

ONE



1855 SAN FRANCISCO

Camille clicked the latches down on her trunk and glanced out her bedroom window. White haze choked the small seaport, and the fog bells sounding across the bay echoed in her chest. Fitting weather to mark the death of her freedom.

She ran her palms over the trunk's glossy redwood lid and took the handle. Camille had been sailing with her father since she'd learned how to put one foot in front of the other, and knew the value of packing lightly. With an easy tug, she pulled the trunk down the hall to the lip of the stairwell—the last trunk she would ever pack for a sea voyage with him.

The tallcase clock in the foyer snapped to the five o'clock hour, sending a persistent chime throughout the townhouse. Camille quickened her pace, careful not to nick the newel post as she maneuvered the trunk around it. Dropping the trunk near the front door, she turned and ran toward the recesses of the house, into the kitchen. The blackened hearthstones were cold and dormant, the tidy countertops waiting for the morning to begin with

breakfast and tea. She liked being awake before anyone else. The notion that she was about to do something improper was an undeniable thrill.

Her heart gave a small flutter as a shadow rippled against the kitchen door's stained-glass window. Camille reached for the velvet cloak hanging on a peg and the woven basket stored on a shelf. He hadn't missed a Saturday morning in over a month. And now, even on the morning of her voyage, he'd come for her company. She opened the door, and Randall Jackson swept off his bowler. He raked his fingers through a tumble of glossy brown hair.

"You didn't forget," he said, his eyes drifting up to the second-level windows.

Camille stepped outside and closed the door, checking to be sure the crimson damask curtains were drawn across the windows of her father's room.

"Who would guide you through the markets if I did?" she asked. Camille put on her cloak for shelter against the predawn chill and brought the hood up over her black curls, drawn back in a loose chignon.

Randall extended his arm. Camille finished pulling on her ivory kid gloves and laid her hand in the crook of his elbow.

"If you recall, I was the one to suggest our secret market meetings," he said as they hurried through the back courtyard past the carriage house, and then swerved to hasten up the alleyway toward Portsmouth Plaza.

They emerged in the clotted white haze the port city knew well, so dense Camille could hear only the rattle of

carts and kiosks setting up throughout the flat, grassy plaza her father's townhouse looked out upon.

"I enjoy a secret or two," she said though knew she really should have been taking a chaperone with her. The risk was slim enough. No one from the society her father or Randall cared about would be out at this hour, and certainly not in the markets. "Who knew buying fruits and vegetables could be so adventurous?"

Randall laughed freely as the vendors came into view. "I believe I'm having a negative effect on you, Camille. I should be careful not to fall out of favor with your father. I wouldn't want William to revoke his approval."

Randall stopped at a crate mounded with shiny, red-skinned grapes. He picked up a heavy vine and placed it in her basket.

"A treat for my future bride." A grin arched his eyes into half-moons. "I've noticed they're your favorite."

As he passed a few coins to the grape vendor, the perfection of his face awed her—his milky skin, wide smile, chiseled chin and nose. Randall truly was something grand to stare at. *Her future husband.*

The courtship had unfolded at an exhilarating speed the last two months, her father anxious to overcome gossip revolving around Camille's dismissal of a proper coming-out season. She couldn't have imagined staying in San Francisco for ridiculous balls and parties and lessons when she could have been on an eight-month trip with her father to India instead. It had been a simple choice for her. Upon their return, her father had learned one of

the city's elite had died, leaving his son, Randall, a sizable fortune to invest where he pleased. To her father's pleasure, the young man had found an interest in shipping — and in Camille.

Randall released Camille's arm to help an older woman unhook a length of salt pork from a stall frame.

"I don't know your favorite," she said once he'd returned to her side.

Except for these brief outings, it seemed all their time had been spent in the presence of her father. Considering he and Randall were business partners, the conversation mostly revolved around shipping, trade industries, fleet growth, and money. Camille had started to wonder if their engagement was just another business matter to tend to. But then Randall had asked her to meet him on the kitchen's back steps before dawn one Saturday.

It took a few times to get used to rising so early, but soon she found the challenge of filling their baskets with the freshest pickings and getting back to the townhouse before her father rose from bed exciting. It became something she and Randall could whisper about throughout the week that didn't have anything at all to do with shipping.

Randall paused at a cart piled with cantaloupe, picked one up, and brought the rough rind to his nose.

"By far, my favorite. Especially when you can trace the musk of the inside right here." He tapped the apex of the melon, producing a hollow sound, and held it up to Camille's nose. She sniffed, feeling silly, but happy she'd learned something new about him.

"You know, Camille, as much as I adore your father, it is nice being able to steal some time alone together. I dare say once we're married, meeting secretly won't hold the same appeal." He paid for the cantaloupe and moved on toward a vendor of tomatoes and purple cabbage. Camille faltered as she followed. Meeting furtively was half the fun. Maybe even more than half.

"I'm glad I could be here today," he continued. "It's exciting to see you off on your last voyage."

Camille stopped walking, the fog swimming low around her heels. *Last voyage*. The words were a brigade of spiders creeping up her legs.

"Yes, I suppose it is very exciting." She hoped she'd sounded more enthusiastic than she felt. It was the right response to give, even if she didn't believe a single syllable.

As soon as Randall had started paying her calls, her father had swelled at the edges with relief. He'd smiled more, held his head up higher, and even started having full conversations with her again. For a long while it had seemed as if he'd lost interest in speaking with her. Only after Camille had officially taken the arm of one of San Francisco's richest and finest did she consider that perhaps her father had been embarrassed by her. The adorable little girl he'd raised aboard ships had grown into a young woman sorely lacking in the ability to attract acceptable suitors. Why Randall Jackson, the one suitor every girl in San Francisco swooned over, decided to call on Camille had perplexed her — and probably everyone else, too.