

One

The morning of my grandfather's funeral, I open the last email he sent me, the one that's been sitting in my inbox for six weeks. Sitting there unread, and even now, I don't feel the slightest twinge of guilt about that.

I pop it open, read and—

Fuck.

The text is innocuous enough.

Dear Samantha,

I think you need to see this.

Douglas Payne (your grandfather)

Who the hell signs an email to their twenty-six-year-old granddaughter that way? The same guy who insisted on calling me Samantha when from birth I was Sam, named after a character in a book my mother loved. As for the "your grandfather" part, that was just him being passive-aggressive, because he's a jerk.

Was a jerk.

Damn it.

I sit up in bed and roll my shoulders, as if I can slough off the prickle of guilt. "Douglas Payne (your grandfather)" never deserved my guilt. Never deserved my respect. Never even deserved my love. He'd wanted the respect, and he'd sure as hell wanted the guilt, but the love was immaterial. He did not give it, and he did not expect to receive it. As for the respect, he forfeited that when he cut my mother off without a cent after my father's death.

My father's *suicide*, which is how Dad chose to deal with the fact that I'd caught him burying Austin Vandergriff.

I instinctively stanch the surge of rage. Then I pause, letting it wash away the irritating wisps of that misplaced guilt.