

EBRIS

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KING  
OF  
WRATH

ANA HUANG



PIATKUS

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*Playlist*

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*Empire State of Mind*  
**Jay-Z feat. Alicia Keys**

*Luxurious*  
**Gwen Stefani**

*Red*  
**Taylor Swift**

*Teeth*  
**5 Seconds of Summer**

*Partition*  
**Beyoncé**

*Pretty Boy*  
**Cavale**

*All Mine*  
**PLAzA**

*Can't Help Falling in Love*  
**Elvis Presley**

*We Found Love*  
**Rihanna**

*Counting Stars*  
**One Republic**

*The Heart Wants What It Wants*  
**Selena Gomez**

*Stay*  
**Rihanna**

## CHAPTER 1

*Vivian*

“I can’t believe he’s here. He never comes to these things unless it’s hosted by a friend...”

“Did you see he bumped Arno Reinhart down a spot on the *Forbes* Billionaires list? Poor Arnie nearly had a meltdown in the middle of Jean-Georges when he found out...”

The whispers started halfway through the Frederick Wildlife Trust’s annual fundraiser for endangered animals.

This year, the small, sand-colored piping plover was the alleged star of the show, but none of the gala’s two hundred guests were discussing the bird’s welfare over their Veuve Clicquot and caviar cannoli.

“I heard his family’s villa in Lake Como is undergoing a one-hundred-million dollar renovation. The place is centuries old, so I suppose it’s time...”

Each whisper grew in intensity, accompanied by furtive glances and the occasional dreamy sigh.

I didn’t turn to see who had the normally cool-as-ice members of Manhattan high society in such a tizzy. I didn’t really care. I was too focused on a certain department store heiress as she tottered toward the swag table in sky-high heels. She quickly

glanced around before swiping one of the personalized gift bags and dropping it in her purse.

The minute she walked off, I spoke into my earpiece. "Shannon, Code Pink at the swag table. Find out whose bag she took and replace it."

Tonight's bags each contained over eight thousand dollars' worth of swag, but it was easier to fold the cost into the event budget than confront the Denman's heiress.

My assistant groaned over the line. "Tilly Denman *again*? Doesn't she have enough money to buy everything on that table *and* have millions left over?"

"Yes, but it's not about the money for her. It's the adrenaline rush," I said. "Go. I'll order bread pudding from Magnolia Bakery tomorrow to make up for the strenuous task of replacing the gift bag. And for God's sake, find out where Penelope is. She's supposed to be manning the gift station."

"Ha ha," Shannon said, obviously picking up on my sarcasm. "Fine. I'll check on the gift bags and Penelope, but I expect a *big* tub of bread pudding tomorrow."

I laughed and shook my head as the line cut off.

While she took care of the gift bag situation, I circled the room and kept an eye out for other fires, large or small.

When I first went into business, it felt weird working events I would otherwise be invited to as a guest. But I'd gotten used to it over the years, and the income allowed me a small degree of independence from my parents.

It wasn't part of my trust fund, nor was it my inheritance. It was money I'd earned, fair and square, as a luxury event planner in Manhattan.

I loved the challenge of creating beautiful events from scratch, and wealthy people loved beautiful things. It was a win-win.

I was double-checking the sound setup for the keynote speech later that night when Shannon rushed toward me. "Vivian! You didn't tell me he was here!" she hissed.

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"Who?"

*"Dante Russo."*We know  
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All thoughts of swag bags and sound checks flew out of my head.

I jerked my gaze to Shannon's, taking in her bright eyes and flushed cheeks.

"Dante Russo?" My heart thudded for no apparent reason. "But he didn't RSVP yes."

"Well, the rules of RSVPs don't apply to him." She practically vibrated with excitement. "I can't believe he showed up. People will be talking about this for *weeks*."

The earlier whispers suddenly made sense.

Dante Russo, the enigmatic CEO of the luxury goods conglomerate the Russo Group, rarely attended public events that weren't hosted by himself, one of his close friends, or one of his important business associates. The Frederick Wildlife Trust didn't fall under any of those categories.

He was also one of the wealthiest and, therefore, most watched men in New York.

Shannon was right. People would be buzzing about his attendance for weeks, if not months.

"Good," I said, trying to rein in my sudden runaway heartbeat. "Maybe it'll bring more awareness to the piping plover issue."

She rolled her eyes. "Vivian, no one cares"—she stopped, looked around, and lowered her voice— "*no one actually cares* about the piping plovers. I mean, I'm sad they're endangered, but let's be honest. The people are here for the scene only."

Once again, she was right. Still, no matter their reason for attending, the guests were raising money for a good cause, and the events kept my business running.

"The real topic of the night," Shannon said, "is how good Dante looks. I've never seen a man fill out a tuxedo so well."

"You have a boyfriend, Shan."

“So? We’re allowed to appreciate other people’s beauty.”

“Yes, well, I think you’ve *appreciated* enough. We’re here to work, not ogle the guests.” I gently pushed her toward the dessert table. “Can you bring out more Viennese tartlets? We’re running low.”

“Buzzkill,” she grumbled, but she did as I said.

I tried to refocus on the sound setup, but I couldn’t resist scanning the room for the surprise guest of the night. My gaze skimmed past the DJ and the 3D piping plover display and rested on the crowd by the entrance.

It was so thick I couldn’t see beyond the outer edges, but I’d bet my entire bank account Dante was the center of their attention.

My suspicions were confirmed when the crowd shifted briefly to reveal a glimpse of dark hair and broad shoulders.

A rush of awareness ran the length of my spine.

Dante and I belonged to tangential social circles, but we’d never officially met. From what I’d heard of his reputation, I was happy keeping it that way.

Still, his presence was magnetic, and I felt the pull of it all the way across the room.

An insistent buzz against my hip washed away the tingles coating my skin and drew my attention away from Dante’s fan club. My stomach sank when I fished my personal cell out of my purse and saw who was calling.

I shouldn’t take personal calls in the middle of a work event, but one simply didn’t ignore a summons from Francis Lau.

I double-checked to make sure there were no emergencies requiring my immediate attention before I slipped into the nearest restroom.

“Hello, Father.” The formal greeting rolled off my tongue easily after almost twenty years of practice.

I used to call him Dad, but after Lau Jewels took off and we moved out of our cramped two-bedroom into a Beacon Hill

mansion, he insisted on being called Father instead. Apparently, it sounded more “sophisticated” and “upper class.”

“Where are you?” His deep voice rumbled over the line. “Why is it so echoey?”

“I’m at work. I snuck into a bathroom to take your call.” I leaned my hip against the counter and felt compelled to add, “It’s a fundraiser for the endangered piping plover.”

I smiled at his heavy sigh. My father had little patience for the obscure causes people used as an excuse to party, though he attended the events donated anyway. It was the proper thing to do.

“Every day, I learn about a new endangered animal,” he grumbled. “Your mother is on a fundraising committee for some fish or other, like we don’t eat seafood every week.”

My mother, formerly an aesthetician, was now a professional socialite and charity committee member.

“Since you’re at work, I’ll keep this short,” my father said. “We’d like you to join us for dinner on Friday night. We have important news.”

Despite his wording, it wasn’t a request.

My smile faded. “*This* Friday night?” It was Tuesday, and I lived in New York while my parents lived in Boston.

It was a last-minute request even by their standards.

“Yes.” My father didn’t elaborate. “Dinner is at seven sharp. Don’t be late.”

He hung up.

My phone stayed frozen on my ear for an extra beat before I removed it. It slipped against my clammy palm and almost clattered to the floor before I shoved it back into my purse.

It was funny how one sentence could send me into an anxiety spiral.

*We have important news.*

Did something happen with the company? Was someone sick or dying? Were my parents selling their house and moving to New York like they’d once threatened to do?

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My mind raced through with a thousand questions and possibilities.

I didn't have an answer, but I knew one thing.

An emergency summons to the Lau manor never boded well.

## CHAPTER 2

*Vivian*

My parents' living room looked like something out of an *Architectural Digest* spread. Tufted settees sat at right angles to carved wood tables; porcelain tea sets jostled for space next to priceless tchotchkes. Even the air smelled cold and impersonal, like generically expensive freshener.

Some people had homes; my parents had a showpiece.

"Your skin looks dull." My mother examined me with a critical eye. "Have you been keeping up with your monthly facials?"

She sat across from me, her own skin glowing with pearlescent luminosity.

"Yes, Mother." My cheeks ached from the forced politeness of my smile.

I'd stepped foot in my childhood home ten minutes ago, and I'd already been criticized for my hair (too messy), my nails (too long), and now, my complexion.

*Just another night at the Lau manor.*

"Good. Remember, you can't let yourself go," my mother said. "You're not married yet."

I held back a sigh. *Here we go again.*

Despite my thriving career in Manhattan, where the event planning market was more cutthroat than a designer sample sale,

my parents were fixated on my lack of a boyfriend and, therefore, lack of marital prospects.

They tolerated my work because it was no longer fashionable for heiresses to do nothing, but they were *salivating* for a son-in-law, one who could increase their foothold in the circles of the old money elite.

We were rich, but we would never be old money. Not in this generation.

"I'm still young," I said patiently. "I have plenty of time to meet someone."

I was only twenty-eight, but my parents acted like I would shrivel into the Crypt Keeper the second midnight struck on my thirtieth birthday.

"You're almost thirty," my mother countered. "You're not getting any younger, and you *have* to start thinking about marriage and kids. The longer you wait, the smaller the dating pool becomes."

"I *am* thinking about it." *Thinking about the year of freedom I have left before I'm forced to marry a banker with a numeral after his last name.* "As for getting younger, that's what Botox and plastic surgery is for."

If my sister were here, she would've laughed. Since she wasn't, my joke fell flatter than a poorly baked soufflé.

My mother's lips thinned.

Beside her, my father's thick, gray-tipped brows formed a stern V over the bridge of his nose.

Sixty years old, spry, and fit, Francis Lau looked every inch the self-made CEO. He'd expanded Lau Jewels from a small, family-run shop to a multinational behemoth over three decades, and a silent stare from him was enough to make me shrink back against the couch cushions.

"Every time we bring up marriage, you make a joke." His tone seeped with disapproval. "Marriage is *not* a joke, Vivian. It's an important matter for our family. Look at your sister. Thanks to her, we're now connected to the royal family of Eldorra."

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I bit my tongue so hard the taste of copper filled my mouth.

My sister had married an Eldorran earl who was a second cousin twice removed from the queen. Our “connection” to the small European kingdom’s royal family was a stretch, but in my father’s eyes, an aristocratic title was an aristocratic title.

“I know it’s not a joke,” I said, reaching for my tea. I needed something to do with my hands. “But it’s also not something I need to think about *right now*. I’m dating. Exploring my prospects. There are plenty of single men in New York. I just have to find the right one.”

I left out the caveat: there were plenty of single men in New York, but the pool of single, straight, non-douchey, non-flaky, non-disturbingly eccentric men was much smaller.

My last date tried to rope me into a seance to contact his dead mother so she could “meet me and give her approval.” Needless to say, I never saw him again.

But my parents didn’t need to know that. As far as they were concerned, I was dating handsome trust fund scions left and right.

“We’ve given you plenty of time to find a proper match these past two years.” My father sounded unimpressed by my spiel. “You haven’t had a single serious boyfriend since your last...*relationship*. It’s clear you don’t feel the same urgency we do, which is why I took matters into my own hands.”

My tea froze halfway to my lips. “Meaning?”

I thought the important news he’d alluded to had to do with my sister or the company. But what if...

My blood iced.

*No. It can’t be.*

“Meaning I’ve secured a suitable match for you.” My father dropped the bombshell with little to no warning or visible emotion. “It took quite a bit of work on my end, but the arrangement has been finalized.”

*I’ve secured a suitable match for you.*

The fragments from his declaration blasted through my chest and nearly cleaved my outward composure in half.