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Then

Eden, Eden, Eden! We want Eden! The crowd were chanting out her name, so loudly that it almost felt to Eden as if the sound was a solid object she could reach out and touch. It was like a surging wave of wanting, of anticipation, and she was not going to disappoint them. She closed her eyes and shook back her long blonde hair, revelling in the chants and in the knowledge that every single person in the packed auditorium was there for her. She felt truly alive, more alive than at any other time. This was what she was born to do. This was what she couldn't live without. This love, this adulation, this validation. The assistant stage manager nodded at her. Eden stepped forward. It was time.

The stage was plunged into darkness and the crowd let out a roar of excitement as the beat of a drum took over from their chanting. And then, as the lights flashed on again in dazzling formations of pinks, oranges and mauves, mimicking a glorious sunrise, a giant gold scallop shell rose up from the depths of the stage. The shell slowly opened to reveal Eden. She was dressed in a gold sequined body stocking, cleverly designed so that it looked as if she was naked except for a smattering of shimmering sequins. And then her four male dancers, stripped to the waist and dressed in

daringly tiny gold shorts, leapt on to the stage and lifted Eden out of the shell, holding her aloft like a queen as she surveyed the crowds in front of her. Let the show begin.

Two and a half hours and six costume changes later, Eden had finished her set. It had been one of the high-lights of her career, a glittering performance which had entranced the audience. Her dancers and musicians were gathered in her dressing room to celebrate, drinking champagne and joyfully swapping stories about how the show had gone for them. It was the final night of Eden's European tour. Everyone was in a state of euphoria, on such a high, and no one more so than the beautiful blonde singer.

'Guys! Thank you so much,' Eden exclaimed, raising a bottle of champagne. 'That was the best ever!' She took a swig, not caring that it fizzed out of her mouth and cascaded down her dress. 'I love you all!' She danced round the room, hugging and kissing everyone.

'Eden, can I have a word?'

It was Ashley, her tour manager.

'Sure.'

'In private,' Ashley replied. Eden followed her out of the dressing room, certain that Ashley was simply going to complain about the dancers running up too big a bar bill. She kept a very tight rein on expenses and was the most ruthlessly efficient tour manager Eden had ever had.

'I've just had a phone call from your sister.'

Instantly Eden's stomach clenched in apprehension. 'Is it about Mum? Is she okay?'

Ashley seemed tense. She tentatively reached out one hand as if to comfort Eden, and then withdrew it; she wasn't known for her people skills. 'I'm afraid it's not good news. Savannah wants you to fly back to London

straight away.' She hesitated. 'It seems like your mum doesn't have long.'

No, no, no! This couldn't be! When Eden's mum Terri was diagnosed with cancer six months earlier, she had insisted that Eden carry on as normal. She kept saying that she would get better and she didn't want Eden to put her career on hold. Eden had wanted to cancel the tour but her mum wouldn't hear of it. 'I'll be absolutely fine,' she had said, over and over, until Eden thought she would scream if she ever heard the word 'fine' again.

She leant back against the wall, fearing that her legs were about to give way.

'There's a car waiting outside to take you to the airport. I'll arrange to have your things sent on from the hotel.'

It was a nightmare flight back from Berlin. Eden sat rigidly in her seat, unable to do anything except pray to a God she wasn't even sure she believed in that she would reach her mum before it was too late. There were so many things she wanted to tell her.

Sadie Park, her manager, was there to meet her at Heathrow. The look on Sadie's face told Eden everything she needed to know. She was too late.

Sadie enfolded her in her arms. 'I'm so sorry, honey.'

Eden sobbed, great heart-wrenching sobs. 'I should have been with Mum! Why didn't anyone tell me sooner?'

'But we told Ashley before the concert. She was supposed to tell you . . . give you the chance to decide what to do.'

'She didn't tell me until afterwards! Oh my God, Sadie. If she had, could I have seen Mum?'

Sadie stroked her hair. 'I honestly don't know. But you were where Terri would have wanted you to be.'

She paused. 'And she was very out of it by the end – I don't think she was aware of who was there.'

'No! I should have been with her.'

It was so painful, walking into her mum's elegant house and knowing that, for the first time ever, Terri would not be there to greet her. Eden closed the front door, still half expecting her mum to appear, to hug her, ask how the tour had gone, and demand to know whether she was eating okay. Eden slipped off the high gold sandals that she was still wearing from the show. Terri had a strict shoes-off-in-the-house rule to protect her luxurious cream carpets.

Eden walked slowly up the stairs, hesitating at her mum's bedroom door before pushing it open. Someone had already cleared away all the bottles of medication that she remembered cluttering up her mum's pretty bedside table, along with the oxygen tank Terri had needed to help with her breathing. The bedroom was back to how it had been when she was well. Eden walked over to the dressing table and picked up the bottle of Chanel No. 5. She unscrewed the silver cap and breathed in the familiar, exquisite scent. Her eyes swam with tears. Her mum had worn Chanel No. 5 for as long as Eden could remember, and whenever she and her sister tried to get her to try something different, Terri would reply that if it was good enough for Marilyn Monroe then it was good enough for her.

Eden sat down on the bed and ran her hand over the thick rose-pink velvet cover. Terri always felt the cold and insisted on having the cover over the duvet, even though it drove Al, her fiancé, mad as he was permanently too hot.

'Oh, Mum,' she whispered, 'I'm so sorry I wasn't with you.' There was a vase of delicate blue and white

freesias on the bedside table, her mum's favourite flowers. Eden leant over and inhaled their sweet fragrance. If only she hadn't given in to Terri over the tour, she could have been there for her mum. If only . . .

She looked up as the door swung open. It was her sister Savannah.

'So you've finally made an appearance, have you? Well, you're too late. Mum died at seven forty-five. How do I remember the time so exactly? Because I was there with her, holding her hand. Where were you?'

Savannah's usually perfectly groomed honey-blonde hair was untidy, her blue eyes bloodshot. Eden was shocked by the look of contempt on her sister's pretty face.

'I wasn't given your message until after the concert.'

'Oh, it's always someone else's fault, isn't it? Precious pop princess Eden couldn't possibly be to blame for not bothering to be at her mum's bedside when she died.'

Eden didn't think she had ever heard her elder sister sound so full of rage.

'Please, Sav, let's not argue. I'm sorry I wasn't here . . . sorrier than you'll ever know.' Eden felt a fresh rush of tears blurring her eyes as she got up and tried to hug her sister.

But Savannah pushed her away and said coldly, 'After the funeral, I *never* want to see you again. All Mum ever thought about was you and your career, and *you* couldn't even be here for her.'

'That's not true! She loved us equally.'

At that moment Al walked into the room. He was unusually pale and looked as if he had aged ten years since the last time Eden saw him. But he rallied to her defence.

'Eden's right. Terri loved both of you so much, you

were her life.' How like Al to be the peacekeeper, even in the midst of his own grief.

Savannah pointed at her sister. 'No, Eden was her life – and she sucked Mum dry. Even when Mum was so ill, she spent all her time worrying about *her*.'

Eden was about to protest once again that it wasn't true, but Savannah said bitterly, 'And now I'm going to arrange the funeral. And why? Because Mum asked *me* to. She knew Eden wouldn't be up to it!' And she stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind her.

Al and Eden looked at each other, then as Eden made to follow her sister, he said, 'Leave her for now. She's grieving, she didn't mean those things.'

But he was wrong. Savannah barely spoke to Eden in the week leading up to the funeral, nor on the day itself. By the time the mourners had left the wake, which was held at her mother's house, Eden was feeling desperate. She had tried so hard to hold it together but Savannah had blanked her for most of the day, looking at her coldly when she had broken down at the service as if to say, *Stop being such a drama queen*.

Al and Savannah's husband, Carl, were in the living room. Eden found Savannah in the kitchen, surrounded by stacks of washing up and plates of uneaten food.

'Leave that,' Eden said, as her sister threw a plate of mini quiches into the bin. They had wildly over-estimated how much people would eat. 'We can do it in the morning. You must be knackered.'

She knew that her sister had barely sat down all day; had insisted on overseeing every last detail of the funeral. Savannah ignored her and continued to scrape food into the bin, the knife grating across the crockery in a way that set Eden's teeth on edge.

'Sav! You don't need to do all this now.'

'Terri liked her kitchen to be tidy.' Savannah paused for a second and finally looked at Eden. 'I'll go in the living room when you've gone.' There it was again, that look of contempt on her face.

Eden bit her lip. Why was Savannah being like this? 'I was going to stay the night, in my old bedroom.'

'Well, if you stay, I'm going.'

Eden couldn't bear it. 'Please, Savannah! I've said I'm sorry and I truly am! Stop blaming me!' Her voice was raised in distress, causing Al and Carl to come into the kitchen.

'What's going on?' Al asked.

'Nothing at all,' Savannah said in a falsely upbeat voice. 'Actually Eden was just about to leave. She has a busy schedule, as you know, and now that Mum's funeral is over, there really is no reason for her to stay.'

'Why won't you listen to me, Savannah? *Please*. I know you're upset. We're both upset.'

Savannah slammed the plate she was holding down on the table, shattering it. She looked aghast at the broken pieces. 'That was one of Mum's favourites.' She glared at Eden, her eyes blazing with fury. 'Why don't you get it? I hate you!'

Eden felt as if she had been struck.

'Come on, Sav, you didn't mean that,' Carl said reasonably. 'We're all upset about Terri.'

'I did mean it. She's selfish, self-obsessed, spoilt! She ruined Mum's life and I don't want her ruining mine.'

Savannah's cruel words were made all the worse by her calm, measured delivery. It didn't sound as if they were uttered in the heat of the moment and she would take them back once she'd calmed down. It sounded as if she meant them.

It was too much for Eden. She couldn't stay to hear any more. Ignoring Al, who called after her, pleading with her to stay, she grabbed her bag and fled.

Back at her own house she ignored all the phone and text messages from her friends and from Al. She took a bottle of wine from the fridge, poured herself a large glass, quickly drank it, poured another, drank that. But even as she drank to blot out the pain, she knew that she had lost her sister as well as her mother . . .

Now

Chapter One

Eden was not looking forward to the meeting with Sadie. She knew her manager was planning on delivering some home truths that Eden really didn't want to hear. So she did what she always did whenever she had anything unpleasant coming up: she pretended it wasn't happening. Which was why this Tuesday afternoon, when she should have been at Sadie's Wardour Street office hearing all the many reasons why her singing career had stalled and was going absolutely nowhere, she was instead sitting in the Fifth Floor Bar at Harvey Nichols in Knightsbridge.

She was halfway through a bottle of vintage champagne and deep into pretending that everything in her life was fabulous. She had spent the last two hours burning a hole in her credit card on clothes she didn't especially want and definitely didn't need; on an expensive exotic perfume, the overpowering scent of which was already giving her a headache; on presents for her boyfriend, Joel, to make up for the fact that they hadn't been getting on for the past month – she didn't know why; and on yet another peace offering for her sister Savannah, which would no doubt be returned to her along with all the other peace offerings Eden had sent.

God, this was all so depressing. She arched a perfectly shaped eyebrow at the bartender; he registered her expression and instantly walked over and topped up her champagne glass. If only all of her problems could be so easily dealt with. She looked down at the glossy designer bags strewn around her bar stool. Why had she blown all that money? She certainly didn't feel any better for it. There had been no surge of endorphins, no rush of pleasure at each purchase, only a kind of desperation instead, a vain hope that the next thing she bought might make her feel better, might fill the emptiness in her life. It did not. Especially as she had spent the day before having her ear chewed off by her accountant about her spending habits. He had issued her with the stark warning that unless she changed her ways, she was in serious danger of blowing the fortune she had made when she was a successful singer.

Fuck them all, she thought bitterly, draining her glass. No one told Eden Haywood what to do or how to live her life. The bartender once again walked over to her and Eden was about to tell him that she'd had enough when he said discreetly, 'Actually, Miss Haywood, there's a phone call for you. It's Sadie Park.'

Bollocks! How typical of Sadie to track her down. Eden had spent the day ignoring all her calls and texts. But her manager of over seven years knew her very well. She knew that when Eden was feeling blue she always went shopping and then hit the champagne. Eden hesitated, then reluctantly took the phone from the bartender.

'Get your arse in a taxi now, Eden. Jack Steele, the songwriter, has been waiting for you for the past two hours. This is his only window.'

Sadie didn't shout, rant or swear. Instead she stayed

icily calm, which made Eden realise that she really had pushed her manager too far this time. She had better turn on the charm.

'Oh my God, Sadie! I had no idea the meeting was today. I don't think Claude can have put it in my schedule. I'll be right with you, I promise.'

'It's been in your schedule for over a month. Please do not blame anyone else, especially not Claude who is the most efficient PA I have ever had,' came the terse reply.

And with that Sadie hung up.

'Shall I get you a car, Miss Haywood?' the bartender asked helpfully.

'Yes, and I'll have another glass of champagne before I go.'

Eden hated being told off. So what if she was a little late for some meeting with a songwriter she had never heard of? Things might be rocky at the moment but she was still the fucking star! Did Jack what's his name have two gold albums behind him, three MTV awards, two Brit awards, countless others . . . and even a waxwork in Madame fucking Tussauds?

However, in spite of her outrage at being summoned like a naughty schoolgirl, Eden made an effort to get her act together in the taxi ride from Knightsbridge to Soho. She checked her appearance: applied more black eyeliner to her already smoky eyes, put on a slick of raspberry-coloured lip gloss, and ran a brush through her long platinum blonde hair. She'd had the same signature look since she'd first found fame as a singer at the age of seventeen: a blonde bombshell/beach babe look. And her style of dress hadn't changed much in the last seven years – she'd always gone for a rock chick look, where she dared to bare.

Today was no exception and she was in one of her favourite outfits: Balmain skinny black leather