

Chapter 6: The Beginning of Chaos

The big day came.

Many prominent businesspersons and celebrities came to witness the Rothschild-Hall wedding. They all marveled at the beautiful beach wedding set in the Rothschild's private island in Malibu. Yachts are all tied in the first class dock, and old fashioned, horse-drawn carriages brought the guests to the other side of the island where the wedding is to be held. The best wedding planner, caterers and musicians were paid to make the wedding the best of all.

The best decorated and prepared for, that is.

Alynnna was weeping on her own room as she saw the guests assemble on the beach. The picture is perfect; the sun setting down, soft breeze coming from the calming sea, romantic music all around, the freshest and most beautiful flowers adorning the rustic makeshift altar, perfect wedding dress, everything was planned for.

But she was very unhappy.

Lyn was sitting beside her, begging her to stop crying. The makeup will be ruined and the wedding is about to start, but here the bride is, crying as if she is going to the scaffold instead of the altar.

"Miss Alynnna, please...stop crying now...your parents will kill me if they see you like this..." Lyn chided, wiping off the tears carefully, though she gave Alynnna a roll of tissue a while ago. She was almost crying herself with pity for her mistress. Alynnna was not able to stop.

"Leave us." A deep voice said from the door. Alynnna and Lyn both looked up to see the groom, suave in his sleek gray tuxedo, his very handsome face unreadable. Lyn almost swooned. She was head over heels with the man. Lyn left the room, not wasting a second as she looked at Cullan until the door closed. Cullan never noticed Lyn's reaction as he walked toward Alynnna.

“I’m really sorry; I’m not late, am I?” Alynna asked as she stood up to face Cullan. She worried that he had come to fetch her. They were only a feet apart and she had to tilt her head up to meet his gaze.

Cullan said nothing as he gently tugged out the tissue from her hand and started wiping her tears away. He gently held her face as he pressed the tissue against her flushed, wet cheeks to dry them. Alynna did not move away.

“I haven’t asked you this before, but will you marry me?” Cullan asked in a soft voice. Alynna’s eyes widened. He is not serious about that, isn’t he?

“We’re getting married later, Cullan.” She reminded him.

“I know.”

“Even if I say no…”

“Just answer it, Alynna. I’m proposing, right now.” Cullan said in a feigned annoyed tone as he brushed his hand against Alynna’s face. If someone would see them this way, he or she will think that Cullan is about to kiss Alynna any second now.

“I…if this was not an arranged marriage, if we did not have our own reasons to push through this, and if I did not want to be a nun…I could have looked at you twice.” Alynna answered, her cheeks flushed not with crying but with shyness. Cullan smiled and her heart skipped a beat. What’s happening to her?

“You *are* looking at me more than twice.” He said.

“That’s not-”

Cullan kissed her forehead and his soft and firm lips settled there for a long moment that Alynna closed her eyes and was blown away. It was a sweet and chaste kiss, and she did not feel violated; rather, she felt comforted. Odd, but the sight of him makes her at ease. Maybe, she thought, it was because Cullan helped her before and until now.

He was her savior.

Alynna opened her eyes when Cullan let go of her. She could have clung to him for strength, but she did not. Cullan smiled at her and she felt both weaker and stronger with each passing moment. Wasn't that an unusual feeling?

"I'll take that as a 'yes', Miss Hall."

"I just think I can't..." Alynna trailed off as she looked in the direction of where the wedding will take place. Cullan understood her unspoken fear.

"When you reach the beach, don't look at anyone else. Look at me, straight in the eye, until I take your hand at the altar. I'll hold you tight, until the ceremony ends." Cullan said. Alynna felt like crying again – in gratitude. How could he be so kind?

"Promise me you'll do that. Now."

"Yes, I promise." Alynna answered. Cullan went to the door.

"See you then." He said as he went out. Alynna was smiling even when the makeup artists came in to the room to reapply her makeup. The makeup team wondered just what magic the groom did to make the crying bride look like she won the lottery. When she was ready to go, Lyn reentered the room, her face excited.

"Sir Rothschild wants you to see something before you go to your carriage, Miss Alynna." Lyn said happily. Alynna smiled as she wondered what could that be. She watched as Lyn went to the door and opened it again.

Standing outside the room was Sister Theresa.

"Sister!" Alynna cried as she ran toward the old woman and hugged her tight. Sister Theresa hugged her back, her eyes watering. Alynna could not say anything but she let the nun know what she feels at that moment through her tight embrace. Sister Theresa understood.

"Now dear, you'll be late for your wedding!" Sister Theresa chided, holding Alynna at an arm's length.

“I just missed you and I was so surprised you’d be here, Sister. Father and Mother never allowed me to invite any of you.” Alynna said in an apologetic tone. Sister Theresa laughed.

“I’m surprised too! You will have a very good husband, *bambina*.” The nun answered as she watched dawn settled on Alynna’s very beautiful face.

“You don’t mean...Cullan took you here?”

Alynna can only gasp as the kind nun nodded.

“Now dear you really need to rush now! I will be at your wedding so I can bring home pictures to Rome.” Sister Theresa said happily. The nun accompanied Alynna to her carriage and watched her go to the beach. Sister Theresa can only smile. She was sure that Alynna is in good hands.

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Cullan watched his bride walk on the red carpeted-aisle. They were under the setting sun, the sound of the waves accompanied by the violins making the best wedding music ever. The guests were all standing, looking at the direction of the bride who was walking in the aisle lined with old-fashioned lanterns with lighted candles inside. Cullan can hear their collective murmurs of how beautiful Alynna is, and they were right.

Alynna looked heavenly on her white, Venice silk wedding gown with narrow waist and hips, accentuating her curves. The tube top made her look like a darling, exposing her collarbones and the swell of her breasts with elegance and respectable sexiness. The gown clung to her body perfectly from the top, and then flowed around from her legs down.

Her curly hair was gathered to the top with a diamond clip he secretly bought for her, with a few strands framing her exquisite face. He specifically told the stylists not to tell her that the stones on the clip were real diamonds, as he had the feeling that she will not wear it then.

Cullan was trying hard not to smile too much. Her bride is such an angel.

And she was doing what she promised; she was looking only at him.

Straight in his eyes.

The wedding was like a blur to Alynna. All the people say that it was like a fairytale wedding, but for Alynna, it passed by so fast and the few things she could remember aside from being blank the whole time was Cullan's warm and firm hands holding hers throughout the ceremony, and the kiss...

Her very first kiss.

She remembered them exchanging vows and putting on the rings, but her world stopped when Cullan held her chin up and kissed her very softly, and she remembered herself responding until Cullan pulled her hips to draw her closer to him. The kiss ended after who knows how long, and by that time Alynna was ready to faint. Cullan's strong arm supported her from her hips without anyone noticing her weakening, and she faintly heard the cheers from their visitors as if they were miles away.

She shook more hands than she could count, while Cullan did all the talking. She was awakened from her reverie when a woman in her early fifties hugged her affectionately. She was Margaret Rothschild, Cullan's mother.

"You are the most beautiful bride I have ever seen." The woman said and a voice inside Alynna told her that the woman is sincere. Alynna smiled and murmured a thank you.

"You take care of Cullan, dear. Our son cares about very few things, and I am glad to see that you are one of them." The woman said. Alynna can only smile.

"I will do my best." Alynna answered humbly.

Alynna received hugs and kisses from everyone, including her father and stepmother. Marcus hugged her for a millisecond, while Isidore kissed her cheeks then wiped her newly-stretched face with her handkerchief afterwards. Alynna did not mind; she expected their treatment of her to be as harsh as possible.

She also met Rhys Hall, her younger brother, and she was happy to know that he is a very nice man. Rhys politely congratulated her and offered a brotherly hug, which she felt was sincere. Rhys even told her that he was proud to have a very gorgeous sister. It melted her heart. At last, someone in the Hall family showed her acceptance. He also gave her an apology in behalf of Bella, who, as Rhys put it, was “born to be MIA in the most important occasions”.

Alynnna looked for Sister Theresa and had the nun bless her and her husband. She asked Sister Theresa to stay for a few days, but the nun refused since there is no one to help Sister Marian take care of her Uncle Fabian. Alynnna wept in happiness when she had known from Sister Theresa that her uncle is getting well quite fast and can now do light exercise. He will begin to undergo chemotherapy in the next few days, according to Sister Theresa.

“Please send Uncle my deepest love, Sister.” Alynnna said as she hugged the kind old woman tight before she and Cullan moved to another table to entertain guests.

She could not remember just how many chairpersons of different companies she had met and thanked, but one thing is for sure: Cullan never let her feel left out or abandoned. He was very attentive to her until Alynnna pleaded a headache. She was not used to meeting too many people, and the repetitive greeting and talking made her feel very tired.

“I can take you back to the mansion.” Cullan offered, but Alynnna politely refused. She knew that Cullan couldn’t leave their guests behind.

“Thank you, but I’ll be fine. I can ask Lyn to be with me.” Alynnna answered. Cullan gave her a long look, a look that says a million things that she cannot really understand but could definitely feel.

“See you later.” Cullan said and walked away from Alynnna before he could even think of leaving everyone for her.

As soon as she saw Alynna leaving, Isidore followed her to the mansion. As early as now, Isidore thought, Alynna must know her role in their plans and now is the best time to instruct her. The brat cannot forget the reason why she was married first and foremost.

Isidore did not bother to knock on the door and went inside Alynna's room as if it was her own. She saw her stepdaughter standing by the opened window, looking toward the warm glow of light on the beach where the reception is being held. Isidore felt irritated; if her own Bella had not run away, she should be the one married to the Rothschild's heir instead of Alynna who came back from the dead to take away what her daughter should have.

“Such a handsome man, Cullan. Isn't he?”

Alynna turned in surprise. She did not hear Isidore entering her room as her thoughts were drifting to her husband. She politely greeted ‘good evening’.

“What's good in the evening? Remember that you are only here because my daughter ran away. If she had done otherwise, she should be the one happily married now to a very rich and handsome man. It is as if my daughter is lending you something she owns, so don't behave like a princess. For us, you will always be that other daughter of Marcus who was thrown away in Italy.” Isidore said in an angry tone. She cannot stomach the fact that her stepdaughter is now a Rothschild by marriage, and even if she benefits from that, any form of Alynna's success is something she could not accept.

For Isidore, it was like chewing bitter gourds and pretending they were bonbons.

“I didn't want this for myself.” Alynna answered; her voice low but with strong conviction. She cannot let her stepmother make her look like a gold digger and a fiancé stealer; that is the least she could do to prove that her uncle raised her well. She can insult me anytime, Alynna thought, but I will never fight. She can throw stones at me, but I will give her back bread.

“Oh, don't give me your dramas. I always know how rotten you are to the core.” Isidore wickedly retorted. Alynna kept her silence. It was a good thing that she sent Lyn back to the party, at least, she will not witness Isidore's humiliating attitude.

“So, now that you are in Bella’s place, you have to know your duties for the family. As Cullan’s wife, you should influence him to always put Hall Enterprise’s interests the first priority. Do everything to increase our power over the merging. In short, suck the money out from him.” Isidore said, not minding her brutality over her choice of words. Alynna gasped. How could Isidore ask such things from her?

“I am sorry, I can’t do that.”

“What?!” Isidore blurted, red blotches on her face appearing. Anger does not really suit her overly botoxed skin.

“Cullan is very kind to me and to repay him with terrible plans is something I will never do. Cullan is a respectable businessman, and I am sure that with the merging, you can already get many benefits. Surely you do not need me to influence him to give you more.” Alynna calmly explained. Isidore was very angry she slapped Alynna’s face so hard Alynna was thrown down to the bed.

“You’re where you are because of me, so better follow my orders or I will stop sending your uncle money! Don’t push your luck on me, you brat.” Isidore said and stormed out of the room.

Alynna could not do anything but cry until she fell asleep.

Cullan purposely stayed out late until he was sure that Alynna was already asleep. When he went inside her room, he was relieved to see her sleeping. He did not want her to feel any pressure on their ‘wedding night’. Not that they were going to have the usual wedding night, anyway. He was already determined that no matter how strong his unexplainable feelings for her are, he will make sure that she remains pure until they divorce. He wanted her to fulfill her dream of becoming a nun as if she was never married.

Cullan approached the side of the bed and sat on the carpeted floor, staring at Alynna’s beautiful face. Why did you marry her? Cullan asked himself. He already had reasons made to convince himself. First, he felt pity for her that is why he married her. That way, he can protect her from her parents’ evil schemes. Second, he thought that if another man married her, he might not let

her go in the future to become a nun. At least with him, Alynna can evidently get out of the marriage unscathed, and then she can continue fulfilling her ‘calling’.

Are you sure you *will* divorce her? A voice inside his head asked. Cullan silenced it. Of course, there’s no doubt about that. Once he decided on a certain thing, he will always –

Is that a bruise?

Cullan bent forward and examined the left side of Alynna’s face. Yes, he cannot be wrong. It really is a bruise, and it looked like she was slapped. Hard.

Rage surged in Cullan’s veins. He said he married her to protect her, and now, just hours after their wedding, his wife was slapped in the face by whoever that devil was. He exhaled angrily. Tomorrow he will ask Alynna what happened. He will definitely kill the person who did this to her!

He is sure that the bruise will be visible by morning, and he thought that other people might think that he struck Alynna. Like he will ever do that to a woman, for Christ’s sake.

Cullan touched Alynna’s face very lightly, a silent way of apologizing for not being able to protect her. When he was sure that his wife is sleeping soundly, he started to get up from the floor to go to his room.

“Cullan...”

Cullan was caught off guard. Alynna’s hypnotizing blue eyes opened and looked directly to him.

“I’m sorry. Did I wake you up?”

“No. I felt you leaving.”

“I am about to. Go back to sleep, Alynna.”

Cullan stood up and turned his back on her. This is not the best time for them to talk. He’s drunk and angry – a bad combination. He went for the door.

“Cullan...”

That's it.

Cullan turned and faced Alynna.

“Who struck you?”

Alynna's eyes widened and her mouth slightly parted. How did he know?

She sat up.

“I...I had an accident and I...I hit the dresser. I was clumsy.” Alynna answered. Cullan narrowed his eyes.

“You are a bad liar, Alynna.”

Alynna did not know what to do. It was already bad enough to lie, but she cannot tell Cullan who struck her. Isidore has a very bad temper, and Alynna never wanted to fight her stepmother. After all, Isidore helps her uncle financially.

“Tell me.” Cullan said, nudging her back to present.

“I'm sorry, I can't.”

Cullan walked toward her bed and sat in front of her. Cullan let himself touch Alynna's hair, drawing back the soft curls away from her face. Alynna closed her eyes.

“Please Alynna. I need to know.”

“No...”

“Open your eyes, sweetheart.”

Alynna did just what he said. How can he make her lose herself like that?

And he called her sweetheart.

Cullan was looking at her eyes directly. They met each other's gazes, and Alynna knew that she trusts him that is why she frees herself from self-imposed restrictions every time he is near her.

Cullan gently hugged her and stroked her hair. He can smell the sweet and warm scent of vanilla in her hair and skin.

“Who hurt you, sweetheart? Tell me.”

“It’s...my stepmother.”

Cullan’s suspicion was correct. That woman did this, and for what reason, he would very much like to know, but he decided that now is not the best time to ask his wife about it. Alynna was very delicate and vulnerable. As much as he wants to strangle the old bat, he didn’t think that his little wife would like that.

Alynna felt Cullan’s body tense, and his hand grasp a bunch of locks of her hair. She knew he is getting angry.

“Cullan please, she didn’t mean...”

“Hush now. Don’t worry. I will not do anything you don’t like me to do.”

When he said that, Cullan felt her body relax. He realized that whatever her family does to her, Alynna will still care for them. Why does she need to have such a big heart?

Pity that a sweet angel like her married a big bad wolf like him.

“Cullan?”

“Alynna?”

“Don’t forget to pray every night before you go to sleep.”

“I’m not a prayerful man.”

“I’ll pray for you, then. Because when you survive each day without being harmed, someone must have been praying for your safety. But remember to do it yourself from now on.”

When Alynna fell asleep in his arms, Cullan gently laid her back on the bed and fixed the blanket around her. How could he even think of getting a divorce when just the thought of someone hurting her makes him murderous?

Cullan went out of the room after looking at his beautiful wife one more time.