

Chapter 2

"The key to confidence is making plans. The key to success is being willing to change your plans."

Fanny couldn't believe she was about to do this. She had never rebelled against Blake, not really. She knew there would be consequences, but somehow, she didn't care. She needed to hear the other side of the story.

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Blake watched the camera system as Fanny pulled out an old iPhone and typed something into it. He couldn't see the message itself, but he could guess at the contents. Subconsciously, he clenched his hands into fists at his sides. He had expected that Fanny would try to rebel at some point, but he hoped to get at least a few more weeks of loyalty.

Blake paced around his room, wondering what the best course of action was. Though he rarely acknowledged it, Fanny's help was necessary if he wanted any chance of winning this vote. At least with her help he had half a chance at success. At the same time, he couldn't just let this go. If word got out that one of his closest disciples betrayed him and wasn't punished, there was no way that anyone in his party would vote for him. He decided it was time to outsource this situation.

Blake: I need to call in that favor. Fanny needs to learn a lesson.

Anonymous: I've got it. Give me twenty minutes.

Blake: Great.

As Rory looked at herself in the mirror, she recognized the two different people that were constantly warring for control of her mind. There was the young Rory, the one that was carefree and optimistic, and then there was the person she was now. Time had weathered her reserves of optimism and, over time, her general outlook had become more bleak.

Rory took a deep breath to center herself. She had to focus now. For nearly a decade, she had been operating without any real weight on her back. She had no obligations beyond the basic expectations of day-to-day life. She had spent her time with her nose in books, trying to gather as much information as she could. Now, though, she had to put that information into practice.

The idea reminded her of when she was planning her marriage proposal. She shocked even herself when she realized that had been almost 20 years ago now. When she began planning the date when she would propose, she had been dating Luke for a few years. They had a fairly fast-paced relationship. She had fallen for him almost immediately, and she had been confident he felt the same way. Still, she spent weeks perfecting every detail of her plan from the color she would paint her toenails to the dress she would wear. She probably spent hours practicing the motion of sliding out of her chair and onto one knee.

Then the night had come and she had felt like everything went wrong. The restaurant had run out of an ingredient for the meal she planned to order. The heel on her shoe had broken when she tripped over the step up to the host's desk. By the end of the night, she was

considering calling the plan off altogether. Still, she decided she had done too much planning to give up. That night had turned into one of her best memories with Luke.

Maybe her current predicament was not so similar. If something went wrong now, there would be no salvaging it. Blake would win the vote and that would be the end of it. Rory didn't know where that would put her, but she doubted that she would be able to recover. If Blake won, Rory's world would change. And it wouldn't be a change for the better.