

Ten

*P*atrick dealt with the early morning shows without me. His logic was that he and Fredrick did these all the time to promote movies. We agreed to meet at the Columbus Circle Barnes & Noble for the first book signing later that afternoon so we could set up together. Not having to get up before the sun didn't stop me from turning on the morning shows to watch what happened. The interviews went off without a hitch for most of the shows. This first New York City round centered on the large, national morning shows. The anchors focused on the book and not Fredrick's personal life. Christi told me she made a point of asking them to do this.

One show did ask about the insanity of PubCon and what it was like there. Fredrick didn't mention Christi's accident and I mentally thanked him for that. The only hiccup occurred on one of the later morning shows. Their newest anchor apparently didn't get or care about the requested focus.

"So," the man said. "You recently had a pretty bad break up with Abby."

"These things happen," Fredrick said.

"It surprised a lot of people considering that she has a child and you seemed to really be in a good place together."

"Things change in relationships. People change and it requires that you change the relationship."

"Abby has commented that you refused to leave Los Angeles when she wanted to make New York City her permanent home."

"That was one of many reasons."

"Well, I know there are thousands of women out there who would love to take her place. What should all the women of the world know is your number one barrier to a lasting relationship."

Fredrick sat there for a moment, thinking.

"You know, I have to say the number one barrier in a lasting relationship with me is weakness of character. If a woman can easily be persuaded by her friends and family to do something she doesn't really want, then she and I won't make a good pair."

I sat there looking at the television and I realized I was never going to be able to fix the mistake I had made. This next month was going to be torture.

I was already at Barnes & Nobles with Louisa when Fredrick and Patrick arrived. I told Louisa, before they arrived, that I thought it would be best that she made sure Fredrick was comfortable and had what he needed. I would deal with the bookstore manager and staff to make sure the space had everything ready.

"I'm happy to help you however I can, Emma. I want to learn as much as you can teach me about book tours. Think of me as the future Princess of book tours." Louisa said with a smile as we went over the list of things to do that afternoon.

I saw an opportunity to both teach Louisa and minimize my interaction with Fredrick.

"What if you do more of the work than I do? You have an idea of what Christi was going to do. I'll work with you and be your back-up."

"Really!?" Louisa said.

Her excitement was contagious. For a moment I felt hopeful that her energy and flexibility would make everyone much happier. I decided right then, if this worked out, I would hire her for my team as soon as the summer internship was over.

I walked around the bookstore with my iPad and

checklist making sure we had plenty of copies of books, plenty of space for a large crowd, plenty of sharpies, prizes to give away, and plenty of drinks. Louisa walked with me and her own iPad checklist. I explained all the aspects of the set-up as we worked. I didn't stop to think as I walked over to the cafe and ordered coffees and teas for the four of us. I knew Louisa drank hers with lots of milk and sugar. Patrick had made a joke the night before, as he showed me pictures of his fiancé Victor, that he liked his men like he liked his coffee: black and hot. I ordered Fredrick's on instinct: venti earl grey tea with raw sugar. Louisa and I brought the drinks back to the group and handed them out. Fredrick looked surprised when he took the cup from me. Our fingers touched quickly as he grabbed the cup and I had to fight back the tears. I turned on my heel and walked back out to the main floor.

"She always seems to know what people like to drink," Louisa said as I left.

After that I stayed away from the break room where they were prepping for the reading.

Once the reading began I stayed off to the side and let the bookstore manager do the introductions. The room was filled with middle school and teenage boys with their parents or nannies. All but one copy of the book had already been sold. While Fredrick

did his reading I made a quick call to the office requesting that another box be sent over quickly. By the time the signing started, two more boxes had been delivered and I was very glad. We sold more books as people kept trickling in during the signing. As the line progressed, I sat about ten feet away from Fredrick.

"Well, I think Queen of Book Tours is an appropriate title for you," Patrick said sitting down next to me.

"Thank you. You seemed to have had a pretty good morning."

"Aside from that one relationship comment, I think it was great."

"He handled it well."

"He's gotten use to relationship questions."

Every ten minutes or so, Fredrick would look over at where Patrick and I were sitting. The first few times I didn't know which one of us he was looking at. I smiled at him anyway. He smiled back and seemed to relax.

"Oh, you're really good. You may be the Empress of Book Tours."

"What?"

"Dealing with social anxiety issues? This many people really make him anxious. I've never even thought to play anchor to him."

"I'm not doing anything."

"Look, Emma, I know. You clearly haven't told people, but he has. I know all of it. He's not just a client, he's my best friend."

He was right, I hadn't told anyone at home about the most important relationship of my life. There had been no point.

"I appreciate your loyalty to him," I whispered.

"When I came out of the closet, he was the one who stood by me. He introduced me to Victor. I love him like a brother. I knew he was in love with you before you knew he was in love with you. I knew he was going to propose before you did."

"He never talked about his friends in LA."

"Maybe you just didn't hear him. I get the impression you compartmentalize things."

I didn't know what to say in response to this.

"Don't worry, I am here to keep the peace," Patrick said when I didn't respond. "Feel free to use your intimate knowledge of him to make this tour easier. I understand you're not here by choice. So far you have been more amazing than I ever dreamed. You have been professional, attentive, and focused."

"Why are you telling me this?"

"I just don't want to play games. It's been eight years and a lot has changed for both of you. I just want you to know that I approve of your choices so far and I appreciate the effort you're making. He's

incapable of acknowledging all of that right now, but you need to hear it."

"Thank you," I whispered.

Things continued successfully on Tuesday. I felt more confident as I prepared for the New York Public Library benefit dinner. Louisa and I went there after the second reading and signing. The items we had donated for the auction had all arrived. We checked little details before going to the salon for a quick style, mani, and pedi. I got back to the apartment, got dressed, and took a cab to the library. I was pleased with my dress. I had picked a black, v-neck, sleeveless dress. The full a-line skirt was embroidered with black flowers. I wore my mother's pearl necklace and pearl clips in my hair that had been pulled back in a bun. My black sling-back, kitten heel, open toe shoes showed off my bright red toenails. I looked good, but understated. I would blend easily. When I walked into the large library doors. I found Fredrick sitting in his tux on a bench at the foot of the stairs that led up to the Edna Barnes Salomon Room where the dinner was taking place.

"Wow!" I heard from my left and turned to see Patrick there, also in his tux.

"Thanks," I said as I walked up to them.

"I am going to get Louisa. She just sent me a text

saying she's almost here. Wait here with Fredrick," Patrick said before walking away again.

I sighed and turned to Fredrick. His bow tie was crooked. He started to get to his feet.

"Sit, I have to fix your tie," I said and stood in front of him.

"When did you learn to tie a bow tie?" Fredrick asked.

"Oh, Freddy," I whispered. "I've always known. This is my world."

He said nothing and allowed me to finish. He looked straight ahead (and later I realized right into my cleavage) while I fiddled making sure his tie was perfect. When I was done I took a deep breath and inhaled the musky orange scent that I've always associated with him.

"Oh, Emma, you look so pretty!" I heard Louisa say as she walked up to us.

I turned to find her in a slinky red dress and garish red heels. Again, her shoe choice made me question her taste.

"You do as well," I lied.

To be fair, Louisa was a whole foot shorter than Fredrick and needed the 3 inch heels to gain some height. I stepped back and watched as Louisa took Fredrick's arm. As the two walked up the stairs, I turned to Patrick who offered me his arm.

"My Empress," He said.

I had to chuckle as I took his arm and let him lead me to the party.

I wish the party had been problem free. I don't think most of the people there knew about the hiccup because Patrick and I shut it down as quickly as possible. While Louisa never left Fredrick's side, Patrick and I slid into the background and enjoyed ourselves quietly. We made jokes about some of the fashion choices, suggested the other try a specific food option, swiped glasses of champagne from passing waiters, and danced when the band played a good song.

"Fuck me," I heard him say under his breath at one point.

I turned, expecting to see some very attractive man walking in (clearly, Patrick didn't want me to fuck him), but instead there was a pixie like, blonde woman walking right toward Fredrick.

"I don't think she's your type," I said.

"No, that's Abby. What's she doing here? Do you think she knows Fredrick's here?"

"If she doesn't then she's a moron. The library promoted the benefit and his face was everywhere."

"She's trying to mess with his head. Help me keep her away."

I followed Patrick as he made a bee-line toward the small blond woman.

"Abby, let's talk," Patrick said as he spun her around and walked her out the door.

"What the hell? Patrick, you have no right to manhandle me," Abby said.

"Oh, please, I know why you're here. Let's not pretend. You've done enough to hurt him."

"He forced my hand. I told him right away that Los Angeles wasn't the life I wanted. He stayed with me anyway."

"You could've been mature about it. You could've walked away when you knew he would never leave LA. You used your kid to keep him around. Why are you even here? You married someone else."

"I just want to talk to him. Who's this?" Abby said turning to me.

"Emma, the editor running his book tour," Patrick said.

"Emma? This is Emma? The infamous Emma? You want to talk about playing games with Fredrick and she stands here helping you keep me away."

I suddenly wanted to punch her in the face.

"She's doing her job and that's making sure this all runs smoothly. She's not the one causing a scene. You need to leave."

"Patrick," Fredrick said from behind us. "Leave Abby alone. She has every right to be here."

"Fred, don't let her manipulate you," Patrick said.

"I expected her to be here. I'm ready for this," Fredrick said.

"Fine, I wash my hands of this. Come on Emma. I think they're serving the meal." Patrick said taking my hand and marching back to our table.

I followed him back into the party, so I didn't hear anything Abby and Fredrick said to each other. Louisa, thankfully, missed all of it. We found her at the table eating the salad at her seat.

"Freddy went to the bathroom."

"Louisa, I told you not to call him Freddy. His name is Fredrick. Please call people the name they want to be called," I said.