



**IAN KABRA**

**AGE: 14**

**BRANCH: LUCIAN**

**HOMETOWN:**

**LONDON, ENGLAND**

**AGENT UPDATE: Ian Kabra**

It was the smiling that really drove him mad. Ian couldn't imagine what made everyone in Boston so cheerful. It wasn't the weather. The sky was a dreary gray, and as he glanced out the window, he saw people cocooned in hats and scarves, fighting their way against the wind. It certainly wasn't because they were all incredibly wealthy. The woman sitting at the next table was even wearing a faux fur jacket. Ian shuddered at the thought of artificial fibers rubbing against his professionally exfoliated skin. He could tolerate considerable hardship, but chafing was just too much to bear.

Yet everyone kept smiling at him. The portly, bald man who had checked them in. The bellboy who took their bags upstairs. The maid who came to their room after Natalie had called to complain that her pillowcases didn't match. And now, the waitress standing in front of them. She was beaming, as if Ian had just handed her a puppy with a Visa Black card in its mouth.

"Can I get you anything else?" she asked as she cleared their untouched plates. "It doesn't look like you enjoyed your breakfast very much!"

"Just the bill, please."

She smiled. "Are you going to do some sightseeing today? The first stop on the Freedom Trail is just around the corner. If you go ask Bob over there at the front desk, he can—"

"We have other plans," Ian interrupted.

"That's great! Anything fun?"

Natalie looked up at the waitress and gave her a fake smile. Except that on Natalie, it looked more demonic than cheerful. "Our mum's on trial for murder. Today's the verdict. But if it ends early, we'll be sure to pop by the Freedom Trail." The waitress's smile vanished.

Yet by the time they arrived in the courtroom, Ian found himself missing the excessive cheerfulness. No one at the Massachusetts Superior Court seemed to smile at all. For the first time since they'd arrived in Boston the night before, the real purpose of their trip sunk in. This wasn't one of their Christmas holidays when they'd take the jet to Boston so Isabel could go shopping on Newbury Street. He and Natalie were sitting on a hard wooden bench in a cold courtroom. And Mum wasn't off trying on clothes at Prada.

Everyone stood up as the judge walked in, his black robes billowing from the drafts. Two guards followed, escorting a tall woman in an orange jumpsuit. It was Isabel. The last time Ian and Natalie had seen her, she was being lifted into the Starlings' plane, unconscious. William McIntyre had made sure the police were waiting for her when they landed back in England.

Standing under the fluorescent lights, it was clear she wasn't wearing any makeup. Yet despite the bags under her eyes, she looked younger. Ian couldn't remember ever seeing his mother without lipstick. Her pale mouth made something in his stomach twitch. Like he was viewing something that was supposed to stay hidden.

He turned to whisper to Natalie, but she was staring straight ahead. Not at Isabel. Not at anyone. She wasn't moving, but Ian could see her jaw muscle tightening. It always happened when Natalie was trying not to cry. He took her hand and gave it a squeeze. She didn't react.

Ian couldn't imagine what Natalie was feeling. The last time she had been with her mother, Isabel had shot her in the foot. Yet, over the past few months, Ian kept catching Natalie in Isabel's room. He'd even found her asleep in their mother's closet, her head resting on a cashmere jumper. Natalie had claimed that she was simply sorting through Isabel's belongings, deciding what

to keep and what to give to charity. But none of the clothes ever left the closet.

The judge banged his gavel. Ian felt Natalie flinch. The jurors filed in, taking their seats on the bench against the side wall. They all avoided eye contact with Isabel, but Ian could see her watching them, wrinkling her nose. He couldn't tell if she was sneering in anticipation of their decision or simply mocking their outfits.

"Has the jury reached a verdict?" the judge asked.

A woman in a blue pantsuit rose. "Yes, Your Honor."

"Proceed."

The juror cleared her throat. "In the matter of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts versus Isabel Kabra, we find the defendant guilty of murder in the first degree."

Although he tried to look away, Ian couldn't keep his eyes off his mother's face. It didn't move; her bored, snooty expression remained the same. He saw her lawyer lean over and whisper in her ear. She smiled slightly.

"Bailiff, remove the prisoner."

Ian watched as a guard handcuffed Isabel and began walking her down the aisle, toward the front door. For the first time in his life, Ian saw people look at his mother with something other than awe or fear. Everyone in the courtroom was staring at her in disgust.

As she passed Ian and Natalie, her eyes locked on to Ian's for a moment, and then she looked away.

A crowd of reporters had gathered outside of the courthouse. When Isabel came out, there was a flurry of camera flashes and eager shouts as the guards tried to push through the press toward the armored prison van.

"Isabel, do you feel guilty?"

“Why’d you do it?”

“Where’s your husband?”

“What’s going to happen to the yacht?”

“Do you have any regrets about your children?”

Isabel frowned and faced the reporter who’d asked the last question. “I regret failing my children. I allowed them to grow up as weak-minded fools without the strength to make hard decisions.” She paused and looked at Ian. “They’ll never amount to anything,” she said before turning back to the press. Although her hands were cuffed, she managed to toss her long hair over her shoulder with a graceful flip of her head. “They’ll never be in the papers.”

*Let her have her last moment in the spotlight,* Ian thought as he led Natalie down the courthouse steps. After a life devoted to charming guests at cocktail parties and terrorizing the world’s top spies at Lucian meetings, she was going to spend the rest of her days in federal prison. Soon, her name would fade from everyone’s memory. It would disappear from newspapers, from lists of benefactors, from social registers. The woman who had been so desperate to take over the world would be erased. There was no more Isabel Kabra. Only prisoner number 44850. ♣

