



Eight

EIGHTEEN HOURS LATER, JANE WAS A CONTINENT AWAY FROM the funeral, Saint-Croix-sur-Amaury, and her past, and staring straight at her future. From the view in the airplane, the New York City nightscape had been all glass skyscrapers and neon lights. But now, on the Upper East Side and firmly on the ground, the city looked like something else entirely.

A sharp January breeze played around her ankles, and Park Avenue was deserted as far as the eye could see. Jane clutched her canvas bag closer to her chest. Wasn't this supposed to be the city that never slept?

Malcolm thanked Yuri, the family driver, and the silent hulk of a man nodded curtly before pulling away from the curb, leaving them alone. Jane studied the heavy stone archway of the Dorans' house. It struck her that, squatting gloomily between 664 and 668, the building shouldn't really have been numbered 665 at all.

She had never been superstitious, but she felt a sudden rush of gratitude for whomever had decided that the carved stone façade was just too forbidding to tack on a sinister number; it would have been creepiness overkill.

The greenish-gray building easily rose eight stories from the street, but there was nothing graceful or sleek about its height. Instead, it seemed to almost be looming over the sidewalk, even though her inner architect, which tended to see things in blue-print form, insisted that it was vertical. The windows, although moderately sized, were set deep back into the thick stone. She wondered how much daylight could penetrate the fortress. *House*, she corrected herself sternly. *Home*. But it didn't look especially like either.

Malcolm typed a short code into a discreet keypad to the right of the entryway, and a massive wooden door swung open on silent hinges. Of course, despite the house's archaic appearance, it would have an electronic key system. *Perfect*. Jane hadn't had an uncontrolled surge of magic since she'd left Alsace—she'd drugged herself into oblivion on the plane so as to keep it in the sky where it belonged—but it was just a matter of time.

They stepped through the enormous arched entryway into the foyer.

"Mr. Doran," wheezed a tiny, white-haired man in a black uniform with gold trim. His eyes looked bleary with sleep, and Jane guessed that her own probably looked about the same. "Welcome home."

"Thanks, Gunther," Malcolm replied. "This is Jane, my fiancée." Gunther nodded deferentially before retreating silently into the shadows behind them. The lobby was ostentatiously large; Malcolm's extended family could clearly afford to waste as much

prime Manhattan square footage as they liked. The marble floor gleamed and the gilded moldings along the ceiling had been expertly restored—assuming they had ever even fallen into disrepair. It was clear the Dorans were not interested in understatement.

Jane stifled a yawn as she stepped into the mahogany-paneled elevator. According to her silver-and-turquoise watch—a gift from Gran on her twenty-first birthday—it was eleven p.m., which would make it five in the morning to her jet-lagged body.

“Are you sure your family is still up?”

Malcolm had seemed sure that his family would be wide-awake and waiting for them, but she was really beginning to hope he was mistaken. She was anticipating a chilly reception at best: the farm-country orphan, to whom New York’s most eligible bachelor had proposed after one short month, was bound to come under scrutiny. She was fully prepared to win them over, but it would be easier after a full night’s sleep had cleared the jet lag and the drugs from her system.

He tapped another code into the elevator keypad and closed the gold metal gate behind them. The button for the sixth floor lit up immediately. “Don’t worry, they’ll love you,” Malcolm reassured her, as if reading her mind. She smiled wryly at the thought of them having his-and-hers superpowers. *We could fight crime.*

The elevator smoothly rose, an arrow clicking off floors two and three. Malcolm’s Upper East Side manse, he had explained during their layover in Paris, had been in the family since the end of the nineteenth century. Over the years, it had been divided and subdivided, and it currently housed three branches of Malcolm’s family. The Dorans occupied floors six through eight, while Mrs. Doran’s cousins and their adult children lived on the floors below.

“Do a lot of families live together like this in New York?” Jane had always heard that Americans moved out of their homes the moment they could. She had imagined that she would fit right in here, but perhaps rushing off to live on one’s own wasn’t such a chic thing to do when it came to UES brownstones.

Malcolm shrugged. “We’re a tight-knit bunch. We just renovate when we need to change the divisions.” He grinned. “Plenty of work for an architect with the right connections, now that I think about it.”

Jane smiled. *Sure—think they’d let me tear it down and start over?*

The elevator bumped to a gentle stop on floor six, and the doors hissed open.

“Jane! I’m so glad to meet you!”

Jane nearly jumped out of her skin. Waiting on the other side was the tallest woman she had ever seen. Jane knew that Mrs. Doran had to be at least sixty, but she could have passed for forty. Glossy, gray-streaked brown hair fell softly to her shoulders. Her crisp charcoal-gray cashmere sweater made her eyes look positively smoky and showed off her trim figure.

She pulled a dazed Jane into a hug, then shot a sharp look at her son. “It’s about time you brought her home.” She clapped brightly. “Now come say hi to everyone. We’ve been *dying* for you to get here.”

Mrs. Doran spun on one high-heeled boot and made her way down a low-lit hallway covered with a plush Oriental runner. Jane was too shocked by the woman’s warmth to do anything but follow. “*Random Nobody Snags Heir to Billions; Matriarch Is Glad?*” They turned a corner, and Mrs. Doran threw open two heavy doors to the parlor, revealing a sea of eager faces. “Guess who’s finally here!”

Three, six, eight, eleven . . . Jane's head spun as she tried to count the grinning faces and raised glasses; there were just too many to take in at once.

"So nice to meet you, dear," a woman Mrs. Doran's age cooed. Her silver hair was pulled back in a pinched bun and she was dressed in a powder-blue boatneck dress. Like Mrs. Doran's, her eyes were dark as pewter. "I'm Cora McCarroll and this is my sister, Belinda Holding." She gestured to a woman completely identical to her, dressed in severe black. Belinda's eyes flicked dismissively over Jane, decidedly less interested than her sister's.

"Nice to meet you," Jane nodded. Malcolm had mentioned that Mrs. Doran's cousins were twins—both widowed—but she hadn't been prepared for them to be so thoroughly indistinguishable.

In her fuzzily jet-lagged state, the whole family, in fact, was beginning to blur together. Cora and Belinda seemed to have about a dozen sons apiece, some with families of their own, and only a few people made any impression on her tired mind at all. ("Will you friend me on Facebook?" pleaded awkward young Ian McCarroll, and Jane hoped that her indulgent laughter was all the discouragement he would need.) Malcolm's father was a stately old gentleman with steel-colored hair and a vaguely distant air, who all but blended in with his armchair; Jane got the impression that his main role in family events was to nod along while sipping his scotch.

An investment banker she eventually placed as Blake Holding sidled up and grasped her hand lecherously. "If I'd known they built 'em that way in France I'd have traveled more," he slurred, earning himself a cold glare from wife Laura-with-the-implausible-Bergdorf-highlights.

“Oh,” Jane replied awkwardly, hoping he didn’t spend much time in the Dorans’ apartment. She wanted Malcolm’s family to like her, but there were limits. “Ha. Um, if you’ll excuse me a minute, I just have to . . .”

Hardly seeming to hear her words, Blake dropped her hand and drifted over to the bar to refill his whiskey on the rocks. Malcolm was now chatting with his mom, and everyone seemed engrossed in their own conversations. Jane used the brief break in introductions to take a long look around the parlor. The room was pentagonal and high-ceilinged. Four of the walls were covered with ivory paper so thick and textured she suspected that it was actually fabric. The fifth, though, was a massive sheet of unpolished white marble, covered in carvings too small to make out from across the room. She approached it and realized that the etchings were names, connected by a complicated web of lines.

A family tree, she guessed, and checked the lowest branches for familiar names. She found Mrs. Doran almost immediately in the dead center of her generation’s row, and impulsively reached out to touch with her fingers the line that led to Malcolm’s name. Just before it reached him, though, it branched. She frowned. Malcolm had called himself an only child, but Jane’s fingers traced across the record of a sister. *Annette*, she read silently. She had been born six years after Malcolm, and next to that date was another one, six years later. She had died when Malcolm was only twelve. Her heart ached at his loss, and then a little pinprick of hurt vibrated through her. Why had he never mentioned something so important? *But you’re keeping secrets from him too*, a little voice in the back of her head pointed out. And Jane realized that she couldn’t imagine how much it must have pained him to lose his little sister. Swallowing some of the dwindling champagne in

her glass, she decided to not mention her discovery until Malcolm was ready to tell her about Annette on his own.

She was about to step away when an unusually smooth, rectangular patch to the right of Annette's name caught her eye. It was too polished to be a natural flaw, and it was the only one on the entire wall. Had it been a mistake?

"We take a great deal of pride in our heritage and tradition." Lynne Doran appeared suddenly at her shoulder, and Jane jerked her hand away from the wall.

"I see. It's quite remarkable." Jane's own family tree would be nothing more than a small sapling dwindling down to one lone name. *Two*, she reminded herself. She had Malcolm now.

"We can trace our family all the way back to ancient Egypt," Lynne said, the pride obvious in her voice. "*They* traced their ancestors through the female line, and you can see that we've done the same."

"Interesting." Jane appraised the generations listed on the wall, and quickly understood what Lynne meant. Though presumably the males had married and had children, offspring was recorded only for daughters descended from Ambika, the very first woman on the tree. All of the male lines simply disappeared.

"It's common sense, really," Lynne went on. "It's the only way you can be sure."

Jane twisted the sequins on her canvas Vanessa Bruno tote: she should have known the welcome was too warm to be true. This was Lynne's way of letting her know that she'd not see her name in marble anytime soon. "Mrs. Doran, I—"

"Goodness, dear!" The tall woman threw her head back in a full-throated laugh. "You can't call me *that*. Just imagine what people would think! 'Mom' is probably out of the question, but

you *are* going to be my daughter soon . . .” Her peach-lipsticked lips pressed together thoughtfully. “Why don’t we try ‘Lynne’ for now? And we’ll think of something new when there are grandchildren to consider.” Lynne’s dark eyes assessed Jane from head to toe so shrewdly that Jane cringed a little. “I do hope there will be some girls, of course. As soon after the wedding as humanly possible.” Then she swept away magnificently, leaving Jane staring after her.