

Lauren McAllen wrapped her hands around the steering wheel and held on tight. Raindrops splattered the windshield while the wipers furiously knocked them away.

“You may think you’re getting him back, Ashely,” she hissed through clenched teeth, “but trust me, it’ll never happen because he’s all mine now.” A defiant smile broke out across her face, but it instantly turned into a look of sheer panic and terror as she frantically yanked the steering wheel back and forth. Unable to regain control of the car, she threw her arms across her face and braced herself for impact.

“Cut!” shouted a man’s voice. “And that’s a wrap.”

As Lauren relaxed, she turned her head and smiled. “So, we got it?”

“Perfectly,” he replied, “but if you wouldn’t mind waiting here, the director would like to speak with you for a moment.”

Lauren waited patiently for the rain machine to shut down. A moment later a production assistant walked up to the car and extended his hand. A bittersweet look came over her face as she took his hand and allowed him to pull her out. She turned and looked back at the prop car, placed in front of a green screen.

“And so it ends for Hayley Ann Lancaster Wright Sweeney Mason, as her car crashes off the bridge and plunges deep into the bay, but at least she went out with a bang.”

“Not necessarily.” The director had returned to set. His deep-set brown eyes matched the color of his wavy hair, but they turned sad as he presented her with a bouquet of pink roses. “Her car will be fished out of the water, but she won’t be in it, because we’re all hoping you’ll be back someday.”

Lauren’s face lit up as she accepted the bouquet. “That remains to be seen. I’ve been doing this gig for ten years. It’s time for me to move on.” She stopped to take in the sweet scent. “And Chuck, really, you shouldn’t have. These are beautiful. Thank you for thinking of me.”

He gave her a warm embrace. “You’ve been an absolute joy to work with. I’ll be the first to admit that you’re overdue for a long hiatus, but we’re still going to miss you. If your future plans don’t work out, you know you’ll always have a home here.” He kissed her on the cheek and gave her a final squeeze.

“Thanks, Chuck,” she said as she brushed a tear away. “I know you have a few more scenes to shoot before the wrap party, and I need to start packing up my dressing room.” She

gave the rest of the crew a final wave before rushing out and hurrying down the hallway to her dressing room.

Along the way two other actors, and other studio employees, stopped and extended their hands. Lauren may have played the woman the fans loved to hate, but both cast and crew loved working with her. Stepping inside her dressing room, Erin, her personal assistant, greeted her with a smile. She took the flowers and placed them on the vanity, along with several other bouquets, and pointed out a vase with a dozen long-stemmed white roses.

“These arrived while you were out.”

“Is there a card?”

“Yes,” said Erin. “They’re from the Foremans.”

Harold and Grace Foreman were the original creators of *The Seas of Destiny*, which began as a story of two rival families living in the fictitious town of Mayfield, somewhere on the Gulf coast. The Foremans had a knack for creating unforgettable characters, and within a few years of its premiere, *The Seas of Destiny* had become the top-rated soap and would remain so for the next four decades. They retired soon after Lauren joined the cast, and their daughter, Sharon, took over as executive producer. Like her parents, Sharon had a knack for creating unforgettable characters, including Roger and Elizabeth Lancaster, and their nineteen-year-old daughter, Hayley, played by the then twenty-three-year-old Lauren McAllen. The spoiled only child of a wealthy surgeon, Hayley Lancaster derived a sadistic pleasure from stealing other women’s husbands and boyfriends and then casting them aside. The character soon became iconic.

“Are the Foremans coming tonight?”

Erin shook her head. “No, but you know Sam and Sharon will be there.”

Lauren felt a twinge of disappointment. During the brief time she had known the Foremans, they had been like a kindly uncle and aunt. Erin’s phone rang, and after a brief conversation she disconnected and turned her attention back to Lauren.

“That was Esmerelda. She’s on her way, and she wanted you to know that your publicist just called. A reporter and a cameraman from *Hollywood Today* will be here in about thirty minutes to tape an interview for tomorrow night’s show.”

“Tonight? I thought they were interviewing me at home tomorrow morning.”

“Apparently, there’s been a change of plans.”

“Well, gee guys, thanks for giving me plenty of time to prepare.” The frustration resonated in Lauren’s voice.

“She said Rita got the call at the last minute as well, so it’s out of her hands.”

“I know.” Lauren’s voice sounded calmer. “Sorry if I sounded snippy. It’s been kind of a bittersweet day. Hayley Lancaster has been my whole life for the past ten years, so in a weird way, I feel like I’m losing my best friend. Would you mind asking wardrobe if I can wear the dress I have on now for the interview? All I have with me are my sweats, and my outfit for tonight’s party.”

“Of course.”

Erin hurried out while Lauren looked around her dressing room. With its three-quarter bathroom and sleeping area it was more like a hotel room, and she wondered who would occupy it once she was gone. Word was out that it would go to Douglas Dawson, who played Justin Chambers, the man Hayley was on her way to see when she met her unfortunate demise.

“Well, I suppose in the overall scheme of things, it really doesn’t matter,” she said to herself as she took her seat at the vanity. Reaching for her makeup bag, she did a quick touch-up and ran a brush through her shoulder-length brown hair. Erin returned a short time later with Esmerelda.

“Got the okay for the dress,” said Erin.

“And I found out where they’re taping the interview” added Esmerelda. “You need to get over there as quickly as you can. They’ve already started setting up.”

Esmerelda rushed Lauren down the hallway. Once again, they passed studio employees who stopped to wish Lauren well, but Esmerelda hurried her along to a small studio where someone immediately clipped a microphone to Lauren’s collar and motioned for her to take a seat. *Hollywood Today* was a nationally syndicated daily entertainment news show, and whenever they came to do an interview, the network was more than happy to accommodate them. A young female reporter sat down and began the interview, beginning with Lauren talking about how her career began.

“I was going to college in Tempe, that’s a suburb of Phoenix, and had just started my senior year when I saw an ad in the college paper about a casting call, so I went. I got lucky. I was hired to do TV commercials for a Phoenix auto dealership. Next thing I knew, an agency here in Los Angeles wanted to sign me up, so I started doing national commercials. That led to a few guest appearances on prime time and cable TV shows. Then I auditioned for the role of

Hayley, and we all know what happened next.” She went on to say that she was leaving to pursue other opportunities.

“I’ve loved every minute playing Hayley, I really have, but I’ve done everything I can do with the character. The marriages. The divorces. The infidelity. The dirty tricks. Then, four years ago, I gave birth to a baby girl, who’s now eleven and off to boarding school.” She looked into the camera. “If there’s one thing Sharon Foreman-Scott excels at, it’s creating iconic characters, and we all know how children on soap operas age in dog years. Hayley’s daughter, Kate Sweeney, has just been recast, so who knows how old she’ll be when she shows up in Mayfield. I’m hoping that someday she’ll be just as memorable of a character as Hayley was.”

The interview wrapped up, and Lauren quickly headed back to her dressing room. A visitor waited inside.

“Mom! You made it!” Lauren gave her mother with a long hug, and as they sat down Erin began packing up Lauren’s belongings.