
Chapter 1

A new mission

MAX COULDN'T WIPE the wide smile off his face when he walked into his brand new corner office. It took him years of hard work and countless hours of overtime to get here. He let out a deep sigh when he sat down behind his wide desk. Letting his hands glide over the fine wood and whispered with a smirk, "Finally."

"Already getting comfortable, I see," Robert Lee, partner at Brisbane & Lee and Max's boss, said and entered the office.

Max forced a smile. When the old man took the time out of his busy day to show up at his office, it was never a good sign. Usually he would send an email or let his secretary call the people up into his office instead.

"I worked hard for this. I think I deserve some gloating."

"This new position stands on feet of clay though. You have no reason to lean back and relax. Any day another

employee can rise up and kick you out of this office just the way you did with your predecessor.”

Max furrowed his dark brows and looked at the alpha with skepticism.

“And how do you suggest I strengthen my position? I want to become partner before I turn forty after all.”

It was what he had been working toward since he started his internship here almost twenty years ago.

“Catch our white whale, of course,” Lee barked with a laugh that didn’t reach his eyes. It was not a joke or suggestion, but an order.

Max leaned back in his chair and swiveled from side to side. “White whale?”

“Clarke Industries.”

Max stopped in the middle of the movement.

“George Clarke’s company?” The name weighed heavy on his chest as unwanted memories of the man in question came flooding back. But Max quickly pushed them aside again. George Clarke was part of his past and he wouldn’t allow the old man to ruin his future. At least not again. He wasn’t an impressionable seventeen-year-old anymore.

“Yes, we’ve been trying to acquire the company for the last three years. If you manage this, you can be certain that you will only move up the ladder. This corner office will merely be the starting point,” Robert said and made finger guns before he left.

Max looked after him for a long while. If Lee & Brisbane had tried and failed to acquire Clarke Industries for three years, how was he supposed to manage it? At least Lee hadn’t given him a deadline, but he could already feel the other upstarts breathing down his neck.

Max swiveled around and turned toward the big windows overlooking Russlow and the other high rise build-

ings that made up the urban landscape. To think that this could only be the start of his career...

Years of working his ass off and it could still slip through his fingers? He could do this. Max needed to believe in this and then it would become true. Clarke Industries would become his before the year was over which left him with a little over six months. Come to think of it, the fact that Clarke was the first one he would have to deal with was a treat in itself. He had hated him since high school. George Clarke was the epitome of an arrogant prick and a disgrace. Not only had he lied and cheated his way into the pockets of every business partner he knew but he had also used his age and dominance against a kid who was seeing his daughter. Max would take everything away from him and delight in it.

His phone ringing pulled him out of his thoughts.

A smile spread across his face when he noticed the caller-ID. It was one of his best friends, Aiden.

"Hello?"

"Is this the new star on the horizon at Brisbane & Lee?"

Max grinned from ear to ear. "It sure is. I have a beautiful view all the way to your shitty company in the ugly part of town."

"Well, well, well. Someone is friendly today. I guess that means you don't need the massive dinner the boys and I have planned for you and want to drag you to after work then."

"No, no, I am eternally grateful for your kindness, my friend."

"Uh huh," Aiden hummed and let it slide. "Be ready to be picked up around seven."

"Sounds like a trap," Tom said and blew out smoke from his cigar.

Aiden nodded and leaned against the high balustrade that surrounded the rooftop restaurant at the heart of Russell. Max and his four best friends had already ordered their dinner and were now waiting for it to be served. They had all moved outside to the smoking area and celebrated Max's promotion with Cuban cigars and single malt as their appetizers.

"I know but I can't wait to see George Clarke's face when he realizes I am the one who will take away everything he owns."

Benny and Roger exchanged a long glance before Tom cleared his throat. "You didn't hear then?"

Max frowned. "What are you talking about?"

"George Clarke suffered a massive heart attack last summer. He barely survived and needed to step down as CEO of Clarke Industries."

Max couldn't help but feel betrayed a little by fate. Now that he could finally win against this asshole, George was already out? Unfair.

"Did it also say who is the CEO now?"

Now all four of them looked at each other before they turned to Max and answered in unison, "His daughter."

Max almost spit out his drink, but managed to keep his composure.

"Imogen?" he asked and cleared his throat before he met his friends' eyes.

"The very same." Tom sipped his drink and shrugged. "But it's not like she's made for this work. She's too soft to be an actual business woman. Omega, what can you do?"

Something in Max shifted. At first, he just wanted to destroy George Clarke but now...

His anger simmered down slightly and made way for something he had almost forgotten about completely. The smile, the red hair, the paint splatters on her old jeans and

baggy shirts with cartoon faces, the taste of her lips. Max glanced over to Benny who only shrugged and waved over a waitress to order another round.

"Maybe this was meant to be?" Roger asked and blew out a thick cloud of smoke. "Who knows when your boss tried to buy Clarke's company. Her old man might not have sold it but Imogen could be swayed with the right arguments, maybe?"

Aiden shook his head. "As far as I know she would rather die than to sell. She's hanging on to it like a crab. You've got your work cut out for you, Max."

The waitress returned with the newly ordered drinks and informed the five men that their food was ready for them. Tom and Benny led the way into the restaurant, Roger trailing after them while Aiden waited for Max to put out his cigar before they also moved back inside.

"What do you want to do now?" Aiden asked as they weaved their way through the other patrons and busy wait staff.

"Do my job." Max wanted to ignore the rock forming in his stomach, low and heavy with long forgotten feelings for Imogen Clarke. Just thinking about seeing her again made him feel nauseous. The girl he had loved with all his heart but wasn't good enough to be with. As much as he wanted to be over her, he couldn't deny the way his heartbeat sped up when he imagined her button nose and almond eyes.

No, he wasn't the same person as he was back then and she was probably married and had the five children she always wanted. He would just do his job, buy her out of her father's company and never think about her again.

Chapter 2

More problems than solutions

IMOGEN SAT behind her desk and went over the latest financial report for the ten thousandth time. It couldn't be true. They had had so many orders last year and the report still told her she was at the brink of losing the company her father had created from the ground up. It was his pride and joy and she was about to destroy it? How? She couldn't lose it. She couldn't disappoint him like this. He had entrusted her with it.

There had to be an error in the numbers! There just had to be!

She was too deep in her thoughts to hear the knock on the door or notice her secretary and best friend approach her desk. Only when Rochelle knocked on the hard wood did Imogen lift her head.

“So...” the brunette started but stopped when she noticed

the deep frown on Imogen's face. "Looks like the numbers aren't what you expected."

"No, not at all. I am searching for the mistake, but I can't find it. Looks like the tax team did its job well."

"You pay them enough after all."

Rochelle sat down on the edge of the desk and placed her hand over her best friend's hand. "How about we go to the club tonight and you can dance off your frustration?"

"That sounds great but I have to find a way to make money, or I won't be able to keep the company."

Imogen buried her face in her hands and let out a shaky sigh. It was all too much. Her father and her late husband, Patrick had worked so hard for the company to exist and she was failing them.

"You could still sell it and move on, you know?"

They had talked about this so many times over the last few months. Ever since the in-house financial expert had told them about the problems they were steering toward.

"I can't," Imogen whispered and hung her head.

"You could, but you don't want to. There's a difference. This is making you sick. You can't even sleep properly anymore. You'll end up like your dad if you don't take care of yourself."

Imogen felt her friend's hand on her shoulder and looked up to meet her deep brown eyes.

"Don't kill yourself or waste your life for someone else's dream."

Deep down Imogen knew that Rochelle was right. Yet she couldn't shake the feeling that Patrick would be disappointed in her if she sold the company, and she knew her father would disown her.

"I will find a way," she eventually whispered with a mix of determination and stubbornness in her voice.

Rochelle pressed her lips to a thin line. As soon as

Imogen used this tone there was no more arguing. She may just be an omega, but she was the boss here now. She had taken over after her father... well, technically he had given it to Patrick, but she had inherited it after his death.

"I would still love for you to come dance with me tonight. It's eighties night at the DragOn. I'm sure the girls can distract you for a few hours."

Rochelle wasn't wrong. The DragOn was a hot tip among the party people in Russlow. The drinks were as mean as the jokes of the reigning drag queens. It was a place to let loose and have fun no matter your age, sexual orientation, or dynamic.

Rochelle gave her best puppy eyes and eventually melted Imogen's resolve.

"Fine. I'll pick you up at nine."

"Nine? Are you crazy? That's way too early."

Imogen lay her head to the side. "It's a work night after all."

"I know, I know." Rochelle rolled her eyes but a cheeky grin pulled on her lips. "I can't wait for tonight."

"Yeah," Imogen sighed with a smile. "Me neither."

This was ridiculous. She was a widow and she walked around in something that was not even appropriate for an exotic dancer to wear to work.

After coming home two hours ago, Imogen had searched through her long abandoned party dresses and had to admit she was not twenty-three anymore. The pink sparkly number hugged her figure tightly, without making her look like a sausage, though she wasn't going out to find a man. She'd already had one.

The light of the cool bathroom lamp caught in her small

diamond ring adorning her ringfinger. When Patrick had asked her to marry him they had still been in high school. Her parents were delighted to have him become part of the family, though her mother had been cautious thinking that she had gotten pregnant, but they had only been in love. This small diamond was the best he could afford back then, and it meant the world to her.

The ringing of her phone caught her attention and she hurried into the living room to answer it.

"Imogen Meyers," she said and tugged a strand of her red hair behind her ear. There was a long pause on the phone before someone finally spoke.

"Hello, my name is Sarah. I am calling about Patrick—"

This wasn't the first call from a mystery woman she'd received, but this one sounded more like a teenage girl. What was her business with her husband?

"I'm sorry but he's... gone. Whatever business you might have had with him is over."

She hung up before tears could choke her. Somewhere in the back of her mind she wondered what they all wanted from her husband but after screaming at the first two, who had only asked about a reservation or an order he had placed before the accident, she had given up on the jealousy. Patrick had loved her with all his heart and no one else. It still hurt to say it out loud. He was gone and he would never come back. Fate had taken him from her and she would never see him again.

Imogen wiped a stray tear from her cheek and headed back into the bathroom to finish her makeup before she needed to head out to pick up Rochelle.

Her friend was right. Distraction was just what she needed right now.