

Chelsea had no words, well she did; she had a lot of them, but didn't know where to start. Speeches had been percolating around in her head for days. Then she saw him and did what Chelsea always did, like a bull to a red rag.

'What are you doing?'

'My job.'

'No! To get Nat back.'

'She doesn't want me.' He'd agonised over their last meeting for days. It still came down to the same thing; she'd torn his heart out. He wasn't going to beg. In an unguarded moment, he let his fears out to Chelsea. 'She said she doesn't - forget that - couldn't ever love me. I've already tried the one-way traffic thing. It doesn't work. Call me stupid, but I need someone who wants to be with me. I've realised I want to be with her, even if she couldn't say she loved me. I'm not going to force her to be with me if she doesn't want a bar of me because she's too fearful.'

'You're stupid. Actually. Both of you are.'

He came at Chelsea like the lash of a whip. 'Excuse me!'

'Can't you see she's crazy for you.'

'I don't need to listen to this.'

'One way or another,' she clutched his arm, 'you're going to,' making him stop and take stock. 'And you will. Nat may not be able to tell you she loves you in words, which is more than likely due to her terrible past, and not much to do with you, but her actions...' A shuddered inhalation. 'Surely you see it.' She waved her arms around. 'She put up with all the shit you and your *scary* family caused to be heaped on her, yet she kept her word. She kept your secrets, even though doing so caused all her secrets to be made public. Now, for some unknown, *irrational* reason, she's

put Ren's and your future happiness ahead of hers.' Almost yelling: 'Don't you get it. Through all of it, she remained loyal, silent—in love.'

'She could have rung or visited me over the last week if she wanted to tell me she'd changed her mind. That she could grow to love me and not live in fear of Wolf and Nina. Chelsea, I can't ride that merry-go-round again.'

'Stop!' She tugged harder on his arm, making him look at her face, 'Sebastian, you're a doctor. You're supposed to be the smart one here. Can't you tell she's said all that because only someone in love could be that terrified - for you?'

'Why hurt me with saying that then?'

'Because she could see it was the only thing that would keep you away, to keep you safe. It crushed her. I saw the aftermath of her words to you.'

'You're making this up.'

'No, you loved-up idiot! She's scared that Wolf and Nina will have more cause to hurt Ren and you if she stays in your lives. Despite your reassurances.' Tugging harder, 'And if you want more reasons, I imagine thinking she could be HIV positive kept her away as well.'

'My God.'

'You still love her, right?'

'Every day, with all of my heart, body and soul.'

Wagging her finger at him. 'Can you keep our girl safe while looking after yourself and Ren?'

His eyes drilled into her, 'Yes, of course. You know Cole is...we're doing everything possible. At the very least, we're about to get Nina with obstruction of justice for having organised the hiding of the CCTV footage. Wolf seems to have

gone to ground; no-one's seen him for days. The police are on him. We'll get him too, I assure you.'

'She also doesn't think your father will ever accept her and that she can't separate you and Ren from him.'

'Believe me, I will protect her and deal with my father.'

'Then go fight for her; she's happiest with you.'

'How can I? She won't let me near her, see her, talk to her.'

Chelsea took a deep breath, 'When the findings of the hospital investigation are made public this afternoon, it's party time at the Norfolk. I'll get her there; the rest is up to you.' She glared at him. 'Don't eff this up. I don't have any more favours left in my bag of tricks for you.'