

KELLEN

HER UNEXPECTED SAVIOR
BOOK ONE



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Kellen
by Jessie Jones

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PROLOGUE



THE DISTINGUISHED LOOKING, ELDERLY MAN IN THE DARK NAVY suit entered the luxurious, dimly lit bedroom and slowly closed the door. When he turned, he made the sign of the cross as his blue eyes fell on the frail, emaciated man who lay almost lifeless in the center of the room on the king-sized bed. He breathed slowly and deeply to keep the tears from spilling down his solemn, regal face as he stepped up to the bed and took a seat in the chair next to it. His best friend of almost eighty years, Pyotr Dragovic, was dying of cancer and he had to pay his last respects. Reaching out his own slender fingers, he caressed the yellow-tinged hand of his friend. Before he could bow his head to pray, he heard his friend make a weak, guttural sound.

"Ja—" Pyotr gasped, trying to find air to speak as his tired eyes opened to find the man sitting beside his bed. A delicate smile spread across his thin lips before he said, "Jakov Andric—cough—you bastard. I was wondering when you would—cough—get here."

"I come to see you on your death bed, and you insult me?" Jakov faintly chuckled, adding to his friend's playful

banter. When tears began to fall down Pyotr's sunken cheeks, Jakov squeezed the man's hand lovingly in his and said sincerely, "We'll have none of that, dear friend. You know there is no place else I would rather be. I've been in to see you quite a few times, but you've been sleeping soundly."

"Not surprised." Pyotr sighed weakly. "My daughters are keeping me heavily sedated because of the pain. I told them yesterday that I wanted to be alert when you came today. There is something that we must discuss, Jakov. I have been—cough—putting off this conversation long enough. Since I will probably be dead by tomorrow evening, that time is now."

"Shit, stop talking like that," Jakov scoffed, knowing his friend was probably telling the truth, but the words were too painful to hear. "A man as horrible as you will be around forever. The evil ones always hang on."

"Unfortunately, not this time." Pyotr breathed deeply, his mouth trembling with emotion as he clutched Jakov's hand to his chest, pulling the man forward. Looking directly into his eyes, he said in a stern voice, "I know my girls are both adults, but I need you to see to it that my position as Capo Dei Capi of the Croatian Cartel goes to them. I know the underworld does not want a woman sitting at the head of the table, but I don't give a fuck. Can you do that for me?"

"Da, but do your girls want it?" the younger man asked sincerely, thinking about the two women in question. "The last time I spoke to Jocelyn and Adalynn, I was not convinced they did by the end of our conversation. You know I will give my life for them, but maybe the family moves from criminal to something more legit. You need to consider their feelings in this."

"I love those two more than I have ever loved anything in this world, even more than their mother, but I don't care

about their feelings this time. They will lead the cartel into the future, in whatever way they see fit."

Jakov closed his eyes a moment as he thought about the younger women. He again felt the tears filling his eyes. God had not seen it necessary to bless him with his own children, so he and his wife had lived vicariously through Pyotr. The fraternal twins were intelligent and compassionate, but also were not prepared for the life of crime their father had fostered and fed throughout their lives. Even now, their existence was unknown to the world, but they still had contracts on their heads because Pyotr's enemies knew the man was sick and dying.

"Jakov, I have known you for most of my life and I know when you are keeping something from me." The frail man wheezed, watching his second in command intently. "Are my girls in danger?"

"Da," Jakov countered, wiping at his own eyes. "I was just notified this morning about a plot to take out your children."

"Nonsense," Pyotr dismissed with a wave of his hand. He had intentionally gone to great lengths to cover up the fact that he even had daughters. Hell, he had even gone so far to have their true identities buried and replaced with false male birth certificates. Because of this, the world assumed he had two sons. The only ones who even knew his girls existed were Jakov and his most trusted lieutenant, Kole Popescu. Why, the man was the son he never had.

"Well, someone knows, and the hit has been ordered." Jakov tensed, sitting up straighter in his chair. "As much as it pains me to say this, friend, the young bucks in our organization know you're dying. They have respected your position of leadership because you are seen as a man of honor. However, that respect ends with you. I spoke with Francesco Barone just the other day and he sees himself as the next leader of the cartel. He refuses to give the organization over

to someone he has never met, let alone two women. You and I both know that he is loyal to you, but that loyalty ends with your death."

"Fuck Francesco!" Pyotr bit out, thinking about the lethal, ambitious younger man. "That little bastard may have his dead father's money and empire, but he will never have his ability to lead. You are my second in command, Jakov. Why don't you just have him killed?"

"And how do you propose I do that, Pyotr? Walk up to your godson and just pull the trigger? The commission would never agree to that, and you know it! Just like us, they're old and ready to retire from the game. No one from our generation wants to cross Francesco for fear of their own children's lives. Too many of our loved ones are in the crosshairs of the brewing territorial war and no one wants to see their families slaughtered unnecessarily."

"I can't believe—cough—the words coming out of your mouth!" The dying man gasped breathlessly, using all his strength to sit up in the bed. "I consider you family and make you my second and now you sit here and cowardly spit in my face. Get out!"

"How dare you say that to me!" Jakov raged, jumping to his feet to glare down at his leader. "I have been nothing but loyal to you and you know it! I don't give a damn about my life! Since my Klara passed away, you and the girls are all I have left! When you leave this Earth, I will be all those two women have! If I fuck over Francesco now, where does that leave Jocelyn and Adalynn? I'll tell you where—dead! Why don't we really talk about what is bothering you, Pyotr? We both know that in your bid to keep them safe and protected from the dangerous life you've led, your actions have done the exact opposite and have made those delicate flowers vulnerable and exposed to those vultures. I have told you to educate those women with this knowledge

for years, but instead, you have taken the last six months to do nothing!"

Jakov immediately regretted his words as he heard the strangled cry escape Pyotr's mouth before his frail body began to convulse with emotion. Overcome with raw feelings himself, tears streaked down Jakov's face as he sat down on the side of the bed and wrapped his arms around his dear friend. The two men held each other for what seemed like a lifetime before Jakov pulled back slightly to kiss Pyotr's cheek and whisper, "I'm so sorry, brat. I never should have—"

"No, you're right," the sickly man replied weakly in a voice that was barely audible. "You don't need to apologize for speaking the truth. I have done my girls a disservice all these years. If God sees fit to let me into Heaven with my sweet Gisele, I'm sure she will give me hell for keeping our daughters in the dark. I should have taken your advice long ago, but I was too damn stubborn and prideful. I swear I was doing the right thing, though, and I've told my girls that. I just hope Jocelyn and Adalynn can forgive me in the long run for putting them in such a precarious situation."

"Your children love you unconditionally and that will never change. They will abide by your requests, even if they don't understand them fully. Those lovely ladies know that you have always had their safety and wellbeing at the forefront of everything. I told you when they were born that I would always protect them with my life. You know I will guide them as best I can; what will be will be."

"I know, and I will never be able to repay you for that," Pyotr returned, grabbing his friend's bearded face affectionately in his hands. "I just wish I had more time. With them, with you." Suddenly very tired as the deep-seated pain he was feeling became overwhelming, the man lay back on the bed and closed his eyes. After a moment of clenching his jaw as a wave of nausea swept through his stomach, he

murmured softly, "I think I need to try to sleep, old man. Can you pass me my pain medicine?" Taking the handheld pump from Jakov, he hit the button and sighed as the strong analgesics entered his body. "This is the last time that we will speak, Jakov. This time tomorrow, my soul will be leaving this Earth. I love you, brat, and promise to hug your beautiful wife when I see her. Thank you for being a father to my girls. They are going to need that more than you know."

The tears once again flowed down his wrinkled face as Pyotr drifted off to sleep. At that moment, he wanted to rip the man out of bed and beat his ass for leaving him with such a daunting task. However, he loved Jocelyn and Adalynn and would die to ensure that they came out of this debacle unharmed and successful. Although he didn't want his friend to die, he was glad that he wouldn't be around to see him betray the underworld they built together by reaching out to the international feds for help. The underboss of the Croatian cartel was about to become a traitor to all that he loved and that would surely mark him for death. However, if his death ensured that Jocelyn and Adalynn came out of the upcoming war unscathed, then it was worth it. Looking at his dear companion once more, Jakov made the sign of the cross and headed toward the door of the bedroom. He knew exactly whom he needed to call.

CHAPTER 1



THE TALL, SLENDER BLONDE RUBBED HER TIRED EYES AS SHE SAT Indian style in the center of the bed going over business reports. Glancing at the clock above the fireplace, she sighed loudly as her stomach rumbled hungrily. Putting down her laptop, Jocelyn Dragovic stretched out her frame and laid her head back on the pillow. Damn, she was emotionally drained! The last three days had been pure hell and she was still reeling from the death of her father. She had known his death was inevitable because the pancreatic cancer had consumed his entire body, but that didn't make things any easier. Feeling the wetness in her eyes, she tried pushing aside the raw emotion. She was tired of crying. Not only had her father died, but she was quickly learning things about him and his business that would alter the rest of her life. Now that he was dead, he had left them with a large empire to run and an even bigger mess to clean up.

Sitting up, she got out of bed and walked to the large set of windows that led to her balcony. With a loud sigh, her silver eyes gazed out over the rugged, Croatian countryside and landed on the turbulent Adriatic Sea. Oh, how the sea

mirrored her own feelings about life right now. Prior to her father's death, Jocelyn had been happy as the owner and proprietor of several nightclubs and restaurants all throughout central and southeast Europe. Even though she owned them under an alias, she enjoyed everything about being a successful corporate woman. Now, thanks to her father, she and her twin sister Adalynn were the crown jewels of the Central European underworld. Their dad, Pyotr Dragovic, was the Caporegime of the Mafia Romaneasca and had been the leader of an elite council of men with very questionable backgrounds. To them, he had been kind, loving, and compassionate, but to the rest of the world, he was a ruthless killer. Although there had been clues to his involvement with the shadowy underbelly, Jocelyn and her sister had been intentionally shielded from his dark, international ties. However, in the past few weeks, those blinders had been quickly removed because Pyotr's business had been dumped in their laps.

Resting her head against the cool glass, Jocelyn felt alone and isolated. She knew she wasn't, because of Adalynn, but the two were so busy that they rarely had time for each other. Truth be told, the only person she could trust was her sister and the two were as thick as thieves. Although they were fraternal twins, each knew what the other was thinking and feeling, even when miles away from each other. They had been segregated from the rest of humanity and made to rely solely on each other, especially after their mother had died from complications related to childbirth. After losing his wife, Pyotr had intentionally wiped away any evidence of the girls' existence. Jocelyn and Adalynn had grown up with the alias surname Slavici, and only two other people knew their real identities. That was all about to change, though, especially when they announced to the world that their father was dead, and they were his only heirs.

Thinking of the daunting task ahead, Jocelyn let out a loud sigh. Secretly, she was dreading that day. Yes, the underworld had known he was sick with cancer, but his death would spark a war unlike any other. Their father had met with the cartel until his body began showing obvious signs of his deteriorating health. Even minutes before he fell into unconsciousness, he had made Jocelyn and Adalynn promise that they would only release the details of his death to the world once they had adjusted to their new positions at the apex of the underworld. Jocelyn knew she didn't want the hassle, but her sister was adamant that they turn all that power into something positive. She had no idea how they were going to do that, but her sister was forever the altruistic optimist.

Hearing the soft rapping sound, Jocelyn was brought out of her thoughts and headed toward the entrance of her bedroom. Opening the heavy, wooden door, she was surprised to see their head of security standing there. "Kole? Is everything okay?"

"I just wanted to see how you were doing. I haven't heard much from you today," the muscular giant replied, leaning against the door frame.

"I'm okay. I just have a lot on my mind. I'm trying to plan out how we are going to handle things pertaining to father."

"Yeah, about that," he reached out to stroke her cheek, "we need to make that happen soon, *draga*. The longer we wait, the more suspicious the commission will become."

"I don't give a damn about them," she said hotly, looking into his chestnut eyes. "Addy and I will do this in our own time. Until then, *nothing* is done without our approval. Understand?"

"Da," he responded, pulling her petite frame into his arms as she immediately rested her head against his chest. "I'm not

trying to rush you, babe, but this isn't going to go away anytime soon."

"You don't think I know that?" Jocelyn barked in irritation, trying to pull away. "I am aware of what needs to be done. I don't need any additional pressure from you or the commission. I'll decide when and if we tell the world and that's all I'm going to say about it! Please respect my wishes on this."

The pulse in his strong, masculine jaw ticked as he clenched his teeth together in anger. With a half-growl, he said, "Fine, I got it."

"Thank you," she replied, rising up on her tiptoes to kiss him on the lips. However, as she went to pull away, Kole pressed her body intimately to his and deepened the kiss. Jocelyn felt his hands roaming her back and tried to get lost in the pleasurable sensations, but she was having a difficult time. Frequently, she used the guard for a sexual release because it was too hard for her to maintain relationships due to the complexity of her life. Kole Popescu was not only their father's lieutenant but kind of a friend with benefits. She knew he felt something more for her, but the feelings were not mutual. As his kiss trailed down her throat, Jocelyn sighed loudly and demanded, "Stop."

"Come on, *draga*," he whispered at her ear before pulling the sensitive skin with his teeth. "You need to relax. I can help you with that."

"No," Jocelyn said, shaking her head as she pushed hard against his chest. "I'm not in the mood right now. I need you to leave."

Sexually aroused and frustrated, the large guard released the blonde with a growl and ran an agitated hand through his brown hair, "Fuck, Josie! You're such a dick tease. I don't think I'm ever going to understand you."

"You don't need to understand her, Kole," Adalynn blurted

harshly, coming up behind them holding a bag of food as she took them both off guard. "Now get the hell out, like she said. I need to talk to my sister privately."

The giant's eyes cut the small, black-haired woman in half as he glared at her a moment before he blew her a kiss and left the room. Watching him close the door, Jocelyn asked, "Why do you hate him so much? He's never done anything to you."

"I've told you. I don't trust him, never have. Plus, I don't like the way he looks at you. He wants more than you are ever going to give."

"I know, which is why I set the boundaries of our relationship a long time ago. He knows we are friends and will never be anything more," Jocelyn replied, taking the paper bag from her sister and setting it down on a nearby side table. Pulling her sister into her arms for a loving embrace, she smiled. "How did you know I was hungry? I thought you were still at the lab."

"Um, hello. If you're hungry, I'm hungry. You know we're connected by that weird twin cord." Adalyn grinned, hugging her sister back. "As for work, I decided to come home. I wasn't feeling great."

Pulling back, she lovingly stroked her sister's face. "Your blood sugar low again?" Adalynn was a type 1 diabetic and had been since the age of three. She wore an insulin pump and took care of her body, but her health could be brittle at times. More than once, Jocelyn had found her sister unconscious on the floor in need of an emergency glucose injection. Not only was Adalynn diabetic, but she had monoplegic cerebral palsy that affected the mobility of her right arm from time to time. Her sister, though, never allowed anyone to see her in a weakened state and was fiercely independent, almost to her detriment. "Did it bottom out?"

"Almost, but I found a chocolate bar in a drawer. Now if you're done worrying about me, Mom, can we eat?"

With a wide smile on her face, Jocelyn laughed. "Smart ass. What did you bring us?"

"Your favorite, mici and sweetbread. I got it from the Villa on my way home." As the two crawled up on the bed and sat across from one another, Adalynn watched the blonde intently as she began pulling food from the bag. "You look tired, Jo. Everything all right?"

"Not really," Jocelyn countered with a sigh, popping a piece of the bread into her mouth. "This whole thing with *Tata* is such a mess. I love him and wish he were still here, but at the same time, I am so damn mad at him for leaving us vulnerable like this. Not only has he left us wide open, but we now have huge targets on our backs. We are trying to prepare in mere weeks for a transition we should have been prepping for our whole lives. To make matters worse, I have been going through his financial ledgers and some things just don't make sense."

"I know exactly how you are feeling, babe, because I'm pissed off about all of this too," Adalynn added, starting to eat her own food. "*Tata* had no right to do this to us, but what's done is done. Unfortunately, it's out of our hands. As for the finances, I was able to speak with Jakov today about money being moved and withdrawn from father's accounts since he died. He assured me that some of it was set into motion by *Tata*, but he still thinks we should have our accountant investigate it. I contacted him just a little while ago but haven't heard anything back yet. Did you get a chance to talk to the attorney?"

"Da, but he needs time to look over everything too."

"Okay, so what else is bothering you, Jo? We need to be as honest as we can with each other, especially now."

"I could never hide anything from you, could I?" Jocelyn

asked, looking into eyes that mirrored hers. The two women were always emotionally in sync but that could be burdensome when one of them was hurting.

"Nope," Adalynn offered with a small smile as she took her sister's hand in hers and squeezed it. "What's really going on in that head of yours?"

"I'm scared, Addy," Jocelyn sighed honestly, returning the small affectionate action with her own hand. "For the first time in my life, I have no idea what I'm doing. We've been thrust into a situation that we know nothing about, and the people we are being forced to deal with are some of the vilest individuals on the planet. They don't care about us; in fact, they want us dead! There is no way in hell that they are going to allow women to run the underworld. As soon as they find out that *Tata* is dead, they'll come for us."

"I know you're scared, babe, and I am too, but we'll figure this out, just like we always have. Besides, just let those bastards try to take us down. They underestimate us because we're women, but they won't for long."

"Come on, Ad. These men aren't afraid of us. We are like two ants trying to stop a car barreling down the road. I have a master's in business and you're a Doctor of Science, for crying out loud! What do we know about drugs, money laundering, and international affairs? Call me cynical, but I doubt we can take life-long criminals and make them suddenly altruistic."

"Then we will just have to show them that there's a different way of doing things," Adalynn responded as she reached out to stroke Jocelyn's cheek. "Think of all the people we can help with our new fortune and power. We can do this, babe, and despite what Kole and the commission want, we will make sure we take our time figuring out how. You trust me, don't you?"

"Of course, I do, but it's not you I'm worried about. It's

Francesco Barone and the other mafia families," Jocelyn replied, fighting back tears as she kissed the back of Adalynn's hand. "I'm sorry, but I don't share your enthusiasm this time. You are all I have left, babe. If something happened to you, I would never forgive myself."

"It's never going to happen, so there is no need for you to worry." The smaller, ebony haired woman softly smiled as she leaned forward to place a gentle kiss on Jocelyn's mouth. "With all the money father left us, we can keep ourselves well-hidden from those thugs. Hell, we can even move far, far away and build a castle if we want. I'm going to keep you safe, Jo. I promise."

Squeezing her sister's hand once again, Jocelyn wiped at her eyes and exhaled loudly. "Okay, enough with the emotional garbage. How is your research going? You any closer to finding your cure?"

As Jocelyn sat and listened to Adalynn excitedly talk about her research, she ate her food and found herself deep in her own thoughts. *If only I could be more like you*, she thought to herself as she watched her sister. Jocelyn knew she was a wonderful person with a whole lot to offer the world, but she would consider herself shy and the softer spoken of the two. For starters, she felt she was the least attractive of the twins. Yes, she was pretty, with her long, wheat-blond hair and tall, slender frame, but Adalynn was gorgeous. The woman was a couple inches shorter, but she had coal black hair, a sexy, curvy body, and a face that artists would have killed to paint. Her sister looked just like the pictures they had seen of their mother Gisele when she was younger. Adalynn wasn't only beautiful, but she was ridiculously intelligent, not afraid to speak her mind, and the bravest person Jocelyn knew. It had taken her five years to complete her master's degree in business, but her sister was an overachiever who finished her doctorate in six. Adalynn

had always been able to mesmerize a room full of people and get what she wanted. If anyone could make the men of the cartel see things her way, it was Addy. She was not only confident and charismatic, but she was also on the verge of a cure for drug and alcohol addiction, and she wanted to share it with the whole world free of charge.

"Earth to Jocelyn," Adalynn said, waving her hand in front of the blonde's face. "Are you even listening to me? Where are you tonight?"

"Sorry, I was listening, I swear," Jocelyn offered, wiping her mouth and taking a long drink of ice water.

"Uh huh," the smaller woman chided, cocking a dark brow. "What was the last thing I said?"

"You said Dr. Bogdan asked you out to dinner. Are you going to go?"

"Okay, I guess you were listening." Adalynn chuckled as Jocelyn stuck out her tongue. "And, no, I am not going. The guy is brilliant, but there is something that kind of creeps me out about him. Plus, the last thing I have time for is dating."

"Well, what you need to do is find someone like Kole who can accommodate your needs, on your time." Jocelyn laughed as her sister rolled her eyes. "When was the last time you got laid?"

"You know when."

"Oh my gosh!" The older twin gasped. "You haven't had sex since the night of your twenty-fifth birthday? That was three years ago! No wonder you are so crabby sometimes!"

"Shut up!" Adalynn exclaimed, chuckling. "There are more important things in life than sex, dear sister. Besides, I probably need to get used to being single for a while. Being the head of the mafia doesn't exactly scream woman of my dreams."

"Yeah, I kind of think finding a husband is off the table too. Well, unless we can find one who is interested in co-

oping an international cartel," Jocelyn countered with a giggle. Truth be told, neither woman was looking for a relationship. Thanks to their father, their lives had been a very lonely existence and they had grown accustomed to that. Hell, they didn't even have friends outside of school until they reached adulthood, let alone a boyfriend. In the twenty-eight years of Jocelyn's existence, she had only been intimate with three men, one of them being Kole. Although she desperately wanted a husband, kids, and the white picket fence, she didn't think that she would ever really have it.

"As stunning as you are, I'm sure you could find a man willing to help you fight the commission. You do have a way of bringing men to their knees."

"If only that were true."

"Our lives are not exactly normal, so who knows what fate has in store for you, babe." Adalynn winked, popping a piece of mici in her mouth. "Your soul mate could be waltzing into your life by the end of the week. Any requests?"

"Hmm. Maybe big, muscular, edgy. Got to be covered in tattoos. Oh, and someone who loves kissing. That's my favorite part of making out, after all."

"Well, then here's to making your dream come true," the dark-haired woman said, lifting her wine glass.

Raising her own glass, Jocelyn smiled before she downed its contents. She would love to meet Mr. Right, but knowing her luck, he would be all wrong. Besides, she had more on her plate right now than she could handle anyway. *Tell yourself that lie long enough, and you might believe it*, she scolded internally. Pushing aside her thoughts, she would worry about her lack of a love life another day. Right now, she and Adalyn had bigger fish to fry.