want a letter. A document that makes it clear you’re giving up all rights to the child in my womb.”

He laughed. Laughed, damn him!

“Thee mou, lady. Don’t you know when to quit?”

“Sign it, date it and I’ll be out of your life forever.”

His laughter stopped with the speed of a faucet turning off. “Enough,” he said through his teeth. “Get out of my home before I do something we’ll both regret.”

“Just a letter,” she said. “A few lines—”

He said something in what she assumed was Greek. She didn’t understand the words but she didn’t have to as he gripped her by the shoulders, spun her around, put a hand in the small of her back and shoved her forward.

“And if you’re foolish enough to tell your ridiculous story to anyone—”

The thing to do was hire a lawyer. Except, he’d hire a dozen for every one she could afford. He had power. Money. Status. Still, there had to be a way. There had to be!

“And if you really are knocked up, if some man was stupid enough to let your face blind him to the scheming bitch you really are—”

Ivy spun around, swung her fist and caught him in the jaw. He was big and strong and hard as nails but she caught him off guard. He blinked and staggered back. It took him all of a second to recover but it was enough to send a warm rush of pleasure through her blood.

“You—you pompous ass,” she hissed. She marched forward, index finger aimed at his chest, and jabbed it right into the center of his starched white shirt, her fear gone, everything forgotten but his impossible arrogance. “This isn’t about you and who you are and how much money you have. It isn’t about you at all! I don’t want anything from you, Prince Damian. I never—”

She gasped as he caught her by the elbows and lifted her to her toes.

“You don’t want anything from me, huh?” Damian’s lips drew back from his teeth as he bent his head toward hers. “That’s why you came here? Because you don’t want anything from me?”

“I came because I thought I owed it to you but I was wrong. I don’t. And I warn you, letter or no letter, if you should change your mind a month from now, a decade from now, and try and claim my baby—”

“Damn you,” he roared, “there is no baby!”

“Whatever you say.”

“The truth at last!”

“Truth?” Ivy laughed in his face. “You wouldn’t know it if it bit you in the tail!”

“I know that I never took you to bed.”

“Let go!”

“How come you didn’t factor that into your little scheme?” Damian yanked her wrist, dragged it behind her back. She flinched but she’d sooner have eaten nails than let him know he was hurting her. “You made several mistakes, Miss Madison. One, I don’t drink to excess. Two, I never forget a woman I’ve been with.” His gaze swept over her with slow deliberation before returning to her face. “Believe me, lady, if I’d had you, I’d remember.”

“I’m done talking about that.”

“But I’m not.” He drew her closer, until they were a breath apart. “Why should I be? You said we were intimate. I said we weren’t. Why not settle the question?”

“It isn’t worth settling. And I never said we’d been intimate.”

His lips drew back from his teeth. “Ah, Ivy, Ivy, you disappoint me. Backing down already?” His smile vanished; his eyes turned cold. “Come on, glyka mou. Here’s your chance. Convince me we slept together. Remind me of what it was like.”

“Stop it. Stop it! I’m warning you, let me—”

She gasped as Damian slipped one hand lightly around her throat.

“A woman can only taunt a man for so long before he retaliates. Surely someone with your skills should have learned that by now.”

“You’re wrong! You know the truth, that we never—”

Damian kissed her.

Her mouth was cool and soft, and she made a little sound of terrified protest.

That was how she made it sound, anyway.

It was all part of the act. Part of a performance. Part of who she was and why she was here and...

And she tasted sweet, sweeter than the first time he’d kissed her, maybe because he knew the shape of her mouth now. The fullness of it.

The sexy silkiness.

She cried out again, jammed her hand against his chest and Damian told himself it was time to let go of her.

He’d accomplished what he wanted, met her challenge, showed her that she had no power over him...

His arousal was swift. He put one hand at the base of her spine and pressed hard enough so she had no choice but to tilt her hips against his and feel it.

God, he was on fire.

Another little sound whispered from her mouth to his and then, same as before, he felt the change in her. Her mouth softened. Warmed. The stiffness went out of her body and she leaned toward him.

He reminded himself that nothing she did was real. It was all part of her overall plan.

And it didn’t matter.

He knew only that he wanted this. The taste of her. The feel of her. He was entitled to that. Hell, he’d been accused of something he had not done.

Why not do it now?

Lift Ivy into his arms. Carry her up the stairs to his bedroom. Take everything she wanted him to believe he’d taken before, again and again and again...

“Please,” she whispered, “please—”

Her voice was soft. Dazed. It made him want her even more.

Deliberately he slid his hand inside her jacket and cupped the delicate weight of one breast.

“Please, what?” he growled. “Touch you? Take you?”

His fingers swept over her breast, blood thundering in his ears when he felt the thrust of her nipple through the silk that covered it. She moaned against his mouth.

A wave of lust rolled through him, shocking him with its intensity.

She moaned again and he gathered her closer. Slid his hands under the waistband of her black jeans. Felt the coolness of her buttocks, the silk of her flesh.

Primal desire flooded his senses. He wanted her, no matter what she was. And she wanted him. Wanted him. Wanted him...

Panagia mou! Damian flung her from him and stepped back. Tears were streaming down her face. If he hadn’t known better, he’d have honestly thought she was weeping.

“I can’t believe Kay loved you, that she wanted to give you a child!”

“Your story’s getting old. And confused. You’re the one who’s pregnant. Who I took to bed, remember?”

“That’s not true! Why do you keep saying it? You know we didn’t go to bed!”

“Right,” he said, his voice cold with contempt and sarcasm. “I keep forgetting that. We didn’t. We did it standing up. Or sitting in a chair. Or on a sofa—”

“There was no chair. No sofa. You know that. There was just—just your sperm. A syringe. And—and me.”

“Yeah. Sure. You, my sperm, a syringe...” Damian jerked back. “What?”

“You damned well know what! And you didn’t even have the—the decency to let Kay be artificially inseminated by a physician. Oh, no. You wanted to protect your precious privacy! So you—you used a—a condom to—to—” Her voice turned bitter. “I knew what you were when you didn’t ask to meet me in advance. When you didn’t care enough to come with Kay the day she—the day I—the day it took place.”

Damian wanted to say something but he couldn’t. He felt as if his head were in a vise.

Her story was fantastic. Far more interesting than the usual He made me pregnant tale.

And the media loved fantasy.

They’d fall on this like hyenas on a wounded antelope. By the time a different scandal knocked the story off the front pages, the damage would have been done. To his name, to Aristedes Shipping, the company he’d spent his adult life rebuilding.

“Nothing to say, Your Highness?” Ivy put her hands on her hips and eyed him with derision. “Or have you finally figured out that denial will only take you so far?”

Tossing this woman out on her backside was no longer a viable option. She was too clever for such easy dismissal.

“You’re right about that,” he said calmly. “Denial only goes so far and then it’s time to take appropriate action.” He closed the distance between them, relishing the way she stumbled back. “You will take a pregnancy test. Then, if you’re really pregnant, a paternity test.”

Ivy stared at him. She couldn’t think of a reason he’d want her to take such tests... Unless he was telling the truth. Unless he really hadn’t known about the baby.

And if he hadn’t... What would happen once he did?

“I don’t want to take any tests,” she said quickly. “You said you didn’t want the baby. That’s fine. You only have to give me a document—”

“No, glyka mou. It is you who will provide me with a document that legally establishes that you and I and a syringe never met, except inside your scheming little brain.”

“But—”

Damian took her arm, marched her to the elevator and pushed her inside it. Seconds later, the doors slid shut in her face.

CHAPTER FOUR

IT TROUBLED her all the way back to her apartment.

If Kay's lover had known about the baby, if he'd orchestrated it as Kay claimed, why would the details of the baby's conception have shaken him?

And he had been shaken.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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