



Is four weeks enough to build a lifetime?

*Perfect*  
**SURRENDER**

**MIA LONDON**

## EXCERPT FROM PERFECT SURRENDER

The eight-hour flight to Paris gave Lauren plenty of time to think about what she was leaving behind for the next four weeks.

She trusted her brother. She did. More than anyone else on the planet. But that didn't mean she wouldn't worry about the spa and how he'd run it in her absence.

Lauren Knight landed in Paris, ambled with the crowd to baggage claim, and saw a man who held up a sign with her name on it. Mr. Bernard, she presumed. He was her aunt's attorney, and from the phone conversations, he had a congenial disposition. Close to her aunt's age, he was an older gentleman with gray hair and bright eyes.

"*Mademoiselle* Knight. I'm Louis Bernard. Welcome to Paris. I hope you found your flight pleasant." How she adored the French accent.

"Hello, Mr. Bernard. Thank you, and please call me Lauren." Her corner of lips curved.

He nodded, his smile beamed. "*Oui*. If you please, our car is out front," he said as he reached down and lifted her suitcase.

Lauren felt bad that he carried her suitcase. She knew it would be heavy. She overpacked trying to be prepared for anything, weather, meetings, maybe touring.

The driver greeted them at the curb, immediately retrieved her luggage from Mr. Bernard and hoisted it into the trunk of the car. Then the driver opened the back door for her. She sidled in next to the already seated Mr. Bernard.

"I am sure you are tired from the flight. The jet lag can be quite unbearable. I will have the driver take you to your hotel, not far from our offices, and pick you up in the morning as well. Shall we say ten o'clock?"

"As much as I am anxious to get started Mr. Bernard, I believe you are correct. I should rest and start fresh in the morning. I would also like to see my aunt's house, if you can take me sometime soon."

He nodded several times. "*Oui. Oui*. We will do that the day after tomorrow. Tomorrow, however, we shall go over her will and the financial handlers will discuss her holdings with you as well."

The drive to the hotel was amazing. Or maybe it just seemed that way because Lauren dreamed about coming to Paris someday and now she was here. She lived in New York her whole life and, aside from Niagara Falls, she'd never been out of the country, until now. Excitement tingled throughout her whole body.

She had studied French for three years in high school because she loved the sound of it to her ears. She often dreamed of coming to France, specifically Paris. Now she was here.

The car passed old and new buildings alike, statues, and many people walking the sidewalks. After about thirty minutes, the Eiffel Tower came into view. Momentous, graceful and majestic. The curves of her lips rose, and she sighed. This is really happening, she thought. *I'm here*.

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The driver waited for Lauren at precisely ten o'clock the next morning to take her to the law offices of Mr. Bernard.

“Good morning, Lauren,” Mr. Bernard greeted her at the lobby of his office. “Would you please follow me?”

They walked to a conference with a large table, several chairs, and a view of downtown Paris.

“Can I get you something to drink? Coffee? Water?”

“No, thank you. I’m fine,” she smiled.

After getting comfortable in his office, Mr. Bernard opened a folder in front of him and proceeded to read her aunt’s will.

Although Lauren wasn’t close to her aunt, she knew her aunt and her mother were close. Despite herself, she felt a stream of melancholy come over her. One of her family members, her mom’s only sister, had died. What a sad, isolating thought.

A shiver swept through Lauren.

She tried to focus her attention back to Mr. Bernard. He answered her few questions. With the exception of a handful of charitable organizations, there were no other heirs except herself and Cole. Thankfully, everything was rather straightforward.

To Lauren’s great surprise, Mr. Bernard also asked about a memorial service from her aunt.

“Oh dear. I haven’t even thought about that. I recall you said she wished to be cremated, and . . . I guess I just forgot.”

“Not to worry, *Mademoiselle* Lauren, I will arrange for a service at a hall in Paris, say next week?” His eyebrows rose as he asked her the question.

“Yes, that would be excellent. However, I don’t know how to contact any of my aunt’s friends.”

“Leave that to me,” he said smiling. And she would. She was coming to trust Mr. Bernard with most everything related to the inheritance and her aunt’s death, but did she have another choice?

After lunch, the financial advisors arrived and proceeded to enumerate her aunt’s holdings. The gentlemen were patient with her as she struggled to understand what they told her.

Overwhelmed didn’t begin to describe what Lauren felt after her first day of meetings. She stood and rubbed her aching temples.

As she gathered her documents, Mr. Bernard came into the conference room where she had met with everyone. He assured her they would take a trip to her aunt’s house in the outskirts of Paris the next day.

“*Mademoiselle* Lauren, there is just one last thing.”

She turned to see him approach holding an envelope in his hand.

“This is a letter your aunt has written for you. Please take it with you, and perhaps you can read it at your hotel.”

She glanced down at the letter and took it from him. “Thank you, Mr. Bernard. I will.”

Once back at the hotel Lauren sent off an email to her brother, Cole, brushed her teeth and got ready for bed.

She plopped herself on the bed and settled in to read her aunt's letter.

My dearest Lauren,

If you are reading this, that certainly means something unexpected has happened to me. Well, no worries, dear. I am only too happy to leave some money for you and your brother so that you can throw a party and celebrate. My dear attorney, Louis Bernard, whom you've undoubtedly met, will fill you in on all the details.

The reason for this letter, I must tell you, is primarily a confession of sorts. I feel only regret and sorrow about your mother and father's death.

I loved your mother and instantly took a liking to your father when she brought him home so many years ago. When your mother told us she was getting married, we couldn't have been happier. She was a wonderful woman and deserved all the happiness in the world.

What I never told anyone was that her death ripped my heart out. She was taken from us far too soon. And to make it worse, I know I took her for granted.

I had moved to Paris shortly after your parents married. It was supposed to be a temporary thing, but I ended up staying. I kept in touch with Sylvie, but it was not enough.

She had come to Paris once to visit, but couldn't do it again after you and Colton were born. I knew the responsibility then lay with me to visit more often, but my trips became fewer and fewer. And when I decided to make a Christmas trip, it was too late.

Of course, my thoughts focused on you and your brother. Who would care for you?

I talked to your uncle on your father's side, and he made it clear he had no concerns about taking you two in and raising you in New York.

I must confess I felt relieved. Not because I didn't want to raise you. You two were darlings—fun, full of life, curious and a joy to be around. No, I was concerned that seeing you both every day would remind me of everything I lost when I lost your mother, my sister. Especially with you, Lauren. You look so much like your beautiful mother, it is positively frightening. I knew I wasn't strong enough to raise you properly and face my pain. All I can hope is that you forgive me.

When I returned to Paris, I was determined to throw myself into life. And I mean literally—you shall find photo books of my skydiving and other adventures at the house. I did it mostly to forget the early death of my sister, but partly to test the gods. I wasn't sure I deserved to live.

With the help of my financial advisors, I made a lot of money, bought a big house, hosted many parties for my friends, and traveled the world multiple times over. I fell in love a dozen times, made love to two dozen men, and never regretted a moment of it.

My only regret was regarding Sylvie. And that's all I can ask of you and Colton. Have no regrets. Live life to the fullest! Fulfill your wildest dreams, and I'm hoping a little money will help you do just that.

You two are so precious to me. I want only the best for both of you.

All my love,

Aunt Rosie

Lauren peered into the envelope and found a picture of her mother and aunt, smiling as they posed in front of a Ferris wheel. They were about twenty.

Tears streamed down Lauren's cheeks unbidden. Her aunt was right. She looked exactly like her mother.

Reading the letter brought a flood of memories back for Lauren. She was eleven when her parents died in a car accident, Cole only six. For his sake, she kept her mourning mostly to herself. And through the years, she'd learned to push down the sorrow and pain because it was simply too much to handle. But regrettably it never went away.

She yanked the curtains closed because, despite the fact that it was ten at night, the sun was still out. She returned to the bed, switched off the light, and covered her head to drown the sobs that spilled from her mouth.

She missed her parents terribly and now mourned for an aunt she hardly knew.

She cried herself to sleep.