



THE *Fine*
PRINT

DREAMLAND BILLIONAIRES

LAUREN ASHER

THE FINE PRINT

DREAMLAND BILLIONAIRES BOOK 1

LAUREN ASHER

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The Fine Print

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Proofreading by Sarah at All Encompassing Books and Gem's Precise Proofreads

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*To the girls who dream of meeting a prince
but end up falling for the misunderstood villain.*

PLAYLIST

Ain't No Rest for the Wicked – Cage the Elephant
Oh, What a World – Kacey Musgraves
My Own Monster – X Ambassadors
Cloudy Day – Tones And I
Flaws – Bastille
Rare Bird – Caitlyn Smith
Lasso – Phoenix
Bubbly – Colbie Caillat
Believe – Mumford & Sons
Take a Chance On Me – ABBA
From Eden – Hozier
Could Be Good – Kat Cunning
R U Mine? – Arctic Monkeys
34+35 – Ariana Grande
Ho Hey – The Lumineers
Can't Help Falling in Love – Haley Reinhart
Wildfire – Cautious Clay
White Horse (Taylor's Version) – Taylor Swift
Need the Sun to Break – James Bay
Landslide (Remastered) – Fleetwood Mac
Missing Piece – Vance Joy
Dreams – The Cranberries

ROWAN



The last time I attended a funeral, I ended up with a broken arm. The story made headlines after I threw myself into my mother's open grave. It's been over two decades since that day, and while I've completely changed as a person, my aversion to mourning hasn't. But due to my responsibilities as my late grandfather's youngest relative, I'm expected to stand tall and unbothered during his wake. It's nearly impossible, with my skin itching like I'm wearing a cheap polyester suit.

My patience wanes as the hours go on, with hundreds of Kane employees and business partners offering their condolences. If there's anything I hate more than funerals, it's talking to people. There are only a few individuals I tolerate, and my grandfather was one of them.

And now he's gone.

The burning sensation in my chest intensifies. I don't know why it bothers me as much as it does. I've had time to prepare while he was in a coma yet the strange sensation above my rib cage returns with a vengeance whenever I think of him.

I run a hand through my dark hair to give myself something to do.

"I'm sorry for your loss, son." A nameless attendee interrupts my thoughts.

"Son?" The one word leaves my mouth with enough venom to make the man wince.

The gentleman centers his tie across his chest with fumbling hands. "I'm

—well—uh.”

“Excuse my brother. He’s struggling with his grief.” Cal places a hand on my shoulder and gives it a squeeze. His vodka and mint-coated breath hits my face, making me scowl. My middle brother might look dressed to the nines in a pressed suit and perfectly styled blond hair, but his red-rimmed eyes tell a completely different story.

The man mumbles a few words I don’t bother listening to before heading for the nearest exit.

“Struggling with my grief?” Although I don’t like the idea of my grandfather’s passing, I’m not *struggling* with anything but uncomfortable heartburn today.

“Relax. That’s the kind of thing people say at funerals.” Two blond brows pull together as Cal stares me down.

“I don’t need an excuse for my behavior.”

“No, but you need a reason for scaring off our biggest Shanghai hotel investor.”

“Fuck.” There’s a reason I prefer solitude. Small talk requires far too much effort and diplomacy for my taste.

“Can you *try* to be nicer for one more hour? At least until all the important people leave?”

“This *is* me trying.” My left eye twitches as I press my lips together.

“Well, do better. For him.” Cal tilts his head toward the picture above the fireplace.

I let out a shaky breath. The photograph was taken during a family trip to Dreamland when my brothers and I were kids. Grandpa smiles into the lens despite my tiny arms wrapped around his neck in a chokehold. Declan stands by Grandpa’s side, caught in the middle of an eye roll while Cal raises two fingers behind his head. My father shows a rare sober smile as he wraps an arm around Grandpa’s shoulder. If I try hard enough, I can imagine Mom’s laugh as she snapped the photo. While the memory of her face is fuzzy, I can make out her smile if I think hard enough.

A weird scratchiness in my throat makes it difficult to swallow.

Residual allergies from spring in the city. That’s all.

I clear my irritated throat. “He would have hated this kind of show.” Although Grandpa was in the entertainment business, he disliked being the center of attention. The idea of all these people driving out to the edge of Chicago for him would have made his eyes roll if he was still here.

Cal shrugs. “He of all people knew what was expected of him.”

“A networking event disguised as a funeral?”

The side of Cal’s lips lifts into a small smile before falling back into a flat line. “You’re right. Grandpa would be horrified because he always said Sunday was a day of rest.”

“There’s no rest for the wicked.”

“And even less for the wealthy.” Declan stops by my other side. He stares at the crowd of people with an unrelenting scowl. My oldest brother has intimidating people down to a science, with everyone avoiding his pitch-black stare. His suit matches his dark hair, which only adds to his cloak and dagger look.

I’m somewhat jealous of Declan since people typically talk to me first, mistaking me as the nicest child because I happen to be the youngest. I might have been born last, but I most certainly wasn’t born yesterday. The only reason guests take the time to speak to us is because they want to stay within our good graces. That kind of fake treatment is to be expected. Especially when all the people we associate with have a moral compass pointed permanently toward hell.

An unknown couple walks up to the three of us. A woman pulls out a tissue from her purse to dab her dry eyes while her counterpart offers us his hand to shake. I look down at it like he might transfer a disease.

His cheeks flush as he tucks his hand back into his pocket. “I wanted to offer my condolences. I’m very sorry for your loss. Your grandfather—”

I tune him out with a nod. This is going to be one hell of a long night.

This one’s for you, Grandpa.

I stare down at the white envelope. My name is written across the front in my grandpa’s elegant cursive. I flip it over, finding it untampered with his signature Dreamland’s Princess Cara’s Castle wax seal.

The lawyer finishes passing out the other letters to my two brothers. “You’re required to read his individual letters prior to me reviewing Mr. Kane’s final will and testament.”

My throat tightens as I break the seal and pull out my letter. It’s dated exactly a week before Grandpa’s accident three years ago that led to

his coma.

To my sweet little Rowan,

I choke back on a laugh. *Sweet* and *little* are the last words I'd use to describe myself since I'm as tall as an NBA player with the emotional range of a rock, but Grandpa was blissfully ignorant. It was the best thing about him and the absolute worst depending on the situation.

Although you're a man now, you'll always be the same little lad in my eyes. I still remember the day your mother gave birth to you like it was yesterday. You were the largest of the three, with these fat cheeks and a head full of dark hair that I was sadly jealous of. You sure had a pair of lungs in you and you wouldn't stop crying until they handed you over to your mom. It was like everything was right in the world when you were in her arms.

I reread the paragraph twice. It's strange to hear my grandpa talk about my mother so casually. The subject became taboo in my family until I could barely remember her face or her voice anymore.

I know I've been busy with work and that I didn't spend as much time as I should've with you all. It was easy to blame the company for the physical and emotional distance in my relationships. When your mother died, I wasn't sure what to do or how to help. With your father pushing me away, I devoted myself to my job until I became numb to everything else. It worked when my wife died and it worked when your mother met a similar passing, but I realize that it set your father up for failure. And in doing that, I failed you all as well. Instead of teaching Seth how to live a life after great loss, I showed him how to hold on to despair, and it only hurt you and your brothers in the end. Your father parented in the only way he knew how, and I'm the one to blame.

Of course Grandpa excuses my father's actions. Grandpa was too busy to pay close enough attention to the real monster his son turned out to be.

As I write this, I'm living in Dreamland, trying to reconnect with myself. Something has been bothering me over the last couple of years and it didn't click until I came here to reevaluate my life. I met someone who opened my eyes to my mistakes. As the company grew, I lost touch with why I started this all. I realized that I've been surrounded by so many happy people, yet I have never felt so alone in my life. And although my name is synonymous with the word "happiness," I feel anything but.

An uncomfortable feeling claws at my chest, begging to be released. There was a dark time in my life when I could relate to his comment. But I shut that part of my brain off once I realized no one could save me but myself.

I shake my head and refocus my attention.

Growing old is a peculiar thing because it puts everything into perspective. This updated will is my way of making amends after my death and fixing my wrongs before it's too late. I don't want this life for you three. Hell, I don't want it for your father either. So Grandpa is here to save the day, in true Dreamland prince fashion (or villain, but that's going to depend on your perspective, not mine).

You each have been given a task to complete to receive your percentage of the company after my death. Do you expect anything less from the man who writes fairy tales for a living? I can't just GIVE you the company. So to you, Rowan, the dreamer who stopped dreaming, I ask you one thing...

Become the Director of Dreamland and bring the magic back.

To receive your 18% of the company, you'll be expected to become the Director and spearhead a unique project for me for six months. I want you to identify Dreamland's weaknesses and develop a renovation plan worthy of my legacy. I know you're the right man for this job because there's no one I trust who loves creating more than you, even though you lost touch with that side of yourself over the years.

I *loved* creating. Emphasis on the past tense because there's no way I would draw again, let alone willingly work at Dreamland.

An independent party will be contacted and asked to vote on your changes. If they are not approved, then your percentage of the company will be given to your father permanently. No second tries. No buying him out. That's the way the cookie crumbles, little lad. I had to work to make the Kane name what it is today, and it's up to your brothers and you to make sure it lives on forever.

*Love you always,
Grandpa*

I stare at the ink until the words blur together. It's difficult to concentrate on the lawyer when he discusses the splitting of assets. None of that matters now. These letters put every plan on standby.

Declan shows the lawyer out before returning to the living room.

“This is utter bullshit.” I swipe the whiskey bottle from the coffee table and fill my glass to the top.

“What do you have to do?” Declan takes a seat.

I explain my impending task.

“He can’t demand this of us.” Cal rises from his chair and starts pacing.

Declan runs a hand across his stubble. “You heard the lawyer. We either go along with it, or my ability to become CEO is null and void.”

Cal’s eyes grow wilder with every ragged breath. “Fuck! I can’t do it.”

“What could possibly be worse than losing your percentage of the company?” Declan smooths out his suit jacket.

“Losing my dignity?”

I give him a once-over. “That still exists?”

Cal flips me off.

Declan leans back in his chair as he takes a sip from his tumbler. “If there’s anyone who has a right to be pissed, it’s me. I’m the one who needs to marry someone and impregnate them to become CEO.”

“You know babies are created by having sex, right? Is that something your internal software is capable of learning?” Cal’s pushing for a fight he can never win. Declan prides himself on his reputation as America’s most untouchable bachelor for a reason other than sleeping around.

Declan plucks Cal’s letter from the floor and gives it a bored glance. “Alana? Interesting. Wonder why Grandpa thought it would be a good idea for you both to reunite again.”

Alana? I haven’t heard that name in years. What does Grandpa want Cal to do with her?

I reach out to grab the letter from Declan but Cal rips it out of his hand before I have the chance.

“Fuck off. And don’t speak about her again,” Cal seethes.

“If you want to play with fire, then prepare to be cremated.” Declan tips his glass at Cal. His gaze flickers between the two of us. “Regardless of our personal thoughts on the matter, we don’t have a choice but to proceed with Grandpa’s terms. There’s too much at stake.”

I will never allow our father to obtain our shares of the company. I’ve waited my entire life for the ability to control The Kane Company with my brothers and I don’t plan on losing against my father. Not when we’re fueled by something far stronger than the need for money. Because if there’s one lesson we learned from Seth Kane, it’s that love may come and go, but hate

lasts forever.

ROWAN



My new assistant, Martha, is a Dreamland veteran who has worked for all the Directors of the theme park, including my grandfather. She's handled my transition with ease. The way she knows everything about everyone has been a bonus, making me breathe easier considering my move to Florida.

Because of Martha's key intel, I know how to find most of the Dreamland employees all in one place to formally introduce myself. I'm able to secure my choice of a seat because I made sure to be the first one to arrive for the morning meeting. I pick the perfect spot in the back of the auditorium where the fluorescent lights don't reach, cloaking me in much-desired darkness. Sitting away from curious eyes will allow me to observe how the crew interacts and how the managers resolve problems.

Ten minutes before the meeting, everyone files inside the space and fills the countless rows of seats. Whatever energy I give off has the employees avoiding the back row for the more preferred seats in the front and middle. There's only one person who braves the seat in front of me. The older gentleman stares at me like I'm inconveniencing him by sitting in his territory, but I ignore him.

Spotlights at the front of the room focus on Joyce, the daytime crew manager and Dreamland house mom. She has a helmet of white hair and blue eyes that scan the entire room like a drill sergeant. I'm not sure how she knows my location, but her eyes land on mine and she nods with pressed

lips.

Joyce taps her clipboard. “All right, everyone. Let’s get started. We have a lot to cover and little time before the first guests arrive.” She sets the meeting agenda and moves through countless questions with confidence. She barely breathes as she discusses the July schedule of parades, festivals, and celebrities visiting the land.

The door behind me creaks open. I turn in my chair and look over my shoulder. A younger brunette woman slides through the small crack before shutting it softly behind her.

I look down at my watch. *Who is she and why is she twenty minutes late?*

She clutches onto a neon pink Penny skateboard with one golden brown arm as she scans the packed room. I take advantage of her distraction to assess her. She’s beautiful in a way that makes it difficult to refocus my attention on the conversation at the front of the room.

I hate it yet I can’t look away. My eyes trace the curves of her body, drawing a path from her delicate throat to her thick thighs. The speed of my heart picks up.

I clench my hands into two fists, disliking the lack of control I have over my body.

Get a hold of yourself.

I take a few deep breaths to slow my heart rate.

A lock of dark hair falls in front of her eyes. She tucks it behind an ear decked out in gold piercings. As if she senses my gaze, her eyes land on me—or more so the empty seat next to me.

The woman walks out of the lit entrance and toward the aisle shrouded in darkness. She checks out the seating arrangement as if she wants to figure out how to slide into the chair beside me with as little contact as possible.

“Hi. Excuse me.” Her voice is soft with a hint of an accent. She takes a deep breath as she moves inch by inch into my personal space.

I don’t say a damn thing as I clutch onto the armrests. I’m given an up-close and personal view of her backside, barely constrained by her unregulated attire of jeans and a T-shirt.

There’s a reason uniforms are mandatory while on company property and I’m staring straight at it. The back of my neck heats, and the armrests creak under the pressure of my hands. Her perfume hits my nose. My eyes drift shut at the intoxicating smell—a mix of flowers, citrus, and something I can’t quite place.

She fumbles around my long legs with the gracefulness of a newborn giraffe.

Wanting to end this, I give her some space by sitting up. My sudden movement has her tripping over my feet. One of her hands smacks against my lap for balance, missing my cock by only a few inches. Electricity shoots up my leg right to my crotch.

Shit. Since when has someone's touch given me that kind of a reaction?

Her wide eyes look into mine, showing off thick lashes and brown, almond-shaped eyes. She blinks a couple times, proving she possesses some form of cognitive functioning. "I'm so sorry." Her lips gape apart as she stares down at her hand on my lap. She gasps and rips her hand away from my thigh, taking her warmth and the weird feeling with her.

Some older crew member looks over his shoulder. "Do you mind taking a seat already? I can barely hear Joyce over your usual racket."

Usual racket? Good to know that this is a pattern.

"Right. Yes," she sputters.

I consider her ability to slide into the chair beside me without another accident as a miracle. She drops her loud jangling backpack on the floor, causing yet another distraction. Metal rattles and pings as she bends over and unzips the bag.

I shut my eyes and breathe through my nose to calm the dull ache pulsing at my temples. Except I take in more of her perfume with each deep breath, making it impossible to forget her.

Her arm brushes up against my leg during her search. A similar spark shoots down my spine at the contact, like a rush of heat begging to go *somewhere*.

Anywhere but *there* for fuck's sake.

"Do you mind?" I grind out.

"Sorry!" She winces as she finally grabs her notebook and snaps back into a sitting position. Her Penny board slides off her lap and smashes into my two-thousand-dollar shoes.

There's a reason those damn things were banned from the park decades ago. I kick the contraband item away from me and right into the ankles of the same man who reprimanded her earlier.

"Come on, Zahra." The man turns his head and shoots her a withering look.

Zahra. Her name fits the wildness I've only had a tiny taste of.

“Sorry, Ralph,” she mutters.

“Stop being sorry and start being early for once.”

I fight the urge to smile. There’s nothing I enjoy more than people being called out on their bullshit.

She leans over and places a delicate hand on the man’s shoulder. “Can I make it up to you with fresh bread that Claire and I made last night?”

Bread? Is she seriously offering this man food after he got annoyed with her?

Ralph shrugs. “Throw in some cookies and I won’t complain to Joyce about you being late again.”

I blink at the graying grump in front of me.

“I knew you had a soft spot for me. People say you’re mean but I don’t believe a word of it.” She shoves his shoulder in a familiar way.

I see what she’s doing here. Somehow, she wrapped old Ralph around her finger with nothing but a smile and a promise of baked goods.

This woman is dangerous—like a landmine someone doesn’t see until it’s too late. Zahra grabs a package from her backpack and drops it into Ralph’s waiting hands.

Ralph cracks a smile, revealing a chipped front tooth. “Don’t let anyone in on our secret. I couldn’t handle the fall out.”

“Of course. I wouldn’t dare.” She lets out a soft laugh that reverberates through my chest like someone smashed a damn gong with a sledgehammer in there. Warmth spreads through my body, scaring the shit out of me.

Her white teeth stand out in the dark as she shoots Ralph a beaming smile. There’s something about the look on her face that has my heart racing faster in my chest. *Beautiful. Carefree. Innocent.*

Like she’s actually happy with her life rather than faking it like the rest of us.

My teeth smash together as I let out an agitated breath. “Are you done? Some of us are trying to pay attention.”

The whites of Ralph’s eyes grow larger before he turns around in his chair, leaving Zahra all by herself.

“I’m sorry,” she whispers under her breath.

I ignore her apology and refocus my attention on Joyce.

“Some big changes are happening at Corporate that we will be reviewing over the next week. They’re going to be keeping a close eye on us this quarter.”