

## The Fifth Time

It was a chilly night on this 23rd of December.

Sophie entered her room which was only lit by the full moon's light. She dumped her bag on the ground and sat down at the window.

The cold glass reflected her face and she just stared at herself for a while. Her eyes weren't swollen anymore. No sign left that she had cried on her way home.

Slowly she raised a hand and touched the remains of her smeared mascara. The tears had made dark rivers out of it which were now dry and empty.

It was the fifth time. The fifth time it almost worked. The fifth time Sophie almost succeeded. The fifth time she had a chance to be free.

And it was the fifth time she had failed.

Sophie ignored the soft footsteps on the floor in the hallway and she ignored the slight knock on her closed door a few seconds later.

"Sophie," her mother said. "I know you are here. Please let me in."

But Sophie didn't move. About a minute later, her door opened and a warm ray of light fell into the dark room. Sophie turned to find her mother standing in the doorway.

She was still wearing her sheath dress from earlier and Sophie did not doubt that her mother didn't get a chance to change her outfit in the last hours.

One look at her face told Sophie how tired her mother was. She knew she got up at 5 a.m. and now it was almost midnight. But this was not Sophie's fault. Not everything was her fault.

"Don't you think we need to talk about what happened?" her mother asked and stepped closer. Only one step.

Sophie looked at her for a second and then turned to face the window again.

"It doesn't matter," she answered stiffly. "Everybody hates me again. We don't have to act like this was a great evening."

"That was not my intention." Her mother's voice was neither soft nor strict. It was neutral, a matter-of-fact; her business voice. This would not end well.

"I know I screwed up, okay?" Sophie said and sighed. "It was the fifth time now and it caused a lot of trouble. I'm sorry, Mum."

This had worked for the past four times but Sophie had the feeling that her mother wouldn't just accept an apology and leave.

"This needs to stop," she said and closed the distance between them. "I cannot protect you if you try to escape this building almost every week. Five times now, Sophie. Five times you left unattended. Five times you were alone. Five times you could've been killed."

Sophie did not answer. She rested her chin on her forearm and gazed outside. Heavy snowflakes were falling from the sky and began to cover the road and the Palace of Westminster.

Dozens of paparazzi were at the gates to the entrance of Downing Street and were taking pictures. All of this because of her.

"Sophie, darling." Her mother sat next to her and reached for her hand. But she did not touch her as if there was a barrier between them.

Sophie knew this barrier well. It was a product of their mistrust, anger and disappointment from the past seven months, ever since Sophie's mother ran for office and became Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. Seven months of arguing and endless fights between her and her mother.

At the beginning Sophie had hoped that things would get better over time. That being the daughter of the Prime Minister would not be too bad but it turned out worse than expected. Paparazzi were chasing her everywhere she went. People were being extra nice to her, hoping Sophie would like them and so would her mother.

It was a game. A game full of jealousy, money and power where no one could trust another. And Sophie was in the center.

"I know the past months have been difficult for you," her mother began softly. "But how am I supposed to protect or help you if you keep running away?"

"You cannot help me." Sophie's voice was full of bitterness. "I asked you not to become Prime Minister. I told you this would change everything but you didn't listen. You didn't *want* to listen."

"So this is all my fault now?"

"No. I'm just saying that you are not innocent. All of this could've been avoided if you would've just let me live with Dad. But you refused because you were afraid people could think that you are not able to care for a teenager as a single mother. This decision was all about your career."

When she looked at her mother, she saw the anger in those cold, grey eyes. An anger that made most politicians tremble.

"It's not all about my career, Sophie. You have nothing to do with this."

"Oh, really?!" Sophie almost jumped up. "This is not about me? I am in the middle of this mess you call politics, what you call your *life*. But do you know what you're missing, Prime Minister?"

The annoyance in her mother's face didn't stop Sophie. She was full of hate and rage for her life that had become so miserable half a year ago.

"You are missing that you also have a child, a daughter, who does not want to be part of this. You dragged me into Downing Street Number 10 while completely ignoring that this is not the life I want. I am not like you and I am so sick of it!"

She paused when the anger on her mother's face faded and was replaced by surprise.

"I am sick of it," Sophie repeated. "Sick of Downing Street, sick of the paparazzi and especially sick of everything this goddamn institution stands for!"

Her mother rose and faced Sophie who had begun to cry. But her mother showed neither remorse nor pity. Her face was a mask forged by years in parliament surrounded by liars and traitors.

"It's enough, Sophie," she growled. "You are sixteen years old and you are not mature enough to see that it's important what I'm doing."

Sophie could barely breathe after this response. She stared at her mother who looked down at her with an icy expression.

"So people need to be mature to have feelings, thoughts and fears?" she asked. Her mother clenched her teeth.

"You are grounded," she said. "Until you've realized what you have done."

"So I guess I'm grounded forever," Sophie replied and sat down on the windowsill again.

"Thanks for understanding me, Mum."

Her mother turned and walked towards the door. With a hand resting on the doorknob she looked at Sophie again.

"I must not remind you that your actions have consequences. If you try to run away again, the guards will not try to catch you. They are sick of it, too. It is not their job to chase after angry teenagers."

"And obviously it's also not *your* job to care for angry teenagers, especially your own."

Her mother's expression was tight. "Exactly. And now stay in here and don't even think about leaving again."

"I love you too," Sophie murmured as she left. Her mother froze and for a second Sophie thought she would turn around.

But she didn't. As if nothing had happened, she exhaled audibly and closed the door.

"Good night, Sophie," she said before the door slammed shut.

Sophie just stared at the spot where her mother had been seconds ago. She ignored the tears rolling down her face and sniffed.

The world outside was already covered in snow. Guards were patrolling the street and the entrance to Downing Street. There were some but not enough. Not enough for Sophie.

She thought about leaving again: Sneaking out through the back door and over the fence but she did not move. Her mother's words had hit her like a punch; made her even angrier than she already was. But Sophie also sensed the truth behind her words.

Maybe there was another way to face the life she was living right now. Or she had to find a way to get used to it.

She just hoped that things would get better one day.

She hoped. Because there was nothing else she could do.