

Chapter One

Present Day

New York City

Bellamy Bennett paced her Park Avenue apartment, biting her manicured nail as the phone rang. When she realized the bad habit, she stuck her hand in her pocket.

Come on. Come on, Archer. Pick up.

After the fourth ring, she ended the call, then immediately redialed. Her older brother would get tired of it eventually and answer. He had to.

She spun back toward her dining table that was currently covered in the pages of her new contract. Vivant, one of the bestselling perfume brands in the world, had just signed her to a four-year contract worth millions of dollars. Bellamy frowned at the contract and turned back to the window overlooking the city. The bright lights normally brought her peace. Tonight, they gave her a headache.

She hung up and redialed.

On the third ring, a gruff voice answered.

“What do you want, Bells?”

“I’m doing well, thanks. How are you, Archer?” She put as much sugar into her words as possible.

He grunted. “How are you, Bellamy?”

“I’m worried. I can’t reach Lily.” Of the three of them, their middle sister tended to be the most reliable. She answered her phone, returned their calls, and she never gave up on them.

“Maybe she’s just out. People do have lives, you know.”

Bellamy rolled her eyes, even though he couldn’t see it. “Like watching television and not leaving your couch unless your stomach demands it?”

“I have a valid reason not to go out.”

Don’t bicker with him, Bells. He’s still healing. “That’s not why I called. If Lily is out, then she’s been out for a week. I’ve left her four messages in the last seven days and she hasn’t called back. That’s not like her.”

He was silent a moment. “Did you get into another argument?”

She ground her teeth and bit back a sharp retort. It was a valid question. She and Lily hadn’t been on the best of terms for the last eight years. “No. Last time we talked it was... fine.” Stilted, but not argumentative. It was progress.

“Hm. I’m sure she’s just been busy.”

“Have you heard from her?”

Archer sighed and she could hear the self-recrimination in it. *Oh, Archer. What happened to you on that last mission?* He’d never tell her though. All she knew was that he was medically discharged from the military after the Humvee carrying his Seal team was hit with an explosive. He’d come back to the states after months in the hospital with a limp and an aversion to everything and everyone. Including his sisters.

“She called awhile ago. I didn’t answer.”

Bellamy straightened. “She called today?”

“Shit. No. It was...” his voice sounded farther away from the phone as if he was scrolling through his recent calls. “Two weeks ago.”

Two weeks! “That was when I talked to her.” She heard something thump on his end of the line. It sounded like a fist hitting a wooden table. “My contract starts next week, so I don’t have a whole lot of time. But we’ve got to go to Kentucky and try to find her.”

“Bells, I’m sure she’s—”

“What if something happened to her, Archer? Do you know anyone out there that can check on her?”

“No.”

“Neither do I. Please. I owe her.”

Archer muttered a curse. “I... I can’t, Bellamy.”

She gripped the phone until the edges cut into her fingers. “Can’t or won’t, Archer?”

He blew out a harsh breath. “Does it matter?”

Damn him. How could he sit back and pretend everything was fine? “What the hell happened to you that you won’t even leave your house when your sister might be in trouble?” she yelled.

“Lily can look after herself. She has since mom and dad died. Since she started taking care of you. She’s fine.”

“What if she isn’t?”

“What if she’s just avoiding you?” he shot back.

Bellamy sucked in a sharp breath. She pressed her lips together until they hurt. “Then she can avoid me in person. At least I care enough about her to make sure she’s okay.”

Archer sputtered.

Before he could reply, Bellamy disconnected the call. And immediately regretted it. Archer was dealing with his own physical and emotional wounds. Maybe it wasn't fair to put the expectation on him to help, but this was *Lily*.

She tossed her phone onto the couch and sank down beside it on the cushions, head in her hands. She *knew* something was wrong. For all their arguments and the years of strained tension, Lily had always been open to talking through their problems. No matter how mad she'd been at Bellamy or what harsh words were spoken, Lily cooled off quickly and didn't hold a grudge. Even if they had argued the last time they'd talked, Lily would have been ready to talk again the next day. Two weeks of silence wasn't like her sister.

Damn Archer.

Bellamy grabbed her phone and went to her bedroom. The large windows overlooking Park Avenue, with its war era buildings and crowded streets below, let in faint light. Cars honked and the noisy hum of the city couldn't be contained by the glass. She loved the energy of Manhattan. She'd been lucky to find this apartment on the Upper East Side, with its beautiful architecture and the security of a doorman. It was also close to the Madison Avenue boutiques, which she loved to browse, and Central Park when she needed the fresh feel of grass under her feet or the smell of fall leaves. Of course, it was outrageously expensive. Fortunately, her modeling career paid the bills and provided security. Something she desperately needed after losing her parents and their family home.

Maybe if she'd stayed in college, she would have found a decent job and bought her own home by now. Or maybe she'd still be paying off school loans and dreaming of visiting many of the countries she'd already been to. There was no way of knowing and she didn't regret most of

her choices. Only one truly bothered her—that she'd been so caught up in grief over losing her parents that she'd pushed Lily away at every opportunity.

We have to work this out. I can't lose anyone else.

If Archer wouldn't go to Kentucky, then she'd just go by herself. She grabbed her suitcase from the closet and laid it open on the bed. She'd catch the first flight out to either Kentucky or Tennessee, whichever was closest, and find her sister.

If Archer was right and Lily was okay, then great. She'd spend time with Lily and make some new, good memories. But her gut told her something was wrong. The Vivant photo shoot started at the old chateau in France in ten days.

Please let it be enough time to find Lily.

She tossed another shirt into her suitcase and then reached for her tablet. A flight to Knoxville, Tennessee left at 8:30 a.m. Bellamy booked the flight, then called for a car service.

By the time she hung up, she was sniffing back the tears that clogged her throat. She wouldn't cry. Not until she knew what happened to her sister. If Lily was okay, she was going to mend their relationship and be the sister that she should have been all along. She owed Lily everything.

April 1814

London, England

The *tink-tink-tink* of hammer against metal soothed Christian Albury's nerves as little else could. He hunched over his cluttered wooden worktable, and tapped the jewelry hammer against the silver petal. He glanced at the full pink rose in the vase on his left, turned the piece in his hand, and shaped the other side.

Blast. It didn't look quite right. Christian wiped the back of his hand across his brow. Half a dozen completed petals sat on the table near his elbow, all slightly different from the one in his hand. When assembled, they would recreate the garden rose, though this would last forever. He could see it clearly in his mind. The flower would sit in a delicate glass vase with a silver pedestal to conceal the timepiece mechanism which would slowly open and close the petals to simulate the bloom.

The idea came to him a few months back as he prepared to depart the house party his best friend, Gabriel Hawthorne, the Earl of Rothden, had forced him to attend. Under normal circumstances, he enjoyed spending a few days at Hawthorne Hall. Gabriel was one of only two men Christian considered his friends. But dozens of additional guests attended the house party for the lavish suppers and balls. Being amid so many people made his pulse hammer and his lungs close until he fought the urge to barricade himself in his chamber.

Christian rubbed the bridge of his nose. He didn't quite have the social skills required to carry a conversation, which often led to whispers behind his back or a cut direct. Something about him put people off. His conversations were stilted, at best. Talking to a woman made his insides quake until he was reduced to single word responses.

Gabriel understood that better than anyone. He dragged Christian to the events anyway under the guise of it being good for him. Or at least, a way to improve his social skills. He

usually snuck out to find solace the first moment he was able. Far better to be alone than the subject of derision. He was happier on his own.

He'd spotted a delicate rose in a vase outside his guest room while visiting Gabriel, and its strong fragrance brought a smile to his face. A flash of desire to capture that moment hit him, and his mind had spun with ways to implement it. Once home, he'd barreled into his workshop and rifled through his tools and clock pieces, looking for the parts he'd need to begin.

Unfortunately, Parliament began session several days later and he'd had to abandon the project to return to London. The miserably cold winter, one of the worst the country had in decades, meant he was unable to return home until the House of Lords session broke for Easter.

Christian shuddered. Now, the families of the lords joined them in London for months of theatre, balls, and dinner parties that made up the Season. It all made his head throb.

He traced a finger over the silver petal and turned back to his project. The tightness in his lungs from thinking about the Season eased and allowed him to draw a full breath, scented by the garden rose. Now if only he could devise a way for the silver flower to release a similar scent into the air when the petals opened. Once he had the mechanism and design complete, he wanted to make this on a grander scale. An entire garden. He adjusted his grip on the hammer and tapped on the silver. Perhaps if he used a narrow tube that ran up the inside of the stem and connected to a small bellows in the bottom that squeezed when the gears turned to open the petals...

Tap-tap-tap.

Christian stilled and looked down at his hammer. He hadn't made that noise...

"Lord Albury?" a muffled voice called through the wooden door. It opened and the dark head of Malcolm, his butler, appeared. "The mail has arrived, my lord." He entered the

workshop, stepping over a stack of scrap metal pieces that tilted precariously. He held a small tray, with a single cream envelope upon it.

Christian set the hammer and the silver petal aside and turned in his seat to eye the letter. Surely Gabriel wasn't already harassing him to ensure he would attend the next ball. Christian pressed his lips together. This was Gabriel. In all likelihood, that was exactly what the letter contained.

They'd been friends for years, since schooling together at Eton. Circumstances had brought them together, and though Christian didn't understand why, Gabriel had insisted on becoming his friend. A fact he would forever be grateful for. If not for Gabriel, he might not have survived Eton.

He reached for the envelope. "Is it impolite to admit that when Lord Hawthorne married, I had hoped he would be so taken up with his lovely wife that he would hound me less about attending parties?"

The butler's brown eyebrows shot up to his hairline and disappeared beneath the thick locks that permanently waved across his forehead. "Very likely, my lord."

Hmm. "When Rothden met a charming woman at his house party and asked her to wed him, I was delighted. He deserves every happiness." Christian liked Lily immensely. He didn't fumble his words around her because her natural charm seemed to put him at ease. He couldn't think of another woman of his acquaintance that he could speak easily with. Not even his housekeeper.

"I suspect many a young lady are disappointed by the news," Malcolm said.

Indeed they would be. Gabriel had avoided the marriage mart with the same dedication of a pickpocket avoiding police patrols. But when his sister Violet had nearly run over a poor

woman in the street with her carriage, she'd done the sensible thing and brought the dazed woman back to their home for care. Miss Lily Bennett was different from any women in their acquaintance and quickly captured Gabriel's attention.

Certainly, there were any number of delightful qualities to appreciate about Lily. But as the days of the house party continued, Christian continued to note oddities about her, until the conclusion he reached shocked him. Lily Bennett was from the future. She'd used one of Christian's inventions to journey over two hundred years through time.

The little clock sat on his shelf above the workbench. How could the device modify time? He'd set the hands to every hour to confirm each chimed properly and none shifted the century he found himself in. Perhaps it wasn't something he'd done yet, but something he would in the future. If he adjusted the balance wheel and the escapement...

Malcolm cleared his throat.

Christian realized that his hand still rested on the envelope on the tray Malcolm held. He flushed and picked the letter up, expecting to see the fluid script of his best friend. Instead, the monogrammed seal of his solicitors, Forester, Morrister, and Lamb was pressed on the other side.

He cast about his workbench, snatched up a wing divider, and used it to open the envelope.

Malcolm rolled his eyes. "Would you like me to wait, my lord? Or shall I have tea sent up?"

Christian removed the heavy paper from within and scanned the brief letter. He frowned. "Sorry, Malcolm. What was that?"

The man's lips twitched. He'd been in Christian's employ for nearly nine years. He was well accustomed to Christian's wandering thoughts.

"Tea? Or shall I wait for your reply?"

Christian read the letter once more. "My man of business wishes to see me about the accounts. I shall call on the solicitors tomorrow. Have William gather the needed books." His steward ran the Huntington estate well. Christian quite happily left the man to the job in order to pursue his love of automatons.

Perhaps if the solicitor's meeting took a few hours, he would have a suitable reason to avoid Lady Barlowe's ball. He hated the crowds, the parties, the dancing, the polite conversation, and most especially the simpering young ladies and their marriage-minded mothers. What he wouldn't give to send a proxy to take his place for the Season as he could for Parliament.

"My lord, you may recall that Mr. Dale left two days past to attend to a family emergency," Malcolm said patiently.

"Of course." Christian had no recollection of such but it made little difference. "Could you—?"

"I shall see to it, my lord. I will also send tea up. Supper is in two hours. Cook will be displeased if you miss for the second day in a row."

Had he missed supper yesterday?

A small smile touched Malcolm's lips. "Shall I return when it's time for supper, my lord?"

Christian flushed but agreed. Cook could be as maddening as Gabriel when he missed a meal. Accounting to both of them in the same week made him feel like a child being scolded by his parents.

Malcolm departed. Christian folded the letter from his solicitors and tucked it into his jacket pocket. If he worked a few more hours tonight, he could finish the last petals. Maybe even begin assembly of the rose.

He picked up his jeweler's hammer and grimaced. London was cold, dank, dark, malodorous, and noisy. His only respite for the long months of the Season was this small workspace he'd set up for himself in the family townhouse.

After the meeting tomorrow, I'll stay home to work on this. Let Gabriel try to force my attendance to Lady Barlowe's ball.

Christian reached for the silver petal and shook his head. Despite his bravado, he knew in his heart that if Gabriel wanted him to go to the Abernathy ball, he would. There was nothing he wouldn't do for his friend. Once, a long time ago, Gabriel had saved his life. Christian owed him everything.