

Chapter 1

Luc pushed himself the last mile over a path still damp from an overnight shower. The humidity had already cranked up, though, sticking his T-shirt and shorts to his skin. He ran through Lincoln Park, his earbuds plugged in as he listened to his playlist, spanning Eminem to U2, which drowned out the sounds of the midmorning Chicago rush.

This was his last run, his last night in Chicago—a city that held nothing but endings for him. His entire life had been all about finding his place, but he had never fit in. Unsettled, that was it. He had always needed to fit into situations instead of the other way around. He often wondered whether anyone truly knew who he was, or would he continue to keep everyone close to him at a distance? He realized he had always tried to conform to be included, in his family, his job, his life.

He pushed himself to a sprint, pumping his arms, his new Adidas runners pounding the ground as he circled the park for two and a half miles. The gate was just ahead, and he pushed through, welcoming the burn just as the playlist shuffled to Queen's "Somebody to Love." It had been his and Bruce's song, a song he now hated, and it filled him with memories of everything that hadn't worked.

He yanked his earbuds out and slowed to a walk, dragging in each breath, his army-green T-shirt soaked with sweat, and beads of it trickled down his neck as he walked it off, not looking into the face of anyone who passed. His iPhone chirped a ridiculous bird call, and he pulled it out, seeing a picture of his brother.

"This is the second time today you've called," Luc said, swiping at the sweat on his forehead. "Even for you, this is a little much."

"Just checking on where you're at," Chase said. He sounded distracted and to the point.

"I'm running—or was. Finished packing. The movers are arriving this afternoon, and then I'm heading to the airport. Anything else, Mom, or do you want me to call you again as I'm leaving?"

He didn't miss the chuckle. At times, Chase needed to organize everyone and everything as if he specialized in everyone else's problems. Luc had never let his brother organize or fix him, though, and he never would. "Sorry, habits," Chase said. "Listen. I was wondering if you could do something for me."

Luc pulled the phone away and stared at it, then took in the clear and sunny day in the park, staring up at the sky. "Uh, I'm not sure I heard you right. You need help from me?"

"Stop being a smartass, would you?"

Luc couldn't help wondering what was up, considering Chase never asked anyone for help—not that Vic, Aaron, or even he did either. It was just that Chase was always shoving his nose in everywhere, trying to fix each of them. This was a first on so many levels. "Couldn't help myself. I thought for a second the world had tilted on its axis."

"It's just a simple yes or no, Luc," Chase said. Now he sounded irritated and short, which wasn't like him. Maybe Luc should have been worried.

"It goes without saying," he said. "Just ask. You know I will." He circled the edge of the park, taking in people crossing at the lights, everyone in a hurry, impatient, the cars stopped.

"Rose is in Chicago, closing up some personal financial matters. I'm not really happy about it, but since her ex has been served for divorce, there are some delicate issues that still need to be resolved there."

“Whoa, wait, what do you mean, delicate?” Luc said. “Didn’t you say her ex was that senator who used her as a punching bag?” He was sure that was what Chase had said, or maybe it had been Aaron. When Chase met Rose, she had been hiding from the scumbag she was married to, believing he’d eventually kill her.

“I did say that, which is why I’m hoping you’ll hang beside her, get her on the plane with you. I have to finish up here or I’d be there. I have Billy Jo and can’t leave. For some reason, Rose didn’t want to wait. She’s developed this confidence, thinking Travis won’t touch her now after the sit-down I had with him. She thinks I’ve made sure he’ll behave—which I have, but he’s a politician, so his word means nothing.”

“A sit-down, what? Are you kidding?” Then again, this was Chase. That was what he did with everyone and everything.

“He’s a successful man, ambitious, with a one-way focus on the White House. A scandal of this nature, him being an abuser of women, that isn’t something he’d want made public. It would hurt him. I made sure he understood just how much. It was necessary, but still, he is who he is: a monster who wouldn’t think twice about pulling some underhanded shit. Wouldn’t put it past him to pull something, now that he knows where Rose is. He probably even knows she’s in Chicago.”

“So you want me to babysit your girl?”

“I want you to show up and glue yourself to her side until she finishes her business, and then get her to the airport with you. She’ll get on a flight to Salem, and Vic will pick you both up. I’ll meet you at Vic’s, and then I’ll be able to breathe a little easier.”

Maybe that was it, the unease he was hearing in his brother’s voice. Chase lived and breathed drama, problems, solving what others couldn’t, but this was the first time Luc had heard something in his brother’s voice that made him stop and really focus on what he wasn’t saying. Chase never asked for help, and Luc was well aware that he’d never once called on him this way before.

“She’ll be fine,” Luc said. “Just tell me where she is. I’ll leave now.”

“She’s booked into the Hyatt downtown, room 403. I told her to stay put until you get there. And, Luc, thank you.” Chase sighed on the other end.

“Don’t mention it,” Luc said, and as he hung up, he also breathed a little easier. Not only had Chase backed off from giving him the third degree about what his plans were, from prying into his business, love life, and everything else that had gone to shit, for the first time ever he was the one reaching out to Luc for help.

Luc looked up to the sky, expecting to see pigs flying.