

*Web of secrets*

# Fresia Lotus

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*Web of lies*

*Web of choices*

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Fresia Lotus

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A contemporary romance trilogy with a  
dark twist for (young) adults.

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with the latest news!

# Trigger Warning

Please be advised: this book intentionally explores taboo themes. No prior list of topics is provided, as it invites readers to uncover the secrets on their own.

To all those like Ardan:  
you are not alone.

May this story give you a voice  
where words sometimes fall short.

# Playlist Ardan en Feline:

Obsession - Mellina Tey

Come home - One Republic

Empty Eyes - Munn

Loved us more - Munn

Tears of an angel - Ryan Dan

A new hope - Broken Iris

Shattered - Broken Iris

What Is Love - Frances

Animal I Have Become - Three Days Grace

Move - Adam Port, Stryv feat. Malachiii

It's you - Ali Gatie

The only exception - Sam Tsui

Say anything - Ashley Nite

Distance - Christina Perry ft Jason Mraz

I wanna be your slave - Måneskin

I Adore You - Hugel, Topic, Arash feat. Daecolm

Never be enough - Boyce Avenue

One Of The Girls - The Weeknd, Jennie, Lily-Rose Depp

Strip That Down - Liam Payne ft. Quavo

Get You Alone - Maejor ft. Jeremih



Favorite - Isabel LaRosa

Drunk in love - Beyonce

Only you - Ashanti

Going on - Henri PFR

Awake - Secondhand serenade

Die for you - The Weekend

It will rain - Sam Tsui



# Prologue

## Ardan

### **Ardan**

'If you're not going to chase after your girl and fight for her, then I will,' I say, my tone resolute.

Sam narrows his eyes at me, his jaw tightening. 'Don't you dare, Ardan. Stay away from her.' He exhales deeply, his shoulders sagging as if under a weight only he can feel. 'I just don't know if she even wants me to fight for her anymore, you know? She's too good for us. She deserves a life without me. I'm just dragging her down.' His gaze drops to the floor, lost in thought.

'At least you're aware of it,' I laugh, though there's no joy in the sound. 'No, seriously, man. Go to her and tell her'—I pause, choosing my words carefully—'that she's all you think about.'

'My car didn't pass inspection, remember? She's at the sauna with your sister. Sylvia's taking her home,' he mutters without meeting my eyes.

I pull the keyring from my pocket and slide the

Mercedes-Benz key off. 'Here, take my car and go pick her up.' I toss him the key.

He catches it, staring at me in disbelief. 'What about you?'

'I'll grab a taxi,' I say with a shrug.

'Why are you helping me?' he asks, his voice heavy with confusion.

'No idea,' I reply. But deep down, I know exactly why.

# Chapter 1

## Feline / Ardan

### **Feline**

I hold my black dress in my hands, my funeral attire. Maybe I should buy something new, but I can't summon the courage to leave the house. It'll have to be this dress, the same one I wore to Grandma's memorial service five years ago. I haven't grown since then, maybe just filled out a little, but the loose black fabric and tulle reveal nothing.

As I walk toward the bathroom, I decide to take a quick shower. The least I can do is make myself presentable for his farewell. I wouldn't miss the service for the world, but the thought of the car ride makes me shrink inside. Driving myself is out of the question, so I call Sylvia.

'Feline, are you okay?' she asks, her voice laced with concern.

'I'm fine. Can you pick me up for Sam's funeral?' My voice falters at those last words.

'Of course. I'll come by at one. Do you need anything

else?'

I instinctively glance at my wrist, only to realize I'm not wearing my watch. 'What time is it?' My sense of time has been completely skewed since that phone call on Saturday—the conversation that drained all the life from me.

'Uh, ten forty,' she says.

'Okay, sounds good. See you then,' I say quickly before hanging up.

I strip off my clothes and step into the shower, feeling sick and hollow.

The car ride is silent, and I'm both relieved and suffocated when we arrive. Oh God, so many people are standing outside the church, waiting. Dragging myself out of Sylvia's car, I feel the weight pulling me toward the ground, as if my shoes are made of lead. *I don't know if I can do this.*

Breathe in, breathe out.

The last thing I want is to mingle with the crowd. I'd much rather crawl behind a rock in a quiet corner and cry,

like I've been doing all week. But if I don't do this, I know I'll regret it. I just have to get through it.

My legs seem to move on their own as I approach the throng of unfamiliar faces. I don't know whether to stand still or keep walking, so I slow down. Sylvia catches up to me, drapes her arm over my shoulders, and gives my arm a comforting squeeze.

### **Ardan**

My little sister wraps her arm around Feline. Sylvia took my suggestion to support Sam's girl to heart. Feline always used to pick Sam up at our garage—until their fight on Monday. Every time she showed up at work, Sam would glance at me nervously, as if I might steal her away.

Sam and I never got along, but he was different when she was around. She was good for him; she made him softer, calmer. My imagination would sometimes run wild, but the last thing I needed was distractions and fights at work. When he told me she'd broken up with him, I felt a sneaky sense of relief. But I still urged him to try to make things right, just to be sure he'd be her past for good.

That same day, he wrecked my car and died.

And that changed everything. Now, I could forget about my fantasies entirely.

The girl with wavy brown hair trembles as she walks slowly through the crowd gathered on the church square. My sister lowers her arm to support her, but Feline turns to her, raising a hand as she speaks softly. I can't hear her, but I can see her face now.

Her brown eyes search blankly ahead, gliding over me as though I'm invisible. Her expression doesn't flicker, her posture doesn't change. Her mouth hangs slightly open, and her chest rises and falls quickly. Her small figure looks so fragile, as if she might collapse under the weight she's carrying.

Her gaze drifts across the people standing beside me before it drops to the ground. Her face shows unmistakable defeat and disappointment.

*I should go to her.*

But the last thing she needs right now is me. So I hold back.

She turns away and walks toward the church's large



wooden doors. Her black dress hugs her delicate curves and falls just below her knees, which barely seem to hold her upright. Her feet, in black open-toed heels, brace against the biting cold on this gray first of December.

A tap on my shoulder pulls me out of my thoughts. I turn to see my colleague Robbe standing behind me in a black suit.

People are used to seeing me like this; as a Mercedes-Benz salesman, I wear suits almost every day. Only the white calla lily pinned near my heart marks this as something other than another day at work.

Robbe, on the other hand, usually works in the back doing maintenance, like Sam used to. It feels strange seeing him like this. I notice the other pallbearers are holding white roses from the funeral director.

Robbe nods toward me, and I know what he means: it's time.

I fill my lungs with the crisp air as I watch Feline disappear through the church doors. The heavy wood closes behind her with a thud that reverberates in my chest.

*You were good for him, Feline.*

And now? Now, I have no idea where she goes from here—or where I do.

# Chapter 2

## Feline / Ardan

### **Feline**

My feet carry me into the church. I deliberately sit far away from anyone I know. If I'm going to fall apart, I'd rather do it alone. Silently, I take a seat on a pew among the back rows, near his extended family.

*How is it that I spent every day with Sam, yet recognize so few faces at his service?*

Where were they when he needed them? When I tried to convince him he wasn't alone? Where were they when he had nowhere to go for Christmas? Or when he told me he couldn't find a single friend to go paintballing with for his birthday?

But who am I to judge them? I wasn't there when he needed me most either. I chose myself over him.

I'm the one who put him in that coffin.

The priest begins the service, walking toward the entrance of the church. *What is he doing?*

And then I see it.

Sam's coffin.

The gleaming brown wood is the only thing my eyes can focus on. The priest sprinkles holy water with a brush, droplets glistening as they fall over Sam. I turn my head forward, away from the men hoisting the casket onto their shoulders.

But as soon as Sam is out of sight, the weight in my chest crushes me, and my heart starts to convince my head that watching is what I need. My reasoning doesn't stand a chance.

My neck twists, my head turns, and my eyes lock onto the sight I've been dreading, knowing I'll never forget it. *I don't want to forget it.*

*Look at what you've done.*

I swallow hard.

The men carrying him are all from his work. Six colleagues, men he spent so much time with at the garage. Sam was proud to work for the luxury car brand Mercedes-Benz. It must be so hard for them to do this.

I track their every movement, alert, as they step in sync with small, careful steps toward the altar. They lay him

down with the kind of reverence Sam always deserved but rarely got.

One of the pallbearers glances at me briefly before focusing on the empty chairs waiting for them at the front. It's Ardan—the guy Sam couldn't stand. A young man, Sam said, got every opportunity handed to him.

Ardan's dark hair is as perfectly, and impossibly, messy as always, spiraling above his head in a way that shouldn't work but does. I stare at the back of his head, wondering why I like his hair so much.

How many times did I have to reassure Sam that Ardan wasn't bothering me whenever I waited in the showroom for my boyfriend? Ardan never even came over to talk. He was always busy with sales pitches and test drives.

Sam had nothing to worry about.

Ardan clearly had no interest in me, and I only had eyes for Sam—my slightly jealous, impossibly sweet Sam.

He was always so afraid I'd meet someone else, always repeating that I didn't need him to get by. That I was strong.

*How could we have been so wrong? I can't do this without you. What was I thinking, believing we couldn't go*

*on together?*

My head searches for answers that aren't there, and tears roll down my cheeks as the music begins—the piece his mom chose for the funeral.

*Does he feel the same as I do now, or is he free of the pain? Can he see us? Can he see me? Oh, Sam, I miss you so much. I wish you were here.*

I spot his mother in the front row. Her shoulders are hunched forward, her fingers clutching a handkerchief tightly. She has no one left.

I swallow hard, trying to refocus on myself.

*Breathe in.*

Air shoots quickly into my lungs.

*Breathe out.*

But it doesn't come out. My body holds the air hostage, my chest tight and aching.

*Out, out! Let it out!*

With effort, I manage to push a small amount of air free, only to inhale sharply again. My lungs burn, and I feel lightheaded. My chest tightens further, and the weight in my stomach presses harder.

Strangely, the pain is the first thing today that feels... right. *Let it hurt. I deserve this.*

I try to breathe properly, but the harder I try, the dizzier I become. My head spins while my chest and stomach grow heavier.

*I'm here. I made it to this church pew. Can you feel me, Sam? Do you sense how much I need you? What I've done to myself?*

*This is exactly what I told you life would be like without you. But you didn't believe me. Why did you think I could survive without you? What were you thinking?*

I look up at the towering columns stretching toward the ceiling of the church. The music fades, and I glance around the space, my vision blurring.

Darkness creeps in at the edges of my sight.

*I left you for dead,* is the last thought I have before everything goes black.

## **Ardan**

The music still echoes as I glance at her again. She's staring up at the vaulted ceiling, like she's admiring the

architecture. And then she collapses, tipping sideways into the old man beside her. *What's she doing?* Before I can process what's happening, she slides from the man's shoulder, tumbles across his knee, and hits the ground hard.

I'm on my feet instantly, the weight of people's stares burning my skin as I push my way toward her, bumping into knees, feet, and handbags.

The old man has leaned over her, his voice raspy with concern. 'Miss?' Worry spreads quickly through the crowd around her. A blonde woman from the row behind stands up and squeezes past the others to reach Sam's girl.

'Give her some space,' she snaps at the people still in her way, her tone sharp with authority.

I pull my phone from my pocket, opening the emergency app and pressing for an ambulance.

The blonde woman crouches over Feline, taking her hand and shaking her shoulder gently. 'Hey, sweetheart, can you hear me?' Her voice is loud, strained with worry.

I'm now standing behind her, watching helplessly as Feline lies on the cold stone floor, pale as death. My heart pounds, panic spreading through my veins like wildfire.



*Think, Ardan. Do something.*

'Is she breathing?' My voice sounds sharper than I intended. I think I see her chest rise and fall, but what if I'm wrong?

The woman turns her head, catching my gaze for a second before she nods. 'I think she fainted,' she says, more to herself than to me.

'Hold her legs up,' I order, the command slipping out instinctively. The woman hesitates for a moment, then follows my instructions. 'Good idea,' she mutters, gripping Feline's ankles and standing upright to elevate them.

Feline groans softly, her eyelids fluttering open a few moments later. *Thank God.*

I step back, my chest loosening for the first time since I saw her fall. For the first time, I look around me. All eyes are locked on us. A little girl, maybe four years old, has turned fully around on the pew in front of Feline. Her knees rest on the bench, her head poking above the wooden backrest, and her big blue eyes stare at me, curious and unblinking. Even the priest has stopped, watching from the altar.

I turn and make my way out, searching for my sister. Sylvia came in late and ended up standing at the back of the church. I spot her small figure among the crowd and push through the people with quick, determined steps.

'Feline fainted,' I blurt the moment I'm within arm's reach. My voice is rushed, more intense than I expected. 'Are you taking her home, or do I call an ambulance?' I hold my phone up between us as proof of my urgency.

Sylvia's face tenses, her light-blue polished nails covering her mouth. She lets out a sigh before brushing past me, already knowing what she needs to do.

Adrenaline hums through my muscles, making every nerve feel stretched and raw. I need to get out of here. I'll wait in the car so I can be sure they leave.

Outside, the cold bites at my face as I walk briskly to my black Mercedes. Snow is in the forecast for tomorrow, and the thought only darkens my mood further. I slide into the familiar seat and run my hand over the key, feeling the engine hum to life beneath me. With the heater and music on, the tension starts to drain from my body.

I stare at my fingers on the steering wheel, the tremor

still there. *I need to stay away from that girl.*

I didn't have a choice when she hit the ground—someone had to help her. *But she's fine now.*

I grind my teeth together and turn the music up louder. I should leave instead of sitting here, waiting like it's somehow my responsibility. But then I catch Sylvia in my side mirror, walking across the parking lot with Sam's girl behind her.

Feline.

Her shoulders sag, her steps unsteady as she stares down at the ground.

I look into the rearview mirror, waiting until they pass before pulling out of my spot. And then she looks up. Her eyes find my car, and my pulse spikes. *No. That's impossible. The glass is tinted.*

And yet I feel her eyes on me. My chest tightens, my knuckles turn white against the wheel, and I can't look away. My heart hammers as I fight the urge to slam my fists against the steering wheel. I knew I shouldn't have gone near her, but I had to.

*You wouldn't have minded, right, Sam?*

I exhale sharply, my grip tightening on the wheel as I force the words into my head like a promise: *From now on, I'll stay away from her.*

It's a promise I regret the second I pull out of the parking lot.

Seeing her is a distraction.

But not seeing her?

That's even worse.