



*Baby*

FOR MY

**BROTHER'S BEST**

**FRIEND**

JOSIE HART

# **Baby for my Brother's Best Friend**

**An Enemies to Lovers Surprise Pregnancy  
Romance**

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

**Josie Hart**

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# 1

## ALLY

“**I**’m sorry...” My voice trailed off. “You want me to *what?*”

Levi rolled his deep hazel eyes—as if his proposition wasn’t shocking. “You heard me loud and clear, Ally. It’s simple: just come with me to Rachel’s wedding and pretend to be my girlfriend.”

“You have a whole roster of women,” I argued, folding my arms across my small chest. “Give me one good reason why I should accept.”

“I’ll pay you ten thousand dollars.”

“I make twenty times that working as your mom’s CPA,” I threw out, raising an eyebrow at him. “That’s hardly appealing.” I mean, seriously, if my brother’s best friend, who I just so happened to *abhor*, was going to reel me into playing his girlfriend, it was going to be worth my time.

*Period.*

“Okay, but you get a free trip to the Caribbean.” Levi let out a frustrated sigh before rubbing his perfectly defined square

jaw, dotted with a tinge of black stubble. “What else do you want from me? I need to prove to Frank Lewis that I’ve matured since I was a reckless twenty-two-year-old.”

“*Why?*” I retorted, shaking my head in confusion. “You can’t seriously tell me you’re still in love with that salty, high-maintenance ex-girlfriend of yours.”

Levi’s jaw tensed, his face filling with irritation. “Why can’t you just accept the offer? You *never* go on vacation, Ally. I figured you’d accept just for that reason alone. I need someone I can trust—and who has their shit *mostly* together. You’re the best option I have.”

“Wow, I think that’s the nicest thing you’ve ever said to me.” I feigned a smile, batting my thick eyelashes at him. “So if it’s not to win Rachel back and crash the wedding, then why do you need to prove to Frank that you’re a grown-ass acting man?”

*Which we both know is a lie.*

“He’s selling CyberSecure, and I *need* to get my hands on that company. I’ve been watching it for years, and it’s finally my chance to make a name for myself outside of the Lombardi family trust.”

I pursed my lips, studying his face for a few long moments. His patience was waning, but playing with his impatience was more than amusing for me. We’d never gotten along—mostly because he was an arrogant asshole who hated the world ninety-nine percent of the time...

But whatever.

“That’s a multimillion dollar company,” I remarked, the wheels in my CPA brain spinning as I thought of what it could do for *me*.

“Obviously, I know that,” Levi snapped, rolling his broad shoulders. “You’re starting to waste my time right now, Ally. I have things to do.”

“Ditto, Levi.” I snorted, before gathering up my courage. “I’d like to counter your proposition.”

“You can’t be serious right now. This isn’t a negotiation.”

I swallowed my nerves, ignoring his words. “Forty percent stake in the company, and I accept.”

“Absolutely not.”

“Fine then. Thirty-five.”

Levi pursed his lips, his eyes narrowing. “Fifteen.”

Hope burst through my chest—I had a shot. “Thirty-four.”

“*Twenty*.”

“Thirty or no deal.” I gave him my best poker face, flipping my auburn hair over my shoulder.

He let out a sigh. “*Fine*. Thirty-fucking-percent it is. You’re welcome for turning you into a millionaire.” Levi pushed his chair back, shaking his head as he stood to his feet. “I’ll write something up.”

“No, *I* will do the write-up,” I challenged him, leaning back in my desk chair. “Knowing you, you’ll put some stupid clause

in there that will ruin me *actually* getting what you just agreed to.”

“Wow.” His eyebrows shot up, and for a brief—*very* brief moment, I thought he might actually be a little hurt by what I was implying. “I won’t fuck you over if you don’t fuck me over, Ally. Plain and simple as that.”

I met his gaze, the deep green hue mixed with chocolate brown a little jolting, my heart skipping a beat. There was no doubt in my mind that those eyes swayed a lot of women right out of their clothes...

But not me.

My brother’s best friend did *not* have that power...nope. Not over me.

“I’m still going to write something up,” I stated, clearing my throat and looking away. “I just think it’s in my best interest. Also, I think it’s only fair that I write up a few rules as well.”

He folded his arms across his chest. “Like what? No bumping uglies, Ally? I don’t think you have to worry about that when it comes to me. Besides, I’ve already seen you naked—remember the Christmas party of fifteen? Yeah, I can’t *unsee* that.”

I rolled my eyes, pushing away the small pang of humiliation. “You didn’t see *all* of me. You just didn’t knock before barging into the bathroom while I was taking a shower.”

“Um, because *most* people lock the door, Ally.”

“Right, but like you couldn’t hear the water running on the other side? The shower is *open*. I don’t know how you didn’t hear it.”

“That rain showerhead is really quiet...” His voice dropped off for a moment before he shook his head. “*Anyway*, it’s fine to write up whatever rules you want, but we *will* have to have some PDA. It’ll be weird if we don’t touch each other at all.”

My stomach knotted up—Levi was more than known for his PDA-packed appearances. “Minimal PDA. I have class, Levi.”

“Yeah, okay. Whatever. Just write it up and I’ll mark out what I don’t agree with. We’ll go over it once we land on Friday.”

“Wait, *this* Friday?”

“Yep, get to packing, *baby*.” He shot me a wink and slipped out of my office, his laughter echoing down the hallway.

I let out a sigh, facepalming as I glanced at my computer screen, having lost my place in balancing Lisa’s accounts.

*Damn it, Levi.*

My phone buzzed on my desk, and I looked over to see a text from my best friend, Linley, lighting up my phone.

*Got you lunch, can I stop by?*

“Absolutely, you can,” I muttered, texting back a quick reply. I needed all the help I could get figuring out what rules to put in place between myself and Levi. Just as I hit the send

button on the message, there was a knock on my cracked office door.

I looked up. “Oh, hi, Lisa,” I greeted Levi’s stunning mother, whose dark hair was fashioned in perfect waves, cascading past her shoulders.

She gave me a smile, adjusting her dark rim glasses and shutting the door behind herself. “So, Levi just swung by and told me he’s taking you to Rachel’s wedding?” Her puzzled expression told me everything.

*He didn’t tell her about the arrangement. You sly dog, Levi.*

I nodded. “Yeah, it’s last minute, but I can definitely work remotely and keep up with the books.”

She waved me off. “Nah, you don’t have to worry about working while you’re there. I just...I had no idea...”

*Right.*

“It’s just a friend thing,” I answered her, my voice coming out with less confidence that I hoped for.

“Are you sure *he* sees it that way?” Her brows furrowed, lines of concern growing on her face. “He made it sound like he was pretty excited to get away with you.”

*Is he seriously going to con his own mother?*

“Oh, well...” I hesitated, having no way to work myself out of it. “I’m just trying not to get too excited over it.”

That seemed to work, her face brightening. “I bet you’ll have a great time. I know it might be a little early, but I just

always thought the two of you would be so cute together. You're already basically family."

I swallowed hard. "Thank you, Lisa. I love all of you so much."

"Aw, we love you too." With that, she tapped the doorframe and spun around, disappearing down the hallway.

*Ugh.*

Groaning, I laid my head down on my desk. Why the hell was Levi pulling it over on his own freaking family? I'd known them since I was a kid, since Levi and Josh, my big brother, had been lifetime friends. Lisa was practically my second mom, and now accepting the proposition might ruin all of that? I hadn't even asked Levi how he planned on explaining us *not* being together when we returned.

*Should've thought about this longer, Ally.*

I mean, was he planning on conning Josh too? Because there was no way in *hell* my big bro was going to buy that Levi and I were suddenly dating seriously enough to jet off to some Caribbean wedding of his ex-girlfriend's. In fact, if we *were* seriously dating, Josh might beat the shit out of him.

He had done it to my other boyfriends.

"What're you chuckling about?" Linley's voice interrupted my thoughts.

I jerked my head up from where it was resting on the desk. "Oh hey, you look *hot*." I wiggled my eyebrows at her

sweatpants and oversized shirt. “Working from home looks good on you.”

“Oh my god, shut up.” She laughed, handing me my pecan cranberry salad from Rob’s Diner just down the street. Her blonde hair was pulled up in a loose bun on top of her head in the most adorable way, and her no-makeup look just emphasized her natural beauty.

My best friend was a stunner.

“I mean it, Lin,” I said in my best serious tone. “Thanks for lunch.”

“Anything for you.” She kicked back, propping her Converse up on my desk. “So seriously, what’s with the weird head-on-the-desk laughter thing you were doing when I walked in? Is there a manic episode in the works or is it the funny cat meme I sent?”

I shook my head, hesitating. Should I tell her about the deal with Levi? Or would it be best to keep it on the down-low before having the details of who *he* was telling?

*Nah.*

“You’ll never believe what Levi wants me to do.”

She forked a bit of her own salad in her mouth, curiosity filling her face. “And what’s that? I can’t think of *anything*.”

“He wants me to be his date to Rachel Lewis’s wedding.”

She nearly choked on her mouthful of kale and spinach. “No way—like for real?”



“Of course not,” I laughed. “He wants me to do it as like a business deal.”

“And why the fuck would he do that?” Her tone was already growing defensive. “What is he scheming up now? Because you don’t have to do this.”

*God, I love my best friend.*

“He wants to buy some business from her dad, and has to prove that he’s matured or some shit like that. He thinks that if he takes a girlfriend who has her life together, he can convince him.”

“And why you?” Her eyes narrowed.

I shrugged. “You’ve seen the kind of girls he surrounds himself with.”

“Aspiring models, influencers, and actresses.”

“Exactly, and so to make it worth my time, I negotiated that I would get a percentage of the business that he buys.” I sat up a little straighter, proud of my business dealings.

“*Dayum* girl, look at you. You’re a freaking boss. But how do you know he’ll come through on the deal? We *know* how Levi is. He can be a real douche.”

“He has to sign a contract, and you better *believe* I’m going to cover my bases. Also, Levi can be a real jerk, but he’s not like that. He’s always been loyal—think about everything he’s done for Josh. I don’t think he’ll bail on me.”

She was quiet for a few moments, but then nodded. “That’s true. And he wouldn’t risk messing up his friendship with your brother over it. Josh is like his only close friend.”

“Yeah, because my brother has the patience of a saint,” I snorted, grabbing for my water bottle on my desk. “But anyway, let’s talk about rules I should put in the contract. I don’t want *any* gray areas.”

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## 2

### LEVI

“**A** bso-fucking-lutely *not*,” Josh roared, throwing his hands in the air. “You’re not jetting off with my sister thousands of miles away to your *ex*’s wedding!” He was pacing around my master bedroom, his chucks squeaking on the freshly polished dark oak floors.

“Dude, relax,” I said, shoving more of my clothes into my suitcase and shaking my head. I turned to look at him. “It’s really not what you think it is. Let me explain before you give yourself a heart attack.”

Don’t get me wrong, I knew that telling my best friend was going to be a shitshow, but *this* was a little overdramatic—even for him.

“Have you slept with her?” he demanded, slamming his hand down on my suitcase, stopping me from continuing to fill it. He was *seething*, his light complexion burning crimson as his icy blue eyes bore into mine. “Because I will literally *murder* you if that’s what happened.”

“What? No.” I snorted, spinning around to grab my good blazer from the closet. “I have no desire to fuck your sister,

Josh. Gross.”

*Well, maybe not gross.*

She did have the body of a goddess—but it was still a no. She was beyond off-limits, and annoying.

Which is why she was perfect.

He jerked back, his eyes narrowing. “Then what the hell are you doing with her, Levi? I don’t like anything that’s coming out of your mouth right now, but you better start talking, or my fist is going to.”

*Again, so fucking dramatic.*

“Bro, I told you about Frank selling CyberSecure. That’s all this is about. I just want to prove to him that I’ve matured so I can buy his company.”

His demeanor didn’t change. “Cool, but that doesn’t explain my sister...”

I let out a sharp breath, taking a step back from him—just in case he went swinging on me. “She agreed to be my *pretend* girlfriend.”

“*What?*” His eyes went nearly as wide as his face. “Why would she even agree to such stupidity? How will that help you buy some company? Is this about Rachel? Because—”

I shrugged and cut him off. “Their biggest complaint with me when I was dating Rachel was that I was too much of a flirt, and that I was immature when it came to handling my relationships. I mean, Rachel was a far cry from mature herself

—and she *did* cheat on me with like three different guys when she went to Italy. But that’s not important,” I added quickly. “This has *nothing* to do with her. I just want that business. If I show up with a successful, charming woman—who has everything going for her, and I present myself as the perfect boyfriend. Maturity reached...”

“You think *my* sister is those things?” Josh burst into laughter. “Like, we *are* talking about Ally, right? The woman you’re talking about does *not* sound like her. Ally is a firecracker.”

“Oh, come on,” I drew out. “Your sister has her shit together more than ninety-nine percent of the women we know. She’s got her own place, makes a killer living with a steady smart-person job, and she’s...you know, not ugly.”

Josh raised an eyebrow. “Are you indirectly calling my sister hot?”

I rolled my eyes. “I said she’s not ugly. I’m not getting off to your sister in my spare time or something.”

*Okay, maybe a handful of times.*

That shower accident would be forever burned in my brain.

Sighing, I pushed the thought away. “The point is to just solely show that I can manage a nice, successful woman as my girlfriend. I can be the mature guy that I’m supposed to be—the kind of guy that can land a multi-million-dollar company and keep it running profitably.”

Josh was quiet for a few moments, his face contorted in a mixture of amusement and disbelief. “And you don’t think *lying* about a relationship is a little immature?”

“Why are you being so fucking unsupportive?” I groaned, running my fingers through my hair. “You know that I’m more than capable of running a business like that. I’ve been working for my dad for nearly ten years now—I’ve proven my business capabilities.”

“No, no,” Josh said quickly. “I *do* think you’re capable of running the business. I just really *don’t* understand why having some fake girlfriend, especially my *sister*, is going to make the deal more plausible. Everyone knows that you’re a suave guy in the tech world. I don’t see why that wouldn’t be enough.”

“Frank Lewis is all about family—he’s the epitome of a family man. That’s *why*. Back when I was dating Rachel, he would always pick the guy with the family over the bachelor, even if the latter was more deserving of the position.” I folded my arms across my Rolling Stones t-shirt, ignoring the irritation burning in my chest. I *had* to convince Josh that this was a good idea...

He was the only person standing in the way of the plan. If he wasn’t on board, then there was no way in hell I would go through with it. Not even a company like CyberSecure was worth losing my friendship with him.

“And Ally *agreed*?” he finally said, letting out a sigh and rubbing his jaw.

“Yeah, for thirty percent of the company.” My jaw clenched at the mention, but it was what it was. She was a hell of a negotiator, and she was also the *only* option I had. I needed her to agree. I could give up some profit to her.

Josh laughed. “Man, I love my sister.”

“Yeah, everyone seems to—which is why she’s perfect. I just have to try and get along with her for two weeks.” I grimaced. On paper Ally really was the ideal girl, but there was never a time when the two of us had seen eye to eye.

*I’ll just have to suck it up and keep my eyes on the prize.*

“Okay, fine. Do it, but don’t mess with Ally—like you know,” he warned, though his expression was more weary than anything.

“I don’t think you have to worry about that,” I assured him, awkwardly shifting my weight. “She’s not really my type anyway.”

“She better not be,” he grunted, side-eying me. “Ally deserves better.”

*Ouch. But seriously?*

I tensed by jaw. “I’m not even going to go there with you—but I’ve seen your sister’s dating choices over the years, and I wouldn’t exactly call them top tier. I mean, who was that one guy she dated for like three years? He was the biggest douche.”

“Which is exactly why she deserves better. She has terrible taste.” Josh chuckled, and my shoulders dropped with relief. “I

think you're a solid bro, but your past with women is sketchy at best. Rachel was your only relationship that lasted longer than a handful of months."

"I was with Rachel for years," I pointed out, furrowing my brow. "That's a lot more than a handful of months, so I *am* capable of maintaining a long-term relationship. I just...I realized after Rachel that I like to have fun more than I like to be nailed down."

"And so now you're going to convince Frank Lewis that you're ready to settle down and be serious. Genius." Josh shook his head and reached for a pair of my designer sunglasses. "Do you want these? Because you only have like ten pairs, and I broke mine last week."

I glanced over to the black Gucci sunglasses—they were my favorites, but... "Yeah, you can have them."

"Dude, you're the best."

"Consider it payment for letting me borrow your sister for a couple of weeks, though that sounds...*weird*."

"Really fucking weird," he agreed, before bursting into laughter. "But anyway, I know that Ally can hold her own. The woman negotiated a thirty percent stake out of you. That's impressive."

"Yeah, and my mom is convinced that it's a real relationship, so we're going to have to just play this off as that. I had to ask off for Ally last minute, and I didn't want to make her be the one who had to explain it. My mom had a thousand



questions, and it was hard to bullshit my way through—even for me.”

“So then I guess the two of you just *don't* work out when you get back?”

“Yeah, and I think it might break my mother’s heart.” I rolled my eyes and plopped down on the bed. “Like, I seriously had no idea that she was pining after the two of us somehow ending up together.”

Josh’s eyes went wide. “No way? I knew Lisa loved Ally, but I thought it was just because she’s, well, *Ally*. Everyone loves Ally.”

“Which is why she’s perfect for my fake girlfriend. I know she’ll charm the shit out of Frank.”

Josh didn’t say anything, but his phone ringing interrupted the conversation. He pulled it out of his pocket and smiled at the screen. “Oh, this is perfect.”

My stomach knotted up as I saw Ally’s face on the phone. *Great.*

“Hey sis, what’s up?” He put her on speaker phone.

“Uh, well...” Her voice trailed off, and I already knew she was fishing to see what he knew. “I’m packing. What’re you up to?”

“Hanging out at home with Levi, helping him pack for the wedding. What’re you packing for?”

“Uh...”

“So you caught the feelings for Levi?” The amusement in his tone made me smile, but not as much as Ally’s reaction.

“Absolutely not. You can’t seriously tell me that he thinks he’s going to get away with lying to you about the arrangement? I swear he’s such a—”

“I’m right here,” I cut her off, chuckling. “Careful what you say. I’d hate for you to lose that thirty percent of CyberSecure before we’re ever even wheels up.”

She groaned. “You’re insufferable.”

“We all know that, and if it wasn’t for the fact that you’re going to be a millionaire once the deal is sorted, there’s no way in hell I would be letting you do this. I hope you know that,” Josh said, running a hand through his hair.

“Well, first of all, I’m a grown-ass woman and I can do whatever I want. And secondly, there’s no way in hell *I* would be doing this. But since Levi is right there, I have some questions for him.”

I cringed. “Yeah?”

“On a scale of one to black-tie affair, how formal is this wedding? It’s at the beach, right? I don’t know what I’m supposed to wear.”

“Uh, whatever women wear to a wedding—so anything but white should be fine. Just buy a nice designer dress of any color that’s a little beachy and you should be fine.”

“I hate to break it to you, Levi, but I can’t afford a dress like that—and I’m not spending thousands of dollars on a dress

that I'll only wear once.”

I shrugged. “No problem. I'll buy you one then. Just text me your measurements.”

There was silence on the other end of the phone, and Josh and I exchanged a look.

“Ally?” Josh asked. “Are you still there?”

She let out a sigh. “Yeah. I just...yeah, I'll send over my measurements, but *nothing* slutty, Levi—I mean it.”

I burst into laughter. “The less material, the better. I got it.”

“I'm serious,” she snapped.

“Don't worry,” Josh spoke up, shooting me daggers. “I'll make sure he picks something that you'd like.”

“I wish you were coming,” Ally said on the other end.

Josh smiled. “You'll be good. If you have to take a cheap shot to keep him in line, I'll back you up when you get back.”

“Hey!” I called out, instantly covering myself. “Not cool, man.”

Ally's laughter echoed through the room. “Deal. This is gonna be fun.”

“So fun.” I feigned a smile, wondering what the fuck I had gotten myself into.

### 3

## ALLY

*I*t's not a heart attack, it's just anxiety.

I leaned back in the seat of the private jet, my heart literally *pounding* in my ears. I shut my eyes, trying not to panic—or check my Apple watch to see just how fast my heart was going in my chest. Gripping the armrests, I took a couple of deep breaths.

*You've got this, Ally. It's just a plane. You've been on them before.*

But honestly, I wasn't sure if it was the small private jet that was getting to me, or the fact that Levi and I were completely *alone* on said jet. I had figured his parents would be attending the wedding...

But surprise!

They weren't.

“You want a barf bag or something?” Levi's amused voice broke into my thoughts. “You seriously look like you might vomit—and I don't really want to be the one who cleans that up.”

“Shut up and leave me alone,” I snapped, peeking over at him. His eyes were bright with pure humor and his lips curled up in a smirk.

He was eating this up.

“We haven’t gone over your rules,” he continued, ignoring my request. “Could you at least hand over the book of papers that I know you wrote up? I’m bored as hell, and you’re clearly not in sound mind.”

I groaned, my stomach lurching. “You’re literally *so* annoying.”

“And you’re a peach, yourself. I need to go over those conditions before we land so I know what we can or can’t do. It’s already obvious that I won’t be getting to join the mile high club.”

My eyes fluttered open at the comment, and I whipped my head around. “Don’t be so vulgar, Levi. That’s going to make Frank think you’re still immature.”

He rolled his eyes and slipped across the aisle to take a seat next to me. “I’m aware that I’m going to have to put a filter on, Ally.” He held out his hand to me, and I eyed it, not sure if he wanted a handshake or... “The *papers*.”

*Right.*

I leaned down to my bag and fished the stack out. “Here. I have a sharpie too, but I want to discuss anything before you just go marking it out.”

“Well, if it’s in regards to not getting my mile high club card, I do *not* intend to do that with you.” He chuckled and grabbed the contract, his laugh fading. “Jesus, you *really* went all in with this.”

“I covered my bases, yeah.” I shrugged, my heart finally calming in my chest. Maybe the distraction was exactly what I needed. “I’m risking a lot to do this with you, and I wanted to set my boundaries.”

“I respect that,” Levi replied, his eyes scanning the formal contract. He didn’t need to know that I had borrowed most of it from the internet, tweaking a very strange prenup I’d found on Reddit. “No kissing?” He grabbed the sharpie from my hand and popped the cap off. “That one has to go.”

My mouth dropped open. “No, it doesn’t.”

“Yes, it does. If we don’t kiss at all, it’ll be super suspect. We *have* to kiss at least once or twice—and we don’t have to tell Josh about it,” he added, giving me a wink. “He wouldn’t understand that it’s solely business.”

I blew out a sigh. “No tongue then.”

He snorted. “Oh my god, you sound like a middle schooler right now.”

“And you sound like a dick.”

“So offended.” He laughed, his eyes going back to the line of rules. “Most of these are okay. The *no butt touching* is a little disappointing, but whatever—does that include a nice light loving smack?”

I rolled my eyes. “No ass touching, smacking, brushing, groping—”

“Okay, that’s enough. I think I get the point.” He looked over at me, the sparkle of amusement in his eyes causing my stomach to flip.

*Ugh.*

“So, if we don’t sleep in the same bed, where *do* we sleep? It would look really weird if we didn’t share a room. I only booked one for us.”

“I’m sure there’s a couch,” I pointed out, narrowing my eyes at him.

“Oh, come on,” he whined, his shoulders dropping. “I don’t want to sleep on the couch. It’s a Cali king bed. We’ll just put up a massive row of pillows. You’ve seen those people on reality TV shows—they can sleep platonically in a bed.”

I shook my head at the strange reference. “Those people also walk around half naked and are apparently looking for love at the same time. This isn’t a reality TV show, and if I have to, *I* will sleep on the couch.”

He sighed. “No, you definitely won’t. I might be a dick, like you seem to think I am, but I’m not going to make you do that. I’ll take the couch—though I really think you should consider the pillow barrier idea.”

I blinked a couple of times, unable to hide my smile. “I’ll *consider* it.”

“Good enough.” He flipped to the next page, his face contorting with concentration. Levi used the sharpie to keep his place, carefully reading each line that Linley and I had written. His jaw tensed every so often, and occasionally he chuckled.

I drummed my fingers on my newly spray-tanned bare thighs, my jean shorts riding up. Despite everything being platonic, I had used the vacation as a reason to purchase all new clothing, wanting to ensure that I looked my very best around the elite crowd. I had grown up around it since Josh and Levi were best friends, and our families had become close because of that...

But I was hardly wealthy.

My parents were business owners of a couple dry-cleaning places. They were middle class, and that was it. We never wanted for anything, but we wore secondhand clothes and drove used cars. I didn’t mind it, really, and still searched the clearance rack despite now making more than both of my parents ever did.

“There’s nothing really to argue with.” Levi signed the bottom of the contract with the black marker. “I just don’t get why you felt the need to be *so* detailed.” There was a hint of offense in his voice—and it was a little surprising.

“Like I said earlier, I just wanted to cover my bases, Levi.” I took the papers from him and shoved them back in my bag.

“I get that, but I’m not some stranger,” he reasoned, his gaze locking with mine. I instantly bit my lip, my breath catching.



*What the hell is wrong with me?*

“Josh is my *best* friend. There’s no way I wouldn’t uphold my end of the deal, even if it’s going to cost me a pretty penny. I’ve never wronged the people that I care about.”

“Right, but I’m *not* Josh.” My voice came out less confident than I intended it to, and I cleared my throat, looking away. “I know that you’ve always been loyal to him, but this is totally different.”

“He’s like my brother, and while you and I *definitely* don’t get along, there’s no way that I would ever do something that would hurt Josh—and hurting you or backing out of the deal would hurt Josh.”

I glanced back at him, the sincerity striking. “I believe you, but I just wanted to be safe. It’s not going to be easy for me to maintain this level of a lie.”

He nodded. “I get that. Speaking of, we need to lay out and agree on some history between us if people ask. Rachel already knows you, and she also knows that we *never* saw eye to eye. It’ll be a shocking relationship to her.”

“Okay, but that was years ago, and I was just a teenager when the two of you were together. Things change as people get older and *mature*.”

“Yeah, yeah. That’s a good point. So maybe we reconnected when you came to work for Mom this last year?”

“I’ve worked for your mom for nearly two and a half years now,” I corrected him, letting out a sigh. “That won’t work.”

“Oh, damn. Didn’t realize it’s been that long.” He huffed, slinking down in his seat. “So, maybe we met up at a party, we had a few too many, slept together, and ta-da! Love.”

I wrinkled my nose. “Uh, no. That’s not romantic at all. There’s also *no* way that would happen. I don’t even go to parties anymore. I only go out occasionally. I *think* we should have a better story than that.”

“Like what?” He sounded less than enthused. “Because everyone knows that I’m not exactly the best representative of romance.”

“But if you *matured*, met a girl who was up to your standards, and you were serious about chasing her—winning her heart—you *would*.”

His face shifted to deep thought, and my eyes drifted to his biceps, toned and layered with ink of some sort of gladiator tattoo. “I guess that would make sense.”

“So, if you found a girl that you *really* liked, what would you do to win her heart?”

He shrugged, staying quiet as he played with his Rolex watch. “I don’t know really, but I would make sure that it was something *big*. I’d probably show up to her house with roses—or maybe do the eighties kind of love scene, the whole boom box over my head. Make it iconic.”

I nodded. “Okay, so you developed a crush on me, and then —”

“And then I took you out on the yacht, saying we were going stargazing with Josh. You wouldn’t have believed it, but you would’ve gone out of pure curiosity. It would’ve been a trick, and ended up being just the two of us. I’d have roses, wine, and we would’ve stargazed, spending all night talking.”

My eyebrows raised. “That’s...that’s impressive, actually. I never would’ve thought you had that in you.”

He rolled his eyes at me before continuing. “And that was three months ago. We got serious really fast, but we’ve kept it on the down-low, because we’re not about labels—and wanted to make sure it was real before we told our families.”

“But the wedding is kind of our way of letting everyone know,” I added, liking where he was going with it. “Also, why aren’t your parents coming?”

“It’s their anniversary, and they’re taking a trip to Fiji.”

*Must be nice.*

“Oh, cool. Great. Happy anniversary to them.” I made a mental note to text Lisa and tell her.

“Yeah, for sure.” He leaned his head back against the seat and shut his eyes. “This is such a long flight.”

“And it’s impossible to get comfortable enough to sleep,” I muttered under my breath, shifting in the seat, wishing that I could get some desperately needed shut-eye. I curled up my legs, turning sideways in the seat so my eyes were looking out the window. The ocean blue beneath us was a little jarring. I

never liked flying over the water. Taking a few deep breaths, I closed my eyes.

*Everything is going to be just fine. Two weeks in paradise and if all goes well, I get to walk away as a millionaire. My parents can retire. I can buy a nicer house. It'll be great.*

The fatigue slipped up as my mind eased, and I let myself slip right into the cozy warmth filling my body, dreaming of sandy beaches...

And then as soon as I drifted off, I woke up.

To a *freight train* of a snore.

And the scent of something *sexy* and masculine—a mixture of sandalwood and bergamot. Blinking my eyes, I saw nothing but dark denim, and felt the pressure of a hand resting on my back. My heart nearly *stopped*.

*Oh my god.*

*I'm lying on Levi's lap.*

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## 4

### LEVI

**M**y eyes took in the sight of her, stepping out of the bathroom, water droplets slipping down her bare legs from underneath the gray towel.

*Holy fuck.*

“Sorry, I forgot my clothes.” Ally gave me a sheepish smile, her dark auburn hair towel dried and spilling over her shoulders.

I nodded, deciding to stay quiet on the matter as she scooped a small pile of folded clothing from the top of her leather suitcase. The light sprinkle of freckles on her shoulders caught my eye, and I felt something stir in the pit of my stomach.

*Get it under control.*

Shifting my weight on the bed, I tried to follow my own advice, thankful when she disappeared back into the bedroom. The image of her naked body filled my mind, her perky breasts only making my arousal more intense.

*Fuck me for walking in that night.*

I had never looked twice at Ally in any way other than just as an annoying younger sister, but the moment I stepped into that bathroom, a little boozed up, things shifted. Granted, she was still Josh's annoying little sister, but...

*Damn, she was fine.*

Her small chest led to a small waist, luscious, curvy hips, and a perfect ass—though I hadn't gotten a good view of it that night. She was all I thought about for weeks afterward during my *private* time.

Which was a little embarrassing.

“Do you think this is okay for the dinner party?” Ally's voice interrupted my thoughts, and I grabbed a pillow, resting it over my bulging lap.

I took in the flowy burgundy top paired with white shorts and sandals. “You look ho—good. It's just a casual dinner. I think that'll do.”

“Were you about to say I look homeless?” She folded her arms across her chest. “Because I know this spray tan makes me feel like I'm *always* fucking dirty.”

I laughed. “I wasn't going to say homeless, but now that you mention it...”

Her shoulders dropped. “Seriously? Levi, I'm not kidding. I need to make a good first impression.”

Ally's worry was actually...*endearing*.

“You look fine. But just as a little advice, there’s more confidence in *not* trying too hard. You’re dressed like you always do, and that’s the best representation of you. It makes you authentic. I don’t want you to come off like you’re trying to impress them. We’re here for the wedding, to have a good time. I want him to think the business deal is secondary.”

“Wow, deep thoughts.” She snorted before going for her bag. “What’re you wearing?”

“I don’t know—some gray pants and a button up. I don’t worry about how I dress,” I added, shrugging my shoulders. “I always look good.”

The way she rolled her eyes made me laugh, and I scooted to the edge of the bed, still holding the pillow over my throbbing erection as my eyes drifted back to her bare legs. “I *am* going to go shower now, so you’re done in the bathroom, right?”

She stood up, turning to give me a weird look. “Does it not look like I am? Should I put on more makeup?”

I groaned. “Women, I swear. I just wanted to make sure the bathroom was clear. I’m going to shower.”

“You said that already.”

“Right.” I stood up carefully from the puffy white duvet on the bed, dropping the pillow and keeping my back turned to Ally.

“Are you sore or something?” she asked as I sidestepped awkwardly to ensure she did *not* catch sight of something I

didn't want to explain.

“Yeah, something like that.”

Her laughter filled the beachy resort suite. “Maybe dancing will loosen up those muscles.”

*You could say that.*

A sigh escaped my lips as I shut the bathroom door behind myself. I had expected room sharing with Ally to be just that—room sharing. But apparently, my body just really *wasn't* going to let go of how attracted I was to hers. I grabbed a towel and turned on the water of the open, tan tiled shower.

*Why is every shower open like this?*

Letting out a grunt, I hung the towel on the hook and stepped in, the warm water pelting my shoulders. My eyes shifted to the door, double-checking that I had really turned the lock.

And I had.

My erection was still throbbing and as the water ran down my back I let my mind lose control, playing out what I'd *really* wanted to do when she walked into the room with just that towel on...

*I walked up to her and pulled the damp fabric free from her body. “Let's just get it out of the way.” My eyes drifted to her chest, flat abdomen, and those fucking curvy hips.*

*“Fuck me, Levi,” she whined, her bright blue eyes begging mine. “I just want to feel you inside of me.”*



My breath hitched as I stroked myself, more turned on than ever.

*I brushed my fingertips along her chin, threading my fingers through her damp hair. Cupping the back of her head, I brought her lips to mine.*

God, if I only knew how she tasted.

*Ally let out a moan as her lips parted for me, and I dove into every inch of her mouth, my free hand sliding along her smooth skin. I gave her ass a squeeze, savoring the moan escaping from her lips.*

*She tugged at the bottom of my shirt, and I pulled it over my head before shedding the rest of my clothes. Ally came at me, shoving me toward the bed. I sat down, pulling her onto my lap. The moisture between her legs rubbed against my shaft, and I let out a groan as I grabbed a condom.*

*I slipped it on as I felt her lips on my neck, and then she lowered herself down on me.*

*And fuck.*

The knock on the door caused me to jump sideways.

“Levi, are you coming?” Ally shouted from the other side of the door. “We’re supposed to meet everyone in ten minutes. I don’t think it looks good for us to be late.”

“Really, Ally?” I called back, turning off the water and grabbing a towel. “You’re not my mom.”

*Guess it’s a good thing I didn’t get dirty on the flight.*

I quickly toweled off and wrapped the towel around my waist before swinging the bathroom door open—Ally was standing *right* there, her blue eyes staring right up into mine. “Why are you being creepy?”

“Says the man who walked in on me in the shower,” she shot back at me, narrowing her eyes and stepping to the side. “Like I said, I just think you should make a good impression. We really don’t want to be late.”

“We’re not going to be late, Ally.” I let out a sigh and dug through to the clothes I had planned on wearing. I grabbed a pair of boxer briefs, and was just about to drop my towel when I realized that was a bad idea. “Can you like look somewhere else?” I said to Ally, who was still glaring at me, arms folded across her chest.

“Right, sorry,” she muttered, spinning around and disappearing into the hallway toward the door.

I chuckled, dropping my towel and wishing she would’ve waited a few more seconds before interrupting me. I got dressed and headed back to the bathroom, passing right by Ally, who was staring into her phone near the door. I peeked over her shoulder, seeing an Instagram post—one from Brad, her old ex.

“Why do you even bother to follow that douche?” I commented, grabbing my comb and fixing my hair.

“I don’t follow him,” she quipped, dropping her phone to her side and looking up at me.

“So you just happened to see his post then? Because that makes no sense. I don’t think that’s how the algorithm works.”

“Okay, well, he’s dating one of my old friends from college, which is just...*weird*.” She shook her head, looking more perplexed than ever.

“Why is that weird? Didn’t you date him back in college?” I never really knew the guy other than the few times that Ally brought him around, and he was a smartass. “Maybe they just reconnected.”

“Yeah, but that still doesn’t make it any less weird. They used to call each other bro and sis. I just think that’s weird.”

I shrugged, setting the comb down and grabbing my watch. “I guess things change sometimes. Still, stay away from that guy.”

“You don’t have to worry about that,” she laughed, just as I sprayed some cologne. Her nose crinkled as I sat the container down.

“What? Does the smell not suit your fancy or something?”

Not that I cared.

“Uh, no, it’s fine. I just caught a big whiff.” She cleared her throat and headed toward the door. “Kind of suffocating.”

“Good, keep you from getting too close and breaking the rules,” I joked, grabbing the handle and holding it open for her. We stepped out into the hallway and headed toward the grand staircase, leading to the beachside restaurant below. I scanned the area, looking for any familiar faces.

“Did they rent out this whole place for the wedding?” Ally’s voice sounded distant as we headed down the stairs, my focus on the seating below.

“I don’t know. They *did* rent it for Trey’s wedding a few years back.” I shrugged, my eyes finally landing on a table of familiar faces. “Found them.”

“What?”

I grabbed Ally’s hand, intertwining my fingers with hers. “Just be on your best behavior.”

She met my eyes with complete indifference. “The only person you need to be worried about is yourself, Levi. If anyone is getting us in trouble, it’s going to be you.”

I rolled my eyes, tugging her along toward the bar on the far side, not far from the table where Rachel and her parents were sitting. “We’re not going to go straight to the introductions. I think we should have a drink first, just the two of us.”

“Because that’s what a normal couple would do,” she added, giving me an approving glance and falling in step beside me. We walked past the table, and I peeked over at Rachel, who was staring right at the two of us.

*Perfect.*

“What can I get for you?” the bartender, a pretty young blonde, asked us.

“I’ll have a piña colada” Ally beamed, giving the woman a smile as she slid onto one of the stools.

“And I’ll just have whatever beer you have on tap,” I said to her, before turning to Ally. “We need to make sure we look like we’re getting on.” Carefully, I placed my hand on her thigh, a jolt of excitement shooting through my core.

*Jesus, Levi. Get it together. You’re not sixteen.*

“This is breaking the rules,” Ally squeaked, her reddening cheeks surprising me.

“No, it’s not,” I argued, continuing toward her knee. “You listed very *specific* places on your body, and your legs were not on the list.”

“Levi...” Her voice trailed off, though her tone was that of a warning.

The sound of our drinks hitting the bar in front of us caught my attention and I met the brown eyes of the bartender.

“Thank you,” I said, giving her a smile. “You can put it on my room’s tab, 204.”

“Perfect,” she cooed, running her tongue along her plump red lips. “Anything else for you?”

*Really? Ally is right here.*

“Nope, we’re good, thanks,” Ally chimed in, her voice painfully sweet. Her hand brushed mine, and suddenly she was leaning into my shoulder...

Claiming her territory.

And *fuck*, that was hot.

*But it’s just a game.*

“Of course, have a great evening,” the woman replied, giving Ally a smile before walking away to another couple of customers. Ally pushed herself off of me the moment the bartender turned around.

Disappointment hit me square in the chest.

Man, this was going to be interesting.

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## ALLY

*I swear, women just flock to him.*

I took a sip of my drink, my lip curling at the amount of alcohol in it. Figured that she would mess it up after the way her eyes had raked over Levi. It didn't necessarily *bother* me, but I was in this predicament to win.

And I was *not* going to lose out on a million for some blonde bartender making eyes at him.

"You good?" Levi's brows were furrowed at me, his head tilted ever so slightly. "Because I would figure you'd need to come up for air at some point."

*Right.*

I sat my drink on the bar, realizing that it was already halfway gone. "I'm just prepping myself to socialize. It's what I do."

"Uh huh," Levi chuckled. "And considering you don't get out much, I think you should probably slow down. I saw you at the Christmas party last year."

My mouth dropped open. “I wasn’t even that drunk at the Christmas party.”

“Yeah, because standing in a chair and singing Jingle Bells with the janitor is something you’d do stone-cold sober.”

*Oof.*

“Leroy is a really good singer,” I muttered, my cheeks feeling hot at the thought. I *had* gotten a little out of control, but everyone else seemed to really enjoy it.

“You’re not though.” He snorted, taking a huge swig of his beer.

“I am well aware.” I laughed, relaxing a little. My eyes flickered over to the table where Rachel Lewis, her parents, and a man I figured to be her fiancé were seated. They were laughing and chatting, and I couldn’t help but admire Rachel. She was Hollywood gorgeous with long dark hair, olive skin, and bright green eyes. A perfect ten.

That’s what she was.

And there was no way in *hell* that she was going to buy Levi dating *me*. Don’t get me wrong, I was a pretty woman—and I had no problem catching the attention of the male gaze. However, I wasn’t Hollywood pretty.

I was just...*normal*.

“Let’s go.” Levi grabbed my hand and pulled me toward the table.



Apprehension built in my chest as I put the best smile I could on my face, approaching a table full of wealthy socialites—the kind that I had never really been around.

“Levi Lombardi, is that you?” An older, white-haired man said, setting his drink down on the table. “Well, I had no idea that you were coming.”

“Wouldn’t miss it,” Levi replied, not missing a beat. “It’s good to see you, Frank. This is my girlfriend, Ally Montgomery.”

The older gentlemen, Frank, turned to me, his eyes narrowing slightly. “You sure look familiar. Have we met before?”

“I work as Lisa Lombardi’s CPA for her investment company,” I said, giving him a smile. “I think I’ve been present in a few meetings, but that’s the only way I would think we’d have met.”

“Wait, are you Josh’s younger sister?” Rachel suddenly chimed in, leaning forward in her chair, curiosity filling her emerald-green eyes.

*Stunning.*

“I am,” I answered, ensuring my tone stayed light. “Is this your fiancé?” I gestured to the dark-headed hunk sitting beside her. He was like Thor, only in a business suit—and a little unpleasant.

“This is Rex Shultz, my fiancé,” she said in response, looking right past me to Levi, who had placed his hand on my

shoulder. “He has partial ownership in Ferrari.”

“Like the car—”

“Impressive,” Levi cut me off, sticking out his hand. “I’m Levi.”

Rex looked unenthused but shook his hand. “I know who you are.” The heavy southern European accent caught my attention, seemingly a little out of place with his looks, but I didn’t press. “It’s nice to meet you though. Thanks for coming.”

“Wouldn’t miss a chance to celebrate any win for the Lewis family,” Levi continued, his attention shifting back to Frank. “So, where’s Trey?”

Frank’s smile shifted downward. “He couldn’t make it I suppose. He had some new business deal in New York that he had to settle.”

“And it was apparently more important than my wedding,” Rachel snapped, her irritation jolting. “But you know how he is.”

“Family should always come first,” Frank agreed with her, giving her a sympathetic look. “No matter how great a business deal, nothing comes above the people in our lives.”

I nodded, realizing what Levi had meant when he said that Frank was all about family—we hadn’t talked more than a few minutes and he was already pointing out values.

“Why don’t you take a seat with us?” An older version of Rachel, who I knew to be her mom, Liz, gestured to a couple

of empty chairs at the table. “There’s no need to be strangers.”

Levi pulled out a chair for me, and I took a seat beside Frank. Levi sat down beside me, placing his hand lightly on my thigh. A jitter of excitement rolled through my body.

*Ugh. What is it about this place that makes me feel like this?*

*Maybe it’s the alcohol.*

“So, I’m just *dying* to know...” Rachel leaned against her hand, elbow resting on the table. “How in the hell did you two end up together? Back when we all hung out, I thought Ally drove you insane.”

*And there it is.*

Levi shrugged beside me. “I guess things just changed between us. She was young, and I was really immature back then.”

*Smooth.*

Frank chuckled. “You were one heck of a kid. I wasn’t sure you’d ever slow down and grow up.”

*Ouch.*

“Yeah.” Levi’s smile stayed plastered on his face. “Something like that. I just know that one day I walked past Ally’s office and saw her in a different light. She works her ass off, and my mom swears that she’s never had a better CPA.”

Frank’s eyebrows shot up at the comment. “Coming from Lisa, that’s impressive. She wouldn’t say such a thing if she didn’t mean it.”

“Thank you.” I beamed, taking a sip from my drink. I glanced over to Rachel, who was still watching me closely.

And it was nerve-racking as hell.

“And I take it you’re still working for your father?” Liz asked, looking to Levi. “The last I talked to Margo, she said that you had moved up to CEO. That’s a big deal, congratulations.”

“Thank you,” Levi replied, acting as nonchalant as ever.

“So how long have the two of you been together?” Rachel interrupted the conversation, her eyes bouncing between the two of us. “This is just a *shocking* coupling. I never would’ve seen it coming.”

“We’ve only been together a few months,” I answered before Levi could. “It shocked me too. I always thought he was the most insufferable person I’ve ever met, but I guess it turns out he has a hidden romantic side.”

Rachel took a sip of her drink. “Now *that* is a side of Levi that I have definitely never seen. Please share how in the world this man can be romantic. In our entire relationship, I don’t think he bought me flowers more than just once or twice.”

I glanced over to Levi, giving him a look of disbelief. “Really?”

He shrugged. “I was just a kid.”

*A really dumb one.*

“Hardly.” Rachel’s crisp, somewhat salty response was surprising, and I couldn’t help but check out Rex’s reaction to it.

Nothing.

The man was lost in his cell phone.

Modern day love was weird.

“So, on our first date—one that he tricked me into,” I began, mustering up my courage to take the plunge, “he took me out on a yacht, and we went stargazing. It was really romantic. We talked all night, and yeah.”

Rachel did *not* look impressed. “Hmm, well, I suppose that’s better than being dragged to a house party for your first date. That’s what he did for me, you know. And *then* he forgot about me. He and Josh went home, leaving me to call Trey to pick me up.”

“Okay, we *really* don’t have to discuss that,” Levi leveled, shooting a look across the table that could kill. “I was nineteen years old, and I had *no* idea what I was doing.”

“Trust fund baby problems,” I mumbled under my breath, glancing around the table. I had never felt more disconnected from a group of people.

*How does Josh manage this?*

He had tailed along with Levi for years to all the high-class events—since before he even graduated high school. He made it look easy, and he never once mentioned to me that he felt out of place.

But my brother had charisma that I didn't.

"I think I'm going to get another beer," Levi said, breaking my thoughts. "Would you like another drink?" He looked over to me, motioning to the nearly empty glass.

"Sure." I smiled up at him.

He nodded, his expression less confident than it had been a few moments prior to us talking to the Lewis family. Levi turned around and weaved through the tables, heading back to the blonde behind the bar.

"So, why did Lisa hire you?" Rachel asked, her tone less than pleasant.

I took a deep breath—she was really going after me. "I was the top of my graduating class at UCLA and I got my master's degree while working full-time for Nike. She took me in as an intern after that, and my job just took off from there."

"Wow, you must have some work ethic," Frank chimed in, giving me a warm smile—the opposite vibe from what his daughter was giving off. "That's really spectacular. Your brother is smart too, though. I wasn't surprised at all when he landed the job working for Bitco as the sales director. I think you both must be products of a very hardworking family."

"Thank you," I said, genuinely touched by the compliment. "My parents owned two dry cleaners in the city, and they always worked very hard."

*Which is why I want to give back to them.*

“I came from very humble beginnings, and I think anyone can work their way to the top if they just have the grit to do so.”

“Do you ever take on any side projects?” Rachel asked, her voice shifting from bratty to just curious.

“I do occasionally,” I answered, my eyes flickering toward the bar. Levi was leaning against it, speaking to the bartender, and based on the look on her face...

I might be in trouble.

“I’m working on a new cosmetics line, and I do have a reliable CPA to handle some of the books, but it would be nice to have a second set of eyes to go over it. Any time there’s an opportunity to hire a woman, I’m all for it—female empowerment.”

I nodded, finishing the rest of my drink. “I’d be more than happy to talk more about it.” My eyes shifted back toward the bar at the sound of laughter.

*You’ve got to be kidding me.*

The blonde had her phone out, showing Levi something on the screen, her flirty giggles making my stomach flip. If I didn’t get over there, he was going to blow the deal before it ever even made it to the table.

Looking back at Rachel, I saw the sympathy on her face—and that only confirmed my fears. “I should probably call it a night,” I choked out, pushing back from the table. “The jet lag is giving me a headache.”

“Of course, we’ll see you tomorrow.” Frank beamed, not connecting the dots.

That I was aware of anyway.

I bid them all goodnight and headed for the bar, looping my arm right through Levi’s. “We need to call it a night.”

“What? Why?” He turned to me, giving me an annoyed look. “I was coming back with your drink.”

“Oh *right*, the drinks,” the bartender cooed, tapping Levi’s bicep.

“Don’t worry about it,” I quipped, dragging Levi away from the bar. “I have a headache.”

“Do you?” Levi asked, everyone at the table waving as we passed.

“I don’t,” I sneered as we made it to the stairs. “But you *have* to get your shit together, Levi. You can’t be bugging off and flirting with the bartender. That’s *not* what a mature boyfriend does. It made you look bad.”

“Oh, come on—”

“*No*,” I chided him, stopping at the top of the stairs, out of sight from everyone. “Everyone at the table noticed, especially Rachel. We’re not off to a good start.”

He sighed, running his fingers through his hair. “Fine.”

“Good.” I spun on my heel and headed toward the room. “You’re definitely sleeping on the couch, by the way.”



“Aw come on, Ally,” he whined from behind me. “You saw that thing. It’s tiny.”

“Don’t flirt with blonde bartenders and we’ll discuss a change in terms.”

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## 6

### LEVI

“**O**h my god,” I groaned, running my fingers through my hair. It felt as though I had slept on cardboard the entire night. My six-foot-three-inch frame did *not* fit comfortably on the small couch in the sitting room of the suite. In fact, based on the sharp pains in my neck and shoulders, I probably would’ve been better off crashing on the floor.

I reached for my phone, and nearly rolled my eyes at just how early it was. It was barely six a.m., but as much as I wanted to just roll over and go back to sleep, there was no way that was happening. Grunting out in pain, I sat up and rolled my shoulders, desperate to relieve the tension. Even, soft breathing filled the room around me, and I couldn’t help but glance over to where Ally was still sleeping.

It was kind of...*cute*.

Her face was pleasant, and the low light in the room illuminated her creamy skin. Her high cheekbones were still naturally shaded with a rosy pink, and everything about her was pretty. But really, she was more than just beautiful in the moment, she was...*enchanting*.

*Man, I must really be tired.*

I shook my head at just how ridiculous I was sounding in the moment. The lack of sleep must've been hitting me in weird ways—which is exactly why I needed to get out and clear my head. Grabbing some black running shorts and a white t-shirt, I got dressed and laced up my running shoes. Before slipping out of the room, I chugged a water.

You know, staying hydrated and all that.

Relief flooded through my body as I made my way toward the sandy beaches, picking up into a jog. Something about working myself physically put my mind at ease, and as my breaths deepened I started to think less about everything going on. My eyes scanned the blue waters, and I didn't even realize I was running *right* past Rachel.

Until she grabbed my arm.

Startled, I put on my brakes, stopping and spinning around to face my dark-headed, exotic ex-girlfriend. Rachel was a stunner, though I wasn't attracted to her in that way anymore.

“Hey,” she greeted me, her thick lips curling up into a smile. “I didn't expect to see you out here running. You never did that much running back in the day. Mostly just a gym rat.” She eyed my biceps, which I had to admit *might* have been a little smaller than they used to be...

But still.

*Ouch.*

“Yeah, I actually still go to the gym, but running seems to clear my head more than lifting weights.” I rocked back on my heels, her scrutinizing look catching me off guard a little. “I just try to put my mental health first. You know, I have a business to run. It’s important to keep a clear head.”

“Right.” She nodded, though her tone was that of disbelief. “And I guess your relationship with Alley wouldn’t have anything to do with *why* you’re out here running at the crack of dawn?”

“Yeah, I have no idea what you’re getting at, so I’m gonna go ahead and keep going...” I motioned awkwardly down the beach, taking a step in that direction. “I need to keep my time...”

“You know you hurt Ally last night?” she snapped at me before I could slip away. “That was the same shit you used to do to me back when we were together, and it just goes to show that some things never change. But seriously, that was *so* embarrassing for her!”

My stomach clenched at the irritation in her voice. “I, uh, didn’t...I—”

She cut me off by holding up a hand. “I don’t need to hear your excuses. I just saw the way she reacted to seeing that, and then the way she had to *drag* you out of there. Like, come on, Levi. It just wasn’t fair to her. You basically dumped her off at our table and made your exit like it was no big deal.”

I nodded. It was no secret now that Rachel wasn’t impressed at all by my actions—and maybe there was some validity to

what she and Ally were saying. “Yeah, well, it’s not really like that...” I choked out, not sure what I *should* say. All I knew was that I did *not* want to lose this deal.

And Rachel thinking I hadn’t changed...

That could be a problem.

“I’m just disappointed, that’s all. I was really hoping that you had grown up, especially considering what Ally was saying about your first date. That was really cute, and I thought you know, the two of you *actually* are kind of cute together.”

“Right,” I said with a nod, my head beginning to spin. “I was just trying to get our drinks and that bartender was being so flirty—I just was trying to be friendly.”

“While ditching your beautiful, intelligent, charming girlfriend. I feel for her—I really do.”

“I better get back. I told her that I was going to pick her up breakfast once I was finished running—I don’t want her waiting on me,” I said quickly, spinning around.

“*Right*. Well, why don’t the two of you come play beach volleyball with us after lunch today?” Rachel laughed before heading off at a jog herself.

I chuckled as I left her, though I didn’t feel any sense of humor. In fact, I was borderline panicked.

*I have to make this right.*

Jumping over the beach chairs and sprinting back to the resort, I stopped in at the gift shop, buying a bouquet of bright exotic flowers. I tucked them under my arm and picked up a few doughnuts for Ally as well. If I was going to play the game, I needed to do it right.

Because I needed to win.

Using my hip, I pushed open the door to our room, my gaze going straight to Ally, who was still sleeping. Taking a deep breath, I steadied my heart—which must've been racing because of how fast I'd been moving.

“Good morning.” I cleared my throat, stepping up to the side of the bed.

Ally's eyes fluttered open, her blue irises reminding me of the water I had just viewed on my run. “What is this?” She pointed to the flowers and food I was holding, her voice full of sleep.

“Uh, it's for you.” I held out the flowers as she sat up in bed.

Suspicion was written all over her face as she narrowed her eyes, taking the bouquet from my hands. “You got me flowers?”

“And doughnuts.” I held out the small white bakery box and smiled. “As an apology for last night. I shouldn't have been flirty with the bartender. I mean, she doesn't even hold a candle to you. You're way hotter.”

She laughed, shaking her head, though she did accept the box. “You know that these grand gestures are great, Levi, but...” Her voice trailed off as she opened the box, revealing three heart-shaped doughnuts.

“Those are especially made for you,” I pointed out, wiggling my eyebrows at her as she looked back up at me, her auburn hair in a messy bun on her head. I didn’t even want to admit how gorgeous she looked.

“This is really nice of you, but Levi”—she reached out, gripping my forearm—“a gesture done behind closed doors doesn’t help impress Frank.”

*Right.*

“It might put you in a better mood—and get me off that.” I pointed to the couch. “I mean, I slept like *shit* last night. Everything on my body hurts today.”

“That’s really dramatic,” she snorted, taking a massive bite of her doughnut. The pink glaze matched her nails, and something about that made the moment even more adorable. “But we’ll see. This bed is *really* big and comfortable. I guess maybe I could share at some point.”

“Oh, come on,” I whined, plopping down on the bed beside her. “If I keep getting horrible sleep, I’ll ruin this for the both of us.”

“Wow, so you’re trying to blackmail me into letting you share the bed.” She shook her head, handing me one of the doughnuts. “It’s very sneaky, but I have to say...” Her voice

trailed off as her eyes held mine. “It’s clever. You’re good at playing the game.”

I couldn’t help but laugh, ignoring the way my heart flipped in my chest. “I am good at this.” I took the doughnut from her, shoving the entire thing in my mouth. Her eyes went wide as I downed the thing, before standing up and heading to the coffee machine. “You want coffee? We’re supposed to play beach volleyball with Rachel and Rex this afternoon.”

“Oh?” She picked up the flowers from the white duvet, putting them up to her nose. “So when did you decide this?”

“I went for a run this morning,” I began, filling the coffee maker. “And Rachel just so happened to be running down the beach as well. She invited us to come and play this afternoon. I thought it might be the perfect way to put our relationship out there. Rachel is going to be the hardest to convince that I’ve changed—and you were right, I’m not doing so great at that right now. I need to get my head in the game.”

She nodded, flipping back the covers and revealing her long, tan legs. My body stirred as I took in the way her shorts were tucked up around her inner thighs.

*Fuck, she’s gorgeous.*

I ripped my eyes from her, spinning back to watch the coffee drip into the pot. “It’s not until one p.m. though, so we can do whatever you want—or you can do something on your own. I don’t want you to think that you have to spend the whole time with me. That might get annoying.”



“Uh, well.” Ally’s voice was closer. “It would look weird if we weren’t doing things together.”

I spun back to look at her, startled to catch a whiff of her warm amber perfume. “Yeah, so that’s probably a good idea. I just know that we don’t really get along.”

“I think that we’ve been doing fine.” She shrugged her shoulders, her brows furrowing. “We just have to keep reminding ourselves what we’re in this for. Last night can’t happen again. I definitely think Rachel is skeptical of us, and I think that we’re going to have to prove her wrong.”

I nodded, pouring a cup of coffee and handing it to her. “Okay, so what do you want to do? Wear matching outfits and go galivant around the island?”

She laughed, the sweet tone of it making me smile. “Nix the matching outfits, but yeah, let’s go *galivant*.”

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## ALLY

“I suck at volleyball.” I glanced up at Levi, who was giving me a weird look as we headed toward the beach after lunch. “Like, I’ve never been very athletic. The closest thing I did to sports was the mathematics team.”

“Great, so we’re gonna lose then,” he huffed, rolling his eyes. “I never lose. I knew you were a nerd, but geez.”

I shook my head. “Just when I thought you had the capability of being a decent human being, you have to go and remind me just how arrogant you really are. I’ll be fine—and so what if we lose? It’s just a game.”

He chuckled at my comment and grabbed my hand, sending a jolt of excitement through my chest. “For the show.” He held my hand up as I furrowed my brows. “There’s no way I’d be walking around not holding your hand.”

“Okay.” I let out a sigh, looking away from him. I was so aware of his touch, more so than I had ever been before.

*It’s just because it’s Levi.*

Staring out at the ocean, I focused on the clear blue-green waters. I had never been to a place like this—probably because I couldn't afford it. It was breathtaking. I reached for my phone in the pocket of my shorts, stopping Levi at the edge of the water.

“What're you doing? It's already one o'clock—they're just down there.” Levi pointed toward the group of people setting up a volleyball net.

“Okay, that's fine, but I want a picture of this.” Dropping his hand, I opened up the camera and held it up to capture the water. “I want to send it to everyone.”

“Here.” He took the phone from my hands, gesturing for me to go out toward the water. “It'll be better with you in it.”

I spun around, hiding the blush growing on my cheeks. “Right.” My reply sounded squeaky, and I took a deep breath as I waded out into the warm Caribbean waters.

*Stop letting him get to you.*

“I don't think your family and Linley will want to just see a butt shot, Ally. Turn around.” Levi's voice was full of amusement, and I shook my head as I spun around. It was a good thing I had a naturally red complexion—otherwise, I'd be *screwed*.

“This better?” I forced the biggest cheesy smile of my life, throwing my arms up in the air and bending a little at the knees.

“Yeah, just like that.” Levi burst into laughter, his head tipping back.

I joined in before noticing that he was taking more pictures—and smiling at the screen as he did. It was genuine too.

My heart flipped in my chest.

“That’s probably good.” I cleared my throat, heading back toward him.

“Oh, absolutely not.”

“You want me to take your picture then?” I offered, holding out my hand for my phone.

“Nah, I don’t need any solo pictures. I think we should take one together.”

Before I could say anything, he threaded his arm around my waist, pulling me into his chest. My breath hitched at the contact, and I hoped to God he didn’t notice. His fingers brushed my bare skin as my tank top blew up a little in the breeze, and my entire body reacted.

*Embarrassing.*

“Smile.” He held my phone up, pressing his cheek against the top of my head. I forced my best smile as he snapped a couple of pictures of us. As soon as he was done, I pulled away and grabbed my phone. I shoved it back in my pocket, not even wanting to look any closer at what he’d captured.

“Come on. We’re gonna be late,” I choked out, taking off toward the group of people just down the beach.

“Hey, wait!” Levi called after me.

But I didn’t.

I needed a break from being alone with him. I could still feel his fingers against my bare skin, and the excitement it had caused was just *way* too much. If I wasn’t careful, I was going to lose my head.

And actually develop a crush on him.

*Yikes.*

“Hey, you two!” Rachel called out, adjusting her thick, white-rimmed sunglasses on her face. I glanced over, seeing that Levi had easily caught up to a jog beside me. “You made it just in time. Want something to drink?”

“Yeah, the cooler is right over here,” Frank spoke up, dropping his book from his face just long enough to give us both a smile and point to the black Yeti just to the left of his beach chair.

“The selection is shit,” Liz huffed, her displeasure visible even with her gawdy designer sunglasses on her face. “I wish we would’ve thought to bring our own from home.”

Frank let out a heavy sigh. “I think the selection is just fine.”

“Well, then that’s all that matters.”

Rachel laughed and shook her head at them. “Mom’s in a mood today.”

“She’s always in a mood,” Rex muttered under his breath from a few feet away.

Rachel blinked a few times before clapping her hands together. “Who’s ready for some beach volleyball? I know I am!”

Levi and I exchanged a glance but nodded. This was going to be interesting.

“Are you ready to kick some ass?” Rex shot a wink at Rachel.

“Wait.” I turned to Levi as the two of them positioned themselves on the other side of the net. “Is it just *us* against them? Like no one else is on our team?” I nervously glanced over to just Rex and Rachel, standing in a diagonal formation.

“Yeah, it’s just the four of us,” Rachel called out before Levi could answer. “Most of the wedding party and guests aren’t arriving for another couple of days—and the ones who are here are too busy doing whatever to hang out.” She sounded a little put out about it, but I wasn’t going to pry.

“You’ll be fine.” Levi patted my shoulder, before guiding me to the front corner, opposite Rachel. “I can cover most of the space.”

“Can you?” I spun around to look at him. “Because I don’t think you understand—I’m *not* good at this kind of stuff.”

“Fake it ‘til you make it.” He nodded, before jogging backward in the sand to his spot.

I turned back toward the net, my eyes landing on Rex, who was readying the white and red ball.

*Oh my god, I'm going to make myself look like such an idiot.*

Heart pounding, the best I could hope for was that Levi really *could* cover all the space like he said he could. I mean, I wasn't like *scared* of the ball...

I just had *terrible* coordination. I was more of a spin class kind of girl.

"Heyo!" Rex shouted as he popped the ball into the air. I watched it, relieved that it was heading right to Levi. With ease, Levi tapped the ball back over the net. He hit it back and forth to them, and it wasn't long before I saw just how athletic Rachel was. She was dodging and diving to hit it...

*I am so not Levi's type.*

Which wasn't a surprise. I knew that I wasn't. But something about the thought in the moment made my stomach flip. I pushed some of my auburn hair out of my face, and pulled the black hair tie off my wrist.

"Oh, she's getting serious!" Rachel called out, a huge grin on her face as I put my hair up.

"She's not even doing anything," Rex laughed. "She is the epitome of standing there and looking pretty."

"Shut the fuck up," Levi shot back at him, startling me. "She'll get this next one, won't you, baby?"

*Baby.*

I whipped my head around, his dark hazel eyes jarring me a little. “Yeah, I’ll try.”

He gave me a reassuring smile—another one that I’d never seen from Levi before. He was *really* doing well at putting on a show.

“Here we go,” Rex called out, serving the ball.

“It’s yours.” I heard Levi’s voice behind me.

Anxiety filling my body, I went for the ball, mimicking the finger tap thing that Rachel did. I hit it straight up—and it did *not* go over the net. Levi dove forward, tapping it just before it the ground...

But his effort wasn’t enough, and the ball whirled off to the right.

Rex burst out into laughter. “I knew she wasn’t any good.”

“Ignore him, Ally.” Rachel gave me a smile. “He’s just a trash talker. He’s all bark, no bite. I swear, you can probably run circles around him when it comes to all that accounting you do.”

That did *not* make me feel any less embarrassed in the moment.

“You’re just fine, Ally,” Levi’s voice came out soft beside me. “It was a solid hit, you just have to hit more toward that side.” He gestured toward Rachel and Rex. “You’ve got this.”



A smile tugged at my lips as his hand brushed down my shoulder. He backed up into his corner and tossed the ball back to Rex.

“Should I go easy on her?” Rex teased, lowering his sunglasses to look me right in the face.

“Give me your worst,” I called out to him, my voice coming out confident.

“Atta baby!” Levi hollered from behind me. “You heard the lady, Rex. Give us your worst.”

He grinned and with one swoop of his arm, he served the ball. It went in Levi’s direction first and he quickly hit right back over the net. It went back and forth, Rachel catching most of the hits on her side. After about six times, Rex dove forward, and the ball flew *right* to me.

*Shit.*

It was a direct hit, just a couple inches above the net—the opposite of how it had come from above before.

*How the hell do I hit that?*

I lunged and palmed it, but it came out in more of a downward motion. My hand collided with the ball, and it tipped back over the net, crashing in between Rex’s legs.

“Fucking spiked it!” Levi pumped his fist in the air and lunged for me, wrapping his arms around my waist. I squealed out with laughter as he lifted me into the air. Rachel’s laughter resonated in the background, and my eyes locked with Levi’s as he sat me back to the ground.

But instead of backing away, he leaned right into me.

His nose brushed mine and before I even could comprehend what was happening, his lips crushed to mine. I caught my breath, hesitant as his tongue brushed my lower lip. I parted them and he dove into my mouth, tasting like beer. Fireworks exploded through my entire body and he pulled me closer to him, his tongue canvassing every inch of my mouth hungrily.

His hand stayed planted on my lower back as his other threaded through my hair, holding my face to his. I could *feel* him becoming aroused against me—and it was *so* fucking hot. I pressed myself against him and a light moan escaped his lips. And for a moment, I forgot that we were in front of everyone...

Until Levi suddenly pulled away from me.

He looked away from me, so I had *no* idea what he thought about what had just happened. My fingers flew up to my puffy lips, and I whipped my head back to Rachel and Rex, who were heading back to get more drinks. No one had paid any attention to what just happened between us, probably thinking it was just normal...

But *nothing* about that kiss was normal.

I rocked back and forth from left to right, stealing a glance back to Levi. He wasn't looking at me. In fact, he was staring directly ahead, the expression on his face entirely unreadable.

*Fuck me.*

## LEVI

“So how’s everything going?” Josh’s voice asked on the other end of the phone. “Have you managed to talk any business with Frank?”

“Uh, not yet. It’s only been a couple days.” I sat on the edge of the bed in the room, trying not to let my mind wander back to the volleyball game. Ally was getting ready for a night out with Rex and Rachel, and it was taking everything I had not to barge into the bathroom and take those luscious fucking lips again. She was *better* than I’d imagined in my alone moments.

And that was terrifying.

I could *not* let it happen again—but damn, it was hard to keep my mind under control. I wanted her *so* bad.

“Ally sent me pictures. The place looks really nice.” Josh brought me back to reality.

“Yeah, it’s nice. I had no doubt it would be, knowing the Lewis family.” My eyes flickered to the hallway at the sound of the bathroom door clicking open.

“Is Ally having a good time? Are you being nice to her? She looked *really* happy in the picture you took of her, laughing like that.” His voice came out unsure and a little suspicious.

“It was probably Rachel making her laugh,” I grunted, not even wanting to admit just how much I’d enjoyed that moment of taking her photo. “The two of them have hit it off.”

“Is that Josh?” Ally asked, suddenly appearing from the hallway. She was in a *tight* black dress, with cutouts at the side. She looked fucking *hot*. I was going to have to adjust to keep my head under control. “Is it?”

I blinked a few times, picking my jaw up off the floor. “Yeah, it is, but it’s time for us to get down to the lounge and meet up with Rachel and Rex.”

“Yeah, you two go have fun. And hey,” Josh added.

“What?”

“Take care of my sister, man. I know that the two of you don’t get along, but don’t let anything happen to her.”

“You got it.” I hung up the phone and shoved it in the pocket of my pants. I had opted to dress up a little for the evening, and I was glad I did, because Ally was looking extravagant.

In an effortless kind of way.

“So where is this lounge we’re going to?” Ally asked, her eyes meeting mine as I stood to my feet.

I swallowed the thought of what I'd really like to do. "It's downstairs, but on the other side of the place."

"Okay." She smiled up at me, but I looked away, slipping past her to the door. I'd never had to worry about holding back from a woman before—and I wasn't even sure if I'd ever felt so much chemistry and attraction in my entire life, anyway. I opened the door for her, keeping my eyes straight ahead rather than taking in her ass...

It was torture.

Taking a deep breath, I followed her out and we headed toward the grand staircase. When we got to the opening, something soft and warm slid into my hand. My heart stumbled over itself in the most obnoxious way...

And I jerked my hand away.

"Are we not doing that now?" Ally's face filled with confusion—and maybe a little *hurt*.

*Fuck.*

"No. Don't want to be over the top," I grunted, taking off down the stairs and leaving her to trot to catch up. I headed right to the lounge, overlooking the water on the other side.

"Can you please just slow down?" Ally huffed, her heels clicking on the beige tile. "I'm in heels and half your height for heaven's sake."

"Exercise is good for you," I snorted, glancing back at her struggling to keep up. A pang of guilt hit me, but I brushed it off. This was the same Ally as before—nothing had changed.

*She's just Josh's annoying little sister.*

*Who I've kissed...once.*

Eyes ahead, I led the way to the bar, relieved when I caught sight of the neon lights. Palm trees glistened in the low light, and the bar was playing some kind of exotic music. I immediately saw Rex and Rachel on the dance floor, grinding against each other.

*Oof.*

My mind filled with images of Ally grinding against me in that manner—and my body instantly perked up at the thought.

*I could just take her back and lift that tight little number right up...*

My mouth went dry as we stepped into the bar, Ally's arm brushing against mine. I ignored the jittery sensation, heading for the bartender already eyeing us—well, *Ally*. He wasn't that old, probably around my age, with dark hair and bright green eyes.

Eyes that were raking over her body.

And it pissed me the fuck off.

“Hey, you!” Rachel called to Ally, running up and wrapping her in a hug. “I'm so glad you came out with us tonight.”

*She's already drunk.*

“I'll let you two chat, I'll grab some drinks,” I said to Ally, my lips staying flat as I weaved through the crowd to the bar.

It was packed, and that was fine. Maybe it meant that we wouldn't have to stay out very long.

Not that I needed to go back to the room.

*Fuck these conflicting feelings.*

“What can I get for you, sir?” the bartender asked, his eyes glancing past me back to Ally and Rachel. I wanted to punch him out.

But I just smiled. “I'll just have a piña colada and whatever's on tap.”

“Perfect, the lady's drink is free.”

I rolled my eyes. “Thanks.” I stood there at the bar while he made them, using it as an excuse to avoid Ally for a few moments. In front of Rachel and Rex, I knew I would have to show *some* affection—especially after the heated kiss we'd shared on the beach. I didn't want them to think that Ally and I weren't good.

“Here ya go.” The bartender set the drinks on the bar and I grabbed them up, giving him a nod before heading to the group of women congregating. I realized that some of the wedding party must've shown up for the outing, though I didn't recognize a single one of them.

“Thank you,” Ally said as she took the drink from my hands, sipping on it. “I'm dying of thirst after practically *running* here.”

I shrugged, avoiding her eyes. “Dramatic.”

“Alright then,” she snapped in a low voice. “Good to know what kind of mood you’re in.” Her auburn hair was in waves down her back, and they bounced as she spun around to cheese it up with Rachel and her friends.

The snide little reply made my chest burn with irritation, and I headed for Rex, who was standing at the rail, looking out over the dark ocean waters. Maybe it wouldn’t be so hard to keep my distance from Ally after all.

“Hey man, we haven’t really had a chance to talk much since I got here,” I greeted him, holding out a hand for him to shake.

He eyed my hand and reluctantly shook it. “Yeah, everyone has been pretty busy.”

“Is your family coming out for the wedding on Friday?” I leaned against the rail opposite him, sipping on my beer—some kind of ale that I was *not* a fan of.

“They’re very busy people, and won’t be flying in until Thursday for the rehearsal dinner. Not everyone can just go jetting off for a full two weeks.” He sounded a little salty about it, but I just nodded.

“Yeah, so where are you from? I can’t place your accent.”

“Rome.”

“Cool.” I gulped my beer down, feeling more awkward than I ever had in my life. It made sense for Rachel to be with someone who was about as exciting as a rock, but damn, he was *not* an easy conversation. I gazed out toward the water,



seeing a few people out and about on the beach, walking hand in hand. Something in my gut shifted at the sight, and it felt a little like longing.

“Your woman is being hit on.”

I spun around, Rex’s voice inciting pure jealousy. My eyes landed on Ally, downing the rest of her drink and laughing with a blond-headed guy. He was gesturing out to the dance floor, and I saw the confliction written all over her face.

*Oh hell no.*

Tossing my beer into the trash, I headed right for the two of them, grabbing Ally’s elbow lightly as I made it to her. “Let’s go dance, baby.” I took her empty glass and handed it over to him.

“Uh...” She looked up at me, and then over to the guy. “Okay.”

“I thought you said you don’t dance?” the dude offered up, raising a quizzical eyebrow at her, holding the glass.

“Just not with you, buddy.” I patted his shoulder as I led her out onto the floor. “She’s taken.”

“That was smooth,” Ally snorted as I turned to face her in the middle of the dance floor. I made sure to lead her out far enough that we were surrounded by a thick crowd of people. “Took you long enough, though.”

I threaded my arm around her waist as we swayed. “I was just distracted by a *very* interesting conversation with Rex.”

She wrinkled her nose. “Is that even possible with him? He’s literally the dumbest person I’ve ever met I think.”

A chuckle slipped through my lips. “He is very dull, but I’m convinced that maybe he just doesn’t like us very much.”

“I can’t blame him. Must be intimidating to see a power couple like us.” Her blue eyes twinkled as they peered up into mine.

“Yeah, *us*,” I echoed. “That’s what we are.”

“Absolutely.” A giggle left her lips as I tugged her body into mine. My hands brushed along her hips as she worked them back and forth. “You’re bending the rules.” Her eyes dared mine as I drifted a little lower.

“Is that what I’m doing?” My breath hitched as she spun, putting her back to me.

*Fuck.*

She put her hands in her hair and grinded her ass against me. My hands remained on her hips, enjoying every second of *this* Ally. I’d seen her let loose before, but *damn*, I had never experienced her at this level. The soft scent of lavender filled my nostrils as her hair tickled my nose. I caught myself leaning into her, enjoying the moment...

She spun back around, my hands gliding along the black fabric of her dress. Ally’s smoky eyes locked with mine, our faces closer than ever before. Every inch of my body was on *fire* for her. My heart picked up its pace, and suddenly I

couldn't figure why I would want to keep myself away from her...

*What happens here, stays here.*

She beat me to the punch, though. Her arms wrapped around my neck, bringing me to her. Ally's fingers threaded through my dark hair, tugging just enough to turn me on. Noses brushing, her lips pressed to mine. At first the kiss was hesitant, but the moment I kissed her back, she opened up for me, nipping at my upper lip.

I wasted no time, possessing her mouth like it was mine. The sweetness of pineapple was on her tongue as I continued to delve in deeper, holding her hips against my own. She was a good six inches shorter than me, but it still felt right. My erection was pressing against her lower stomach, and the way she rubbed against it was driving me *crazy*. I was full-fledged *throbbing* for her. We weren't even swaying anymore...

But I *definitely* wanted to keep this dance going.

I broke the hot kiss for split second. "Do you want to get out of here?"

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## ALLY

I couldn't tell Levi no.

And the moment the door shut behind us, he was on my body like he *needed* it. "You're so fucking hot," he murmured in my ear as his hands ran down my sides. My chest heaved with an excited breath as he pinned me against the back of the door. There was a part of me that was hesitant, worried that maybe we *shouldn't* be doing what we were, but my pussy was *ready* for him...

The moment his lips were on my neck, sucking my skin into his mouth, I felt my panties getting wet. I wanted him to touch me, let me grind myself against his hand. A moan escaped my lips as I pulled at the buttons on his white shirt, desperate to feel his skin against mine. His fingers stopped at the hem of my dress, slipping just underneath. The sensation of his warm touch sent a jitter of arousal through me, and I ripped at his shirt with more vigor. Slowly, he began to tug it upward, the cool breeze of the room's air conditioner tickling my moist underwear.

*Ugh. Just fuck me already.*

“You’re eager,” he growled into the nape of my neck, and I shuddered in response. In one big motion, he took my dress right up and over my head, tossing it to the floor. It left me in just a strapless black lace bra and matching underwear. His eyes raked over my half-naked body, his teeth tearing into his bottom lip. “You’re fucking gorgeous, Ally, and I’ve been *dying* to get my hands on you.” The lust in his voice was raspy, his eyes darkening as he came for me with a hunger greater than before. My eyes widened as he lifted me into the air, his hands squeezing my ass cheeks as he carried me to the bed. With a swift toss, I hit the white duvet.

“Take it all off,” I panted, my eyes on the tufts of black hair sticking out of his white shirt—that only had a few buttons remaining.

He gave me a wicked grin and unbuttoned the rest. He stripped it off his thick, muscular arms and I couldn’t help but pour my eyes over the washboard six-pack in front of me. I ran my fingers down my abdomen, going lower until I hit the hem of my panties. I slipped beneath them, finding my throbbing clit.

“Oh *fuck*, that’s hot,” Levi groaned as he caught sight of me masturbating to the sight of him getting undressed. “Keep doing that.”

I arched my back at the arousal building in my pussy, finding the dark sexual hue in Levi’s gaze to be one of the sexiest things I’d ever seen. He dropped his shirt to floor, his eyes still locked on the movements of my hand between my

legs. Leaning down, he ripped my panties down my legs, discarding them somewhere on the floor.

“I want to see all of you,” he huffed, his eyes lingering on my now bare pussy in front of him. “You’re so wet for me.”

“I am,” I panted, my voice coming out strained as I continued to masturbate. “But I want that cock, Levi.”

He went silent as he undid the black belt around his pants and dug out a condom from his pocket. He tossed the foil onto the bed and slowly unzipped his pants, his dick making a large outline in his navy boxer briefs.

*Oh god, he’s so big.*

My mouth went dry at the sight of his erection as he stripped out of his underwear, his cock bouncing free. I literally ached to feel it inside of my slick pussy, my walls pulsing at the sheer size. I already knew it was going to feel *so* fucking good.

“Fuck me, Levi,” I demanded, dipping a finger into myself as I bucked my hips against my own hand. “Come on.”

“I like it when you beg like that,” he growled, climbing onto the bed, his quads flexing as he slipped in between my legs. His taut, perfectly toned figure was on full display—and I couldn’t find a single flaw in his broad, athletic stature.

*He looks like a Greek god.*

He loomed above me as he made his way back to my lips, taking them with force. A bit of sexy pain pulsed as he bit my lower lip, and I let out a moan. He tugged my hand away from

between my legs, breaking the kiss to peer down at my fingers. They were glistening with the wetness of my pussy, and he brought my fingers to his lips, sucking them into his mouth. A guttural groan escaped him as he licked them clean. My lips parted with a sharp breath, burning the sight of him into my brain forever.

Once clean, he grabbed my other hand, pulling me into a sitting position. His hands slipped around my back to unhook the clasp on my bra. He set my small, but perky breasts free, his hands immediately palming them. The satisfied breath that left his lips sent more juices slipping from my pussy—and I was certain I was going to be making a mess on the duvet.

“Touch my pussy, Levi,” I demanded, my voice breathy as our eyes locked.

He grinned, his white teeth sparkling beneath the low lights of the room. “You’re so bossy—so *sexy*.” He brushed his fingertips down from my chest, running over the small hill of my stomach before reaching my sopping wet pussy.

*Oh yes.*

Using two fingers, he slipped between my wet folds, and I let out a cry as he began to tease my clitoris. My hips bucked against his hand, arousal building in my core as he kissed lower. Leaning down, his lips caressed my breasts, his tongue circling my nipple before sucking it fully into his mouth.

“Oh my god, Levi,” I panted, my fingertips brushing along his shoulders as he continued to worship me, his fingers taunting the entrance of my vagina. No one had ever taken this

amount of time when it came to foreplay before, and the heat in his touch was enough to nearly send me over the edge.

*He knows exactly what he's doing.*

His lips left my breasts, slowly working their way down my abdomen, and my stomach fluttered with excitement as he neared my throbbing pussy. Still rubbing my clit, he kissed my inner thighs.

“You’re so sexy, Ally,” he groaned as his eyes alighted with lust, pausing to lick his fingers again. The loss of his contact left me aching, but the way he was looking at me left me feeling more wanted than ever before.

And I wanted his cock inside me. *Now.*

“God, just fuck me, Levi.” I met his gaze, and the hunger in his green-brown irises made my heart stutter.

A wicked smile stretched across his face and he leaned down, situating himself between my legs. “Not yet.” He kissed my clit before running his tongue where his fingers had just been. My knees shook with pleasure in response, and he groaned out in satisfaction, his mouth going to work as he slipped two fingers inside of me. He nudged and sucked gently on my clitoris, my hips bucking.

“You taste so good.” His voice was husky and raw, and I ran my hands down my body until I reached his soft, dark hair. I laced my fingers into his locks, squeezing ever so slightly as he sucked and kissed me, driving me right to climax. As my hips rocked against his face, the stubble on his jaw tickled in



all the right ways. I shut my eyes, the pure ecstasy crashing through my body like the waves of the ocean outside.

*Oh my god, this is so good.*

I bit my lip as I felt myself holding on tighter to Levi as his movements picked up speed. Levi slipped his fingers out and using both hands, he held me to him, forcing me to give into his raw strength. *He* wanted to be the one who brought the orgasm. The dominant move was so sexy...

An orgasm burst through my body, moisture streaming from my pussy. "Oh, *Levi*," I moaned, my entire body trembling as he lapped at the wetness, cleaning up any mess I would've made on the bed.

"You're fucking phenomenal." He reached for the condom, giving my pussy one last kiss. He eyed me as he tore it open, my chest still rising and falling heavily from the immense pleasure I had just experienced. He tossed the wrapper toward the trash before stretching the condom over his massive cock. New arousal thrummed through my body as he positioned himself between my legs, desperate to tighten myself around his raging erection.

"Tell me you want me to fuck you again, Ally." His voice came out raspy as he loomed over me, the tip of his penis teasing my entrance. "I want to hear you say it to me."

"I want you to *fuck me*, Levi," I leveled with him, daring him with my eyes as I propped myself up onto my forearms. "*Now.*"

He let out a guttural groan as he rammed his cock into my ready pussy, his hips thudding against mine. “You’re so tight, Ally. Oh my *god*.” His hands ran down my thighs and he leaned down, his lips brushing my forehead. “You’re so good, baby, so *fucking* good.”

I tipped my head back, catching his lips with mine. I lightly bit his lower lip, and he responded by slamming his hips into mine again. Crying out with a burst of pleasure, I gripped his shoulders, digging my nails in. He ravished my lips the same way he was ravaging my pussy, and I held onto him, savoring every bit of it.

Sex had never felt so fucking good.

He slipped an arm underneath my lower back and suddenly shifted me up as he leaned back. Never slipping out of me, he pulled me into his lap, his strong arms moving my ass up and down while my pussy ground against his hard cock. He tasted of beer and smelled of mahogany as I wrapped myself around him, my arms around his neck. I rocked my hips back and forth and he growled into my mouth, his body shuddering at my movements.

“You’re so sexy,” he murmured, letting me ride him, my legs wrapped around his waist. “I’m gonna cum for you.”

“Mmm,” I replied, his words nearly sending me over the edge again. “You can cum for me.” I rocked, letting the tension in his thighs guide me right toward the orgasm that I was so close to. His grip on my hips tightened, and he let out a loud moan as he stilled me against him.

“*Fuck!*” He leaned his head against my bare shoulder, his dick pulsing inside of me. Knowing that he was cumming caused my own arousal to peak, and I joined him in orgasm, pulsing around his dick. He pulled his head away from my neck, leaning in to kiss my lips once more, his tongue ramming right into mine, scouring every inch of my mouth. It was *hot* and passionate—and I clung to him for a few seconds longer, moisture seeping out from my pussy on his still slightly hardened cock.

We stayed there for a few moments longer, lost in a heated kiss, before he pulled away, his eyes suddenly searching mine.

“What?” I panted, my brows furrowing as I tried to catch my breath. “Is something wrong?”

He shook his head, planting a soft kiss on my nose before pulling me off him. “We just made the biggest mistake.”

“Um, *what?*” I knew I sounded like a broken record, but as he slipped off the bed, scooping up his clothes, I couldn’t help it. I’d just had the *best* sex of my life...

And he was already saying he regretted it seconds after finishing.

Levi continued his head shaking, only adding in a grumble as he slid on his boxer briefs. “That was the dumbest thing we could’ve done.”

“I’m confused,” I snapped, folding my arms across my chest and hiding my breasts. “You seemed to enjoy what happened.”

“I never said that I didn’t enjoy it,” he barked back. “All I’m saying is that we just really fucked up. Josh will *kill* me if he knows that this happened. Besides, I just broke all the fucking rules that you put in that contract—you basically can do whatever you want now.”

My mouth dropped open. “You’re being a jerk right now.”

“Wow, tell me something I don’t already know.” He rolled his eyes and grabbed his pants, heading toward the bathroom. The moment he disappeared, I jumped into action, scurrying around the room for my own clothes. I pulled back on my underwear and grabbed a sports bra out of my bag.

*Everything is fine. It’s fine.*

Except it didn’t *feel* fine. I had been expecting Levi to feel the same way I did about the intense encounter...

But that obviously wasn’t true.

I grabbed a pair of black cloth shorts and a tank top, quickly dressing and slipping into my sandals. “I just need to get some air,” I mumbled to myself under my breath, pushing my auburn hair out of my face. I slid my phone into my pocket and headed toward the door, desperate to escape the ruffled covers and reminders of the piece of stupid I had just done.

“Where the hell are you going?” Levi demanded, just as I reached for the handle. “Where are you going, Ally?”

“I just need to get some air.” I didn’t turn around to see him, ripping the door open.

His hand landed on the door above my head, forcing it closed. “I don’t think so. We need to talk about what just happened.”

“I think you’ve said enough.” I spun around, snapping at him. “You made it *very* clear.”

He let out a heavy sigh, his body looming above mine—feeling just as close as he was before, but so much further away at the same time. “No, I’m definitely not finished talking about it all. We need to talk about what the fuck we’re supposed to do now.”

Leaning my back against the door, my shoulders dropped. “I don’t know. I guess if it’s such a big deal, we just act like it never happened. We go back to following the rules and just no more touching me like that.” My voice dropped off with disappointment and I hoped he didn’t notice.

“I normally have no problem with sex and friends.”

*Good to know.*

“But...” His voice trailed off as he met my gaze. “You’re the younger sister of my best friend, so I just broke way more than the rules in that contract.” I could see the concern in his face, and as much as I was angry at him for it...

I understood.

“We won’t tell Josh about this,” I said, my voice coming out slow. “I guess it was just a one-time mistake.”

“A very fucking good mistake,” he grunted, pulling his bottom lip slightly into his mouth. “But it won’t happen again.”

We have to keep our pants on.”

“Got it. I’ll go buy a chastity belt in the morning.”

He smiled at the joke, though it didn’t reach his eyes. “If you put on one of those, there’s no way in hell I’m not gonna try to get that thing off of you.”

“Noted. I guess I’ll just have to dress like a nun.”

“Also a fetish.” He shrugged.

I squeaked, unable to hide my surprise. “I didn’t see that coming.”

“It was a joke.” Levi chuckled, running his fingers through his hair. “But seriously, we can’t let that happen again. I mean, I’m not gonna lie, I wanted to get you out of my system—something about being here with you, it just…”

“Yeah, same,” I said when his voice trailed off. “I guess it’s just the close contact and alcohol.”

He eyed me, tilting his head. “We each only had one drink tonight, Ally.”

“Well, it was a very strong piña colada?”

“Whatever helps you justify what happened.” Levi spun on his heels, heading toward the bed. “But I’m sleeping in the bed tonight.”

“Pillows between us.” I hurried behind him, grabbing a few pillows from the couch. I climbed onto the bed, fashioning them in row right down the center.

“Are you serious right now?” Levi burst into laughter, his voice light and humorous—like we hadn’t just had sex and regretted it.

“I am.” I leveled with him, flipping the covers back. “You’ve already admitted that you regret touching me. I’d hate for it to happen again.”

He nodded. “Alright. No touching then.”

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## LEVI

“So how have you enjoyed your first week here?” Frank asked me, sipping on his mimosa. He had agreed to brunch with me, and despite everything, I was nervous to bring up the business deal.

“It’s been great.”

*Especially the sex I had with Ally—that she thinks I regret.*

“It’s really a nice time of year to be here. Liz and I have decided that we might start taking an annual vacation here.”

“Yeah, I don’t blame you. It’s a nice resort. I came with the family a few years back. We all had a blast. It was memorable for sure. Not quite as memorable as this trip though. You know, with Ally. This is our first real trip together as a couple. It’s been really special.” The words came out easy, and I wasn’t sure if I was just a good liar, or if...

*Nah, no way.*

Frank’s grin stretched across his face. “I have to say, I remember when I first went on a trip with Liz. It’s like a whole new experience. You’ve never really enjoyed traveling until

you have a partner in crime for it. I can't imagine going anywhere without her."

I nodded. "I can definitely see myself being like that. I can't imagine going anywhere without her." My eyes drifted out the window of the restaurant, searching for Ally. She had sworn that she would be fine spending the morning on her own—and that she would *enjoy* it.

But I still kind of worried about her.

I had promised Josh that I would look out for her—and that's exactly what I had done. We hadn't spent much time, if any at all, apart.

And that wasn't my norm.

"I think Ally is a very nice woman," Frank said, nodding to me. "I think the two of you are a good match, too. It takes a strong woman like her to handle a man like yourself, though I think you've come a long way."

"Thank you. That means a lot coming from you." I picked up my own glass of water, sipping on it. I had been avoiding alcohol ever since Ally and I had, um...gotten a little too close. I didn't want to take any chances, because sober me *still* had to use my shower time very wisely.

She had been better than I could've ever imagined.

"I can't believe Rach is getting married today," Frank said with a sigh, grabbing my attention. "It seems like just yesterday she was a little toddler, playing fashion show in the living room. It's amazing how fast the time flies by. Before

you know it, you and Ally might have little ones of your own—and then *bam*, you'll be walking one of them down the aisle.”

*That escalated quickly.*

“Uh, yeah, maybe so. We haven't talked much about kids... *yet*,” I added when I saw his facial features shift. “I mean, we both want them, but there's no set time frame. I'm still working hard to grow my father's business, and then I'm hoping to expand on my own—you know, for the future of my own family.”

Frank's eyes narrowed for a moment. “I see, and what kind of expansion are you thinking, Levi?”

“Well, if I could, I'd love to have a shot at buying CyberSecure,” I forced out, mustering up the courage to just throw it out on the table. I mean, I had been here nearly a week and it hadn't come up at all.

I needed to get it moving forward.

“That's a big task for someone your age.” Frank raised an eyebrow. “It's an impressive thought that you have going though. I'm not selling it at a bargain though—and there are a lot of stipulations. I want to ensure that everything transfers over smoothly. Nothing worse than a change in ownership and a failed business.”

“I absolutely understand that, Frank. I think that I have the capabilities to run the business the way that you intended it be run.”

“That’s a big statement, son.” He folded his arms across his chest, leaning back in the wicker chair across from me.

I bit the inside of my cheek—he was *not* as open as I had hoped. “It is a big statement, but I’m trying to build a legacy for my family.”

“The family that you’re not sure you’re going to have?” Frank’s scrutiny made my stomach churn.

“Actually, I was hoping to let Ally in on thirty percent...” My voice trailed off as his face lit up at the mention. “She’s part of the legacy—and family.”

*Sort of, anyway.*

“That...that is what I like to hear.” Frank tapped his fingers on the white tablecloth. “But I’ll be honest with you, Levi. I don’t like to be out on family outings—or weddings—and discussing business. The wedding is tonight, and I think we should chat about this after the fact.”

“Absolutely. I completely understand that. It just came up and I thought I’d throw it out there that I—we are interested in purchasing.” I reached for my water, nearly gulping it down to quench my suddenly dry mouth. The last thing I wanted to do was put the man out...

Or rub him the wrong way.

“I get it,” Frank said with a grunt, forking a bite of his waffle. “I would’ve done the same thing. Like I said, we will definitely chat about it in the future. I’ve gotten a couple of

offers on it, but I'm going to keep being picky. I won't sell to anyone other than the perfect match."

"Well, I look forward to discussing it with you." I gave him a smile, taking a silent deep breath. It wasn't the *best* answer from him—but it was a step in the right direction.



"How did it go?" Ally asked the moment I stepped into the room, her eyes as wide as saucers. "Did I come here for no reason after all?"

I rolled my eyes at her sass—sass that I was seemingly starting to think was more funny than irritating. "It went alright." I knew there was no point in lying to her. She had thirty percent in the company anyway. "He seemed open to the idea. I don't know that he was as open as what I was hoping. He's got some other offers, but apparently he's going to be really picky. I think he's a fan of you though. Once I threw your name into the mix, he perked up."

Her eyebrows shot up. "Me?"

"Yeah, he's very into...family." I cringed at the same time she did, already reading into what I meant.

"So what? You told him we were going to have a family of our own?" Ally choked out, motioning between the two of us. "I don't really think that's something we can *fake*, Levi. In fact, that seems like the one thing I don't want to fake at all. I was just—"

“Stop,” I cut her off. “There’s no way in hell that we’re going to fake something like that. I think that I can just use it to sway him to the deal. No one says that we have to make our relationship work after the deal is over. People break up all the time—I mean, you and what’s-his-face were serious. You broke up.”

She blinked her eyes at me a couple of times, disgust filling her face. “Are you seriously bringing up my one serious relationship as some sort of example? Like, I get what you’re saying, Levi, and you don’t have to worry. I’ll happily support us breaking up. I just hate the fact that we’re lying to Frank. He’s a genuine guy.”

“Yeah, and he can think that we’re *genuinely* together.”

“You’re seriously so shallow.” She plopped down on the edge of the bed, her pastel blue dress spilling around her upper thighs. “I feel terrible for lying the way that we are.”

“So, halfway in, you’re what? Going to back out of the deal?” Irritation burned in my chest as I threw my hands up in the air. “I’ll book your fucking flight I guess.”

“I never said that I was backing out,” she snapped. “I’m just admitting that I feel *guilty* about lying to a man who is potentially going to sell you a multimillion dollar company—and make me a millionaire.”

“Okay, you’re acting like the man is *giving* it to us, Ally. I have to buy the entire business. It’s going to set me back every single penny that I’m inheriting.”

“So then why do it?” She looked up at me, confusion filling her face. “You have all the money you could ever want. What’s the point?”

“The point is that I want to have something of my own—to pass down to my children. It’s like my legacy. I get that I was born wealthy, but I still want to make a name for myself. CyberSecure is how I’d like to do it.”

She was silent for a few moments, her thick, seductive lips pursing as her eyes fell to her clasped hands. “I never knew that you wanted a family of your own someday.”

I shifted my weight to my heels, suddenly feeling more vulnerable than ever. “I...I do want a family of my own. Pretty much everyone wants one.”

“I think there’s plenty of people who want to be bachelors their whole life—my *brother* is one of them.” She rolled her eyes, picking at her nails. It was a habit that I’d never realized she had...

And it was strikingly cute for some reason.

I shoved the thought away. “Josh? Nah, he definitely wants to settle down one of these days. He just hasn’t met the right person yet. He’s working on it though.”

“Well, he never tells me anything anymore.” Ally shook her head. “But anyway, I hope that someday you get the family you deserve—and the business.” The sincerity in her voice was touching, but while it hit me right in the gut, I didn’t show it.

“You’re just saying that so you can become a millionaire. If I could convince Frank I was gay, I totally would’ve brought Josh instead. He would’ve made the perfect match for me if you think about it.”

“Oh my god,” Ally groaned, pushing her hair out of her face. “I swear there’s nothing you won’t do to get the company, is there? But yeah, you are way too much of a womanizer to fool anyone that you’re actually with Josh.”

“I’m going to take that as a compliment.” I snorted, turning around and grabbing my light gray shirt off the hanger. “I don’t know why every girl I’m ever with has to bring up my reputation. It’s not like I’m a bad guy.”

“First off, we are *not* together,” Ally pointed out, raising a brow at me. “And second, no girl wants to feel like just a notch in the bedpost. You’ve got a long list of high-profile ladies, and it’s probably just very intimidating to the women that you’re with.”

I nodded, though I had never once thought about that. “So are you trying to say *you* are intimidated by the long list of women I’ve been with?”

She laughed sarcastically, standing to her feet and patting me on the shoulder. “I hate to break it to you, Levi, but *no*. I still remember you as the kid who got a nosebleed in the middle of his baptism, turning the entire pool red—and then believed that Pastor Sarah had gotten her period when we told you. You don’t intimidate me.”

*Fuck. That was a bad day.*



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## ALLY

I stood beside Levi, my eyes drifting to Rachel as she appeared at the back of the sea of white chairs, her arm threaded through Frank's. Her wedding gown was a bright white, making the sand look a little less vibrant in comparison. It was a flowy, sleeveless bohemian style—probably designer, and her chocolate-brown hair flowed as freely as the dress in waves down her back.

She looked beautiful.

And as I gazed back to Rex, I saw emotion on his face for the first time since meeting the strange man. Tears glistened in his eyes as the soft music played, Rachel and Frank walking down the aisle in synchrony.

What a poignant moment.

It pulled at my heartstrings as the ceremony continued, and all of the longing that I had managed to shove into the depths of my being was brought back to the surface. Maybe I *did* want a happy ending, a husband, and even some kids.

“It’s windy as fuck out here,” Levi grumbled beside me as we sat back down in the chairs.

“It’s still beautiful.” I side-eyed him, not wanting to take a second away from the way that Rachel and Rex were staring into each other’s eyes, now holding each other’s hands. Levi chuckled beside me, but I ignored him, allowing myself to get lost in the precious moment between the two of them.

“I promise to love you no matter the season or the timing, and to always be a place of solace and safety for you,” Rex said to Rachel. She grinned at his vows, and I found myself smiling along with her, wiping the moisture from my eyes as they had their final kiss.

*Maybe someday someone will love me like that.*

I couldn’t stop the longing as they exited, everyone cheering around me. I joined them, but on the inside, I was reminded how many times things had gone wrong in my romantic life. I mean, I was *pretending* to be Levi’s girlfriend...

And *that* was the best sex I had ever had—not that sex defined a relationship.

It was just kind of pathetic that a fake connection was the closest I had come to experiencing the *real* spark that I had wanted my entire life. A hand slipping into mine grabbed my attention and I turned to look up at Levi, his shorter dark hair perfectly styled in a hipster side sweep as he gazed down at me.

“You ready to go do this reception thing?”

“Yeah.” I forced a smile back at him before looking away. I let him lead me through the sand, toward the large reception hall. They weren’t doing a typical dinner—just one massive party. And after getting to know Rachel, it made sense.

“I hope they have some strong drinks,” Levi muttered as we headed with the flow of the other guests up the hill. “Weddings suck.”

I raised my eyebrows at him. “I agree, but why do *you* think they suck?”

He acted like the question caught him off guard. “Uh, because it’s literally just one big party for two people who are agreeing to be forever chained to each other. Not exactly the most romantic thing in my opinion.”

“*Right*. And what do you prefer, Levi?” I quipped, shaking my head. My calves burned as we took the hill, and I pulled at the olive dress that Levi had chosen for me to wear to the wedding. It was gorgeous, but it was also *tight* and stopped at my mid-upper thighs. It was a little racy for me.

But the way I caught him staring at me in it was *hot*.

“I guess I just prefer to never settle down.” His voice brought me back to reality, though he didn’t sound nearly as certain as I expected him to.

“That’s kind of sad and lonely,” I remarked, letting out a sharp breath as we entered the grand reception area, where the party appeared to be in full swing already.

“I don’t see the point in relying on someone for anything,” Levi continued, his hand still warm in mine. “Honestly, most women just want me for my money, anyway. They see me as a bottomless wallet and they can do whatever they want.”

Looking up at him, I couldn’t hide my surprise. “Now that’s something I’ve never heard you say. I bet not all women are out to take advantage of you.”

“Yeah, right,” he snorted. “I can’t think of one that didn’t start dating me because of my looks and money. It makes it nearly impossible to find a real fucking connection.”

“I guess I could see that—but I don’t have that problem,” I added, my voice dropping a little.

“I’ll go get us a couple of drinks.” Levi ignored what I’d said, dropping my hand and heading toward the bar. Normally, I would’ve been annoyed by such a move, but a hand landing on my shoulder didn’t give me that option.

I spun around to see Rachel giving me a giddy smile. “You look beautiful!” I embraced her lightly.

“You look *phenomenal* in that dress,” she countered, gesturing down my body like I was a car for sale. “Like, wow, it brings out the little bit of green in your blue eyes and *pops* with your complexion. Love it, really. I bet Levi loves you in it too.”

“Thank you.” I felt my cheeks grow warm. “It was honestly such a lovely wedding.”

“Thanks, I never knew that Rex had it in him to be such a romantic, but he surprised me. It was impressive. We’re going to start trying for a baby, you know. I’m ready for that.”

“Oh *wow*.” I drew in a breath, shocked by the statement.

“Yeah, I know.” She laughed, pushing some of her dark hair behind her ear. “It’s just that, while I love my businesses and whatnot, I just want to be a mom more than anything—and I’m not getting any younger. I don’t want to be an old mom. I think that Rex will be an *amazing* dad, too.” She was rambling with the giddiness that one would expect on a wedding day, but the more she talked about it, the more it reminded me of how empty my life was.

*Stop feeling sorry for yourself, Ally.*

I smiled and nodded through the conversation. “I totally get it.”

“Would you want to have kids with Levi? I bet he would be a fun dad. When we were together we never really talked about that kind of thing, but I always thought that he would make a great dad. He has a great dad as a role model too.”

“Yeah, we haven’t really talked about it much, but I could see it happening,” I admitted, feeling an annoying little pang of emotion in my chest. Ever since landing on the island, I was thinking about Levi in that way more and more...

And I found myself actually agreeing with Rachel.

I *could* see it happening—and somehow in that fantasy, I saw myself as well.

*Yikes.*

“Cool wedding, Rachel,” Levi’s voice boomed from behind me, just as his arm came over my shoulder, holding out a glass of champagne to me. I took it from him, putting the glass to my lips, desperate to drink it all away—in the most healthy kind of way, of course.

“Thanks, Levi. I was just telling Ally how beautiful she looks in this dress. It really flatters her—everything about her.”

“I knew it would,” he said from behind me, his voice softer than I expected. “That’s why I bought it for her.”

“*Oh*, nice.” She beamed, reaching out and squeezing my arm. “Well, you two lovebirds have fun tonight. I should probably get back to socializing with all these people that flew all the way out here to celebrate with us.”

“Have fun,” I said, before turning around to peer up at Levi. “I think she’s already a little drunk.”

“*No way.*” He feigned shock, placing a hand up to his mouth. “If it’s my guess, I bet she pre-gamed the entire wedding. Stressful events are really her strongpoint.”

I nodded. “Good point, I guess. I don’t really know her, but I trust you. You wanna go dance or something?” I gestured out to the dance floor, thinking it might be a good distraction from all the unwanted feelings swirling around in my head.

“Actually, no.” He shook his head before grabbing me lightly by the elbow and steering me away from the dancing.



We came to a stop near the exit of the room and back into the resort, his eyes searching my face. “Something is wrong with you. You look like something is wrong—and I don’t want anyone to think we’re not good,” he added quickly, causing me to roll my eyes.

“I’m fine.” I took long gulp of my champagne, ignoring the way that he was looking at me in the moment.

“Yeah, I know you’re not. You’re pounding that champagne, and considering you’re a lightweight, you’ll be smashed before they even cut the cake.”

“Perfect. Then I won’t have to remember that I’m going to be forever alone.” I ripped my eyes from Levi and back out to the crowd, not wanting him to see just how much that really bothered me.

“Ah, I get it,” he said, his voice dropping in volume. “I guess to people who want to find their soulmate, a wedding might be like salt in the wound—but if it makes you feel better, fifty percent of people who get married will get divorced.”

I laughed at the well-known statistic. “Wow, that really makes me feel so much better.”

“Yeah, I bet it does.” He chuckled, then grabbed my hand. My heart jumped at the surprising contact. “But can I tell you something?”

I looked back up at him, our eyes meeting. “What do you need to tell me, Levi?” He hesitated and a glimmer of hope

swelled in my chest, all those feelings that I had worked to push away coming back to the top.

“I...” His voice trailed off as his jaw tensed. “It’s not easy for me to talk about this kind of stuff, but—but I think that you’re a real catch, Ally. I know that we don’t see eye to eye at all, but there *was* a reason that I chose you out of everyone else.”

“Yeah, because your options were limited.” I sighed, pushing a strand of auburn hair out of my eyes.

“Because you were the *best* option. You’re really something, and I think that any guy would be *crazy* not to see that. You’re beautiful, intelligent, charming, passionate, sweet—and a *freak* in the sheets,” he added, blowing out a sharp breath.

His words nearly made my head spin—was he admitting that maybe he had...*feelings*...

For me?

Our gazes remained on each other, my mouth growing dry as my apprehension rose to meet the tension that was settling between us. I could barely hear the music or the noise of the crowd, my mind running rampant with what all this could mean...

*Is Levi the one?*

“I’m just saying,” he continued finally, clearing his throat. “I have no doubt that the right one will come along one of

these days. He's going to see your worth, and I bet he'll write a hell of a lot better vows than Rex wrote for Rachel."

My heart sank, suddenly feeling stupid for even *thinking* that Levi might have legitimate interest in me. "I thought his vows were nice."

Levi chuckled. "Yeah, but nice doesn't equate to what someone like you deserves, Ally. You deserve your wedding day to be perfect."

*Just not with you.*

I swallowed the rejection creeping up, sucking the air right out of the room. "Thanks, Levi. That means a lot."

"No problem, kid." He patted my shoulder before someone called his name from a few feet away, waving to him. "Don't drink too many of those glasses," he added, pointing to my empty glass as he walked away.

"No worries," I muttered, staring down into the glass.

*Maybe I can just get a whole bottle.*

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## LEVI

*I shouldn't have said anything.*

My eyes flickered back over to Ally, pleasantly speaking with a couple women—none of which held a candle to her. She was easily the most beautiful woman in the room, and it was bothering the shit out of me that I felt that way about her. I really wanted to just blame it on the one wild night of sex with her, but...

There was something going on beneath the surface for me.

And that was *not* good.

I hadn't caught feelings for a woman since Rachel, and even then it hadn't escalated nearly as fast as what was happening with Ally. I was basically drooling all over her, and in the moment of talking to her about all that sad, sappy shit, my mind had actually imagined what *I* would say if I was to give wedding vows to my best friend's little sister.

Talk about a clusterfuck of weird emotions.

All of which needed to just go away.

Because one, Josh would kill me before I ever made it to the aisle and two, there was *no* way that Ally and me together for real made any sense. It wouldn't work in the world outside of this island. There was just no way. Ally and I had never gotten along, so why would that suddenly change? She was always the thorn in my side, and I was always the annoying vain guy who pissed her off just by breathing.

“Levi, do you mind if we chat for a few minutes?” Frank asked me, grabbing my attention away from my own thoughts.

I whipped my head around to the left, meeting his dark, friendly eyes. “Yeah, of course. What's up?”

He ran his fingers through his white stubble. “I know that it's getting late, but I thought that we might be able to discuss the deal with CyberSecure.”

I tried to remain calm, only allowing my eyebrows to raise slightly. “Oh, are you sure? I don't want to take away from family time.”

He smiled, his eyes lighting up. “Oh, I think we've had plenty of family time—I'm about to call it a night, if I do say so myself. I think everyone left is drunk except for you and me. I love my family, but once they're drunk—well, they're a bit much for me.”

“Getting drunk isn't really my thing anymore, so I understand,” I admitted, which was the truth. I *did* try to stay away from drinking too much. It wasn't good for my health...

Or my decisions.

“That’s a good thing to hear,” Frank said with a nod, wiping a few beads of sweat from his forehead. “I was just thinking that I might have come across a little too harsh on you when we met for breakfast the other morning. I can see that you’re very serious about purchasing the company, and honestly, I *do* agree that you could potentially be a great fit. I’d like to see the company go to someone who has plenty of years remaining to build it even larger than it already is. I don’t want to pass it on to someone who’s my age, looking at it as a way to retire in a handful of years.”

I nodded, hope building in my mind. “I think I could do well with it—without changing *too* much of what’s already there. I believe that you don’t try to fix what’s already working. I’d only look into expansion of new products or services, while maintaining everything else the way it is.”

He gave me an approving look, a smile still on his face. “I can really appreciate that view. I can also appreciate your choice in partner. I know that you mentioned Ally was going to be in on the deal with you, and I think putting that kind of trust in your partner is admirable. I did the same thing with my wife, and she makes the best business partner. I know it’s not for everyone, but after all my years, I can tell when a couple is compatible for business—and I think you and Ally have a great shot.”

My mouth dropped open, but I quickly corrected myself. That was *not* something that I would’ve thought—but whatever it took to get the deal, right? “Yeah, she’s agreed to a

thirty percent stake in the company. I think that's really all she's comfortable with taking on right now."

"I understand. It's a big step taking on a company like CyberSecure, but I have to be honest with you, Levi. I'll only consider the deal if she's going to be an active part of the company. I think her CPA skills and charisma could be a wonderful addition to the leadership that you bring to the table. You complement each other in that way."

"That really means a lot coming from you," I replied automatically, though my brain was now backfiring and spinning, trying to figure if there was any grounds to what Frank was saying...

*Maybe we're just really that good at acting.*

"Anyway, Liz and I are flying back home tomorrow. I know everyone else is planning to stay another week, but we have a lot to get done. I'm still working right now—not retired yet," he added with a chuckle, giving me a friendly pat on the arm.

"Right, I get that," I said, my heart dropping. I *had* intended to stay the second week, getting as much time in with Frank as I could, but now...

There was no point.

It would just be another week of trying to keep myself from Ally—and while I would love nothing more than to ravage her body every fucking minute of the day, it was *not* good for whatever feelings were hiding beneath the surface.



“I’m actually heading out tomorrow too,” I added, downing the rest of my drink. “Ally needs to get back to work and so do I.”

“Ah, so we’re like-minded then.” Frank laughed. “Fun is fun until it’s time to get back to the grind. I’ll be in touch with you in a couple weeks about the deal. I don’t want to rush things, and I’ll have a lot of making up to do once I get back. I’ve put a lot to the side planning for this wedding.”

I nodded, tossing my beer into the trash I was standing beside. “That sounds good. I’ll look forward to your call, and in the meantime, I’ll get to work on my business plan.”

“Atta boy.” He squeezed my shoulder before turning to go. “Talk soon, Levi.”

“Look forward to it,” I called after him. As soon as he had disappeared into the crowd, I took a deep breath, letting out a sharp exhale.

*This is looking good—really fucking good.*

A smile stretched across my face as I shook my arms out, bursting with excitement. I scanned the crowd for Ally, hoping to catch her and tell her the good news. After all, she benefitted from it all too.

And I was depending on her.

She would have to be a part of the business plan.

“Hey *you*.” A drunk Rachel waltzed up to me, reaching out to squeeze my arm. “I just want to say you are *so* cute with

Ally. She's the sweetest girl I have *ever* met. I hope that you marry her and invite me to the wedding."

I raised my eyebrows, amused by the drunk slurs coming from my ex-girlfriend. "You really need to find Rex and tell him it's time to get you to bed."

"Oh my *gosh*, you are *such* a party pooper, Levi." She let out a drunk-girl giggle, leaning on my arm a little more as she nearly lost her footing. "Dad said that you might be buying CyberSecure."

"Yeah, maybe," I answered her curtly, still searching the place for Ally. The crowd had thinned out significantly, mostly made up of drunk people getting down awkwardly on the dance floor. I turned back to Rachel. "Have you seen Ally anywhere? I really need to find her."

"Ally? Yeah, yeah, I have." Her sleek brows furrowed as she put a manicured finger up to her red lips. "*Oh*, she told me to tell you that she was tired and she was going to bed. I *completely* forgot to relay the message—my *bad*." She started to giggle again and I rolled my eyes, peeling her hand off my arm.

"You *really* need to go find Rex, Rach." I shook my head as she cackled more, before sauntering right back out into the mixture of people.

*She's going to have a hell of a hangover on her honeymoon.*

Slipping effortlessly through the room, I slipped out, heading back into the main area of the resort. It was

convenient that everything was all right here, and as I thundered up the grand staircase, I was thankful the room wasn't far away.

Because I was suddenly *irritated*.

Why wouldn't Ally have told me she was going back to the room herself? Was it really that hard to find me and just tell me? Was she avoiding me for some reason?

I reached into my pants' pocket, pulling out the keycard and opening the room. There was a soft glow coming from the main area, and the sound of the TV filled my ears. I let the door shut behind me and I flipped the deadbolt before heading down the hallway where I saw Ally, propped up on the bed, eating chips and watching some sort of chick flick.

"Why did you leave?" I demanded.

She slowly dropped her hand, which was holding a chip. "Are you mad at me?" Her hand hovered above the bag before she dropped it back in.

"Uh, I wouldn't say that I'm *mad*, but I'm definitely irritated that you couldn't take a minute to tell me that you were leaving. That reception area was *not* that spacious. It would've been easy to find me and tell me yourself, instead of relying on *Rachel*, who was drunk out of her mind, to tell me instead. It's amazing that she even remembered."

Her eyes widened. "I'm sorry. I didn't think it would matter. You were busy, and I thought it might annoy you."

I shook my head. “You said we have to act like a real couple. Well, if we were a real couple, I would’ve wanted to know that you were leaving—from *you*.”

“Okay, fine,” she snorted, reaching back into the chip bag. “I will make sure that I consult you before leaving a wedding reception.”

“Well, lucky for you, there won’t be any more of them. We’re leaving tomorrow,” I snapped. “I’m sending Jeff a text right now.” I pulled out my phone, typing out a quick text to our pilot, who was enjoying the resort himself while we were all here.

“What?” Ally exclaimed while I finished typing. “Why are we leaving? Is it all because I told Rachel to tell you I was going back to the room?”

I pressed the send button and shook my head. “No, I’m a dick, but I’m not *that* much of one. We’re leaving because Frank is also leaving tomorrow. There’s no point in hanging around when all his family is gone. Rachel and Rex will be off doing their own thing. There’s no purpose to us staying. I have plenty of work to get back to, anyway.”

She nodded before her face fell. “I guess the deal is off...”

*Oh yeah. The deal.*

“Actually...” A smile tugged at my lips. “I think we *might* have that in the bag.”

Ally dropped the bag of chips onto the bed beside her, lunging forward as her eyes lit up. “*Wait*, did he agree to it?”

Are you buying it?”

“Well, he’s going to consider it, and thinks that we could potentially be a good fit. He’ll get back with me in a couple of weeks. And knowing how Frank is, that means he’s serious.” I couldn’t hold the excitement back from my voice and I laughed as Ally hopped to her feet, coming right for me.

“Oh my *gosh!*” she squealed, jumping into my arms and wrapping hers around my neck. “This is so big!”

The scent of her warm amber perfume filled my nostrils, catching my breath as her breasts pressed into my chest, my arms wrapping around her waist and holding her bare feet off the floor.

*Fuck.*

The desire came rushing over me like a tidal wave as her cheek pressed to mine, her hair tickling my nose. My hands loosened on her waist as I tilted my head back, my eyes locking with hers. It was our last night like this...

*What’s one more time?*

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## ALLY

I caught my breath as the lust alighted in Levi's hazel eyes, his hand leaving my waist and threading through my auburn hair. He cupped the back of my neck, not hesitating for a second as he brought my lips to his.

*I shouldn't be doing this.*

All of the alarms were going off in my head as his tongue delved into my mouth, dancing with mine as he fisted my hair. The familiar taste of beer was in his kiss, and my pussy tightened as I felt his cock grow hard against me.

"Just one more time," Levi panted as he reached for the back zipper on my dress. "Then never again."

"Never again," I whined, backing my ass up against his dick. "But *god*, I want you right now."

Levi chuckled darkly as he pulled the zipper down, exposing my back. The cool air of the room sent a chill down my spine—or maybe it was the soft fingertips brushing down my skin, unhooking my bra. He gently pulled the material down, my dress and bra dropping to my ankles. It left my

nude-colored thong, my ass cheeks bare against the boner in Levi's pants.

And I was fucking *dying* for it.

"Do you like it like this?" Levi asked in a husky tone as he ground into my backside. "It's our last night, let's make it one to remember."

"Then fuck me like this," I moaned out as his erection brushed my pussy's entrance through my soaking underwear. "*Please.*"

"You are a fucking naughty girl." A groan escaped Levi's lips as his hands gripped my hips, holding me firmly against him as he ravaged me through our clothes. The way he was rubbing against me turned me on to the point that I could've orgasmed just like that.

*Everything he does is so hot.*

His fingers slipped under the satin material of my panties and he stepped back slightly, pulling them down my hips and adding them to the pile of clothes on the floor. Levi spun me back to face him, my body completely naked while he stayed clothed.

"God I could get used to seeing you like this all the time," he murmured, letting out a sharp sigh as his eyes raked down my body. "I'm just committing you to my memory."

My heart fluttered at his words, butterflies bursting through my stomach as he began to slowly strip in front of me, tossing his shirt to the floor. My eyes ran down his perfectly toned



chest and abs, my mouth salivating as he undid the button on his pants. He unzipped them, dropping his boxer briefs and pants at the same time, stepping out of them.

Before he could take a step toward me, I closed the distance, dropping to my knees and taking his cock in my hands. I stroked him using both hands, looking up and meeting his gaze. I gave him my best seductive grin, my tongue slipping past my parted lips. He let out a groan as I licked the tip of his cock, and slowly, I brought my mouth to the head of his erection. I took him into my mouth, using my hands at the base of his dick as I worked back and forth.

His fingers found my hair, holding it back from my face as I picked up my speed, fucking him with my mouth. “You’re *really* fucking good at this,” he forced out, his breath catching as I let him deeper into my mouth, bumping the back of my throat. “*Fuck.*”

I kept working back and forth before he finally stopped me, gently pulling me up to my feet. His lips met mine, his hands on my hips as he forced me backward, bumping me into the edge of the bed. He released me then, spinning me around.

“You said you wanted it like this,” he said, sticking his fingers into his mouth. Levi then took his moist fingers and added extra moisture to my already soaked pussy. He slipped a couple of fingers into me, working back and forth as his other hand forced me to bend over. “You’ve got the nicest pussy I’ve ever seen.” Levi ran his fingers over my wet folds, and I suddenly felt his lips, kissing my ass cheeks. He leaned back,

slapping me playfully and gently—and then going right back into my pussy.

His tongue slipped into my folds, running from my clitoris all the way to the end of my opening. My legs trembled and I let out a moan, considering begging for him to just fuck me right there, shoving his cock deep inside of me. However, I refrained, letting him bury his face in my pussy, bringing me pure ecstasy.

“*Oh, Levi,*” I cried out as he flicked his tongue back and forth, bringing me closer and closer to the edge of climax. My hips rocked back and forth, bouncing my ass against his face. I could feel the muscles tense, my toes curling into the bamboo flooring of the room as the orgasm burst through my body. Moisture poured from my pussy, and Levi let out a groan as he lapped me up, his hands running down my hips.

“Oof,” he blew out a breath as he backed away from me. “Stay just like that. I wanna fuck you just like that.” I smiled, hearing the condom wrapper tear behind me...

And then he took me.

He shoved his cock forcefully into my pussy, quickly taking me. His hands went for my hair, and I let out a cry at the tinge of pain mixed with pleasure. His other hand rested on my waist for a second before slapping my ass cheeks on both sides, one at a time.

“You’re the best fuck I’ve ever had,” he growled from above me. “Like, holy *fuck*, Ally. Your pussy feels *so* good.” The arousal and lust in his voice was the sexiest thing I had

ever heard, and the moan that escaped hopefully showed that as Levi continued to pound into me, our bodies filling the room with the thudding of skin and sex.

He slowed down after a few more moments, pulling out of me completely. “I need to see your face,” he murmured, flipping me around to face him. Levi lifted me onto the bed, but didn’t join me there, instead looming over the edge. Grabbing my legs, he lifted them straight up into the air, resting them against his chest and shoulders. Lightly, he kissed my calves, sucking a little skin into his mouth. He smiled down at me, positioning his cock at the entrance of my pussy, teasing me by just inserting the tip and then pulling it out again. He let out a sharp breath.

“Just fuck me, Levi,” I pleaded, meeting his eyes with mine. “I want that cock inside of me.”

“I just want this to last all fucking night,” he groaned, running his hands down my tan, lean legs. “This is the best fucking sex I’ve ever had. I don’t know how I’m going to go back to the real world and not fuck you every time I see you.”

My mind stopped for a moment, having trouble processing what I was hearing him say—right in the middle of fucking me. “I—”

“Don’t say anything,” he said, shaking his head for a moment, before shoving his whole cock into me. “Just let me fuck you like there’s no tomorrow.”

I let out a loud cry in response as he gripped my legs, his intensity speeding up as he rammed into my body over and

over. His dick was stroking something inside of me that turned me on all over again, getting lost in how good he felt in the moment.

*Fuck, this will be hard to give up.*

I stretched my hands over my head, resting my arms as I enjoyed the view of Levi standing above me, his eyes hazed over with lust as pleasure contorted his face, focused on where our bodies were intertwining. I shut my eyes, focusing on the sensation of his cock filling me over and over. My pussy tightened around Levi's dick as I neared a second orgasm, and my lower body tensed as it erupted, pulsing around his cock.

“Oh *fuck*, there you go.” Levi let out a loud groan. “Oh my *god*.”

“*Levi*,” I moaned out, riding the final few waves of my climax. It was the best one yet, and as my eyes fluttered open I was met with his intense stare, now focused on my face.

“I love it when you cum for me,” Levi panted, his intensity picking up as our gazes stayed locked. “You’re fucking perfect.”

“Just fuck me harder,” I whined, loving the way his hips were slamming into mine. He picked up the pace, letting out a chain of grunts. It was the sexiest noise, and I felt sexy as my breasts bounced with the motion of his speed. I lifted my hands, palming them for Levi.

“You’re gonna make me cum,” he panted.

“Cum for me then,” I demanded, my voice taking a raspy tone. “Cum for me, baby.” The nickname had slipped from my lips but I didn’t regret it, Levi’s body stilling as he tensed, filling the condom inside of me.

*Fucking perfection.*

He leaned down, placing a soft kiss on my lips before pulling out of me. “That was amazing, Ally.”

I raised my eyebrows as he headed toward the bathroom, and I sat up, pushing my hair behind my ear and trying to process what had just happened. Levi had said a *lot* during sex, and while I knew he was caught up in the moment, I also knew that there had to be *some* reason he’d said those things...

That stuff doesn’t just come from arousal.

I blew out a sigh as I headed toward the dresser, pulling out an oversized t-shirt and fresh pair of underwear. I wasn’t sure what to expect when Levi came out of the bathroom—was he going to go back to acting like this was the worst mistake of his life? Or was he going to maintain the same kind of attitude he’d had during sex?

“We should probably pack,” Levi said as he came back into the room. “Jeff wants to fly out in the morning. He said the weather conditions will be best to make the flight then.”

I nodded, swallowing hard as he rocked back and forth from his toes to his heels. “Okay, I guess I’ll get started working on that.”

“Yeah, I should probably get started on it too.” He cleared his throat, reaching to pick up his bag and tossing it onto the bed. “And for the record, Ally”—he turned to me, his hand resting on the bag—“I *don't* regret what happened between us.”

“I feel like there’s a *but* coming after that,” I said, letting out a nervous sigh. “If it’s because we broke the rules I set, I don’t think it’s fair to make me back out of the contract.”

He shook his head, a half-hearted smile growing on his face. “We both broke the contract, so I think it’s basically null and void—but either way, I’m not backing out of your thirty percent stake in the company. I wouldn’t do that to you, and there’s no way in *hell* I want to have to explain to your brother *why* the contract was broken.”

I burst into laughter, relief replacing the tension in my shoulders. “Honestly, I think he would probably kill us both. He’s never been easy on me. He’s always told me to stay away from you, and I think he knows that I’m equally as capable of making terrible decisions.”

“Yeah, right. You’ve always been perfect, Ally. I don’t think there’s anything that you’ve ever done wrong.”

“Have you *seen* my choice in men?” I exclaimed, tossing my own bag onto the bed. “I don’t think I’ve picked a decent guy—like my type is just walking red flags.”

“No wonder you like having sex with me so much,” he teased, reaching over and grabbing my hand. He pulled me to him, brushing my hair out of my face and behind my ear.

“You’re really something, Ally. You deserve a guy who knows that—and treats you as such. I think that’s why your brother is so hard on you sometimes.”

“Yeah, thanks, Levi,” I choked out, forcing myself to back away from him as I was tempted to kiss him all over again. “That means a lot. I, uh, I have a lot more respect for you now.”

“Good, I’m glad you don’t think I’m a total asshole.” He chuckled, letting me go as I began pulling my clothes out of my drawers. “Maybe after this we can be friends instead of enemies.”

*Friends.*

The word sent a pang of hurt in my chest, but I brushed it off. I *knew* that it all wasn’t real—just like I *knew* that we were never going to be anything more than friends.

But it didn’t stop me from feeling the rejection.

Maybe getting back to the real world *was* a good idea.

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## LEVI

“Glad to be back?” Josh asked me, handing me a beer as he leaned up against the bar. “You were only gone a little over a week, but *damn*, it felt like a long time. I hate going out without you.”

“Yeah, I guess usually you just go with me when I travel.” I chuckled. “It was a good time though.”

“When you told me you were coming back early, I assumed that it was because you and Ally just weren’t getting along at all.” Josh ran his fingers through his hair, his eyes scanning the dance floor.

“Nah, it wasn’t that bad. I don’t think I give her enough credit.” I smiled, thinking about her. We’d been home nearly a week, and I hadn’t seen her since we split at the airport.

But that didn’t mean that I hadn’t thought about her constantly.

“Credit for what?” Josh’s change in tone and narrowed eyes caused me pause. “Did something happen while you were there?”

“No, no, not at all,” I lied, shaking my head like I was disgusted by the thought. “I just mean she really put on a good show for everyone. I think she was the reason that Frank is giving me a shot at buying CyberSecure—actually, I *know* she’s the reason. Everyone loved her.”

Josh’s face flooded with relief. “Yeah, everyone loves Ally. They always have—always will. I haven’t really talked to her much since she got back though. I thought she was avoiding me actually.”

*Oof. Can’t imagine why—not like I stuck my dick in her or something.*

“I bet Mom has her catching up on work.” I rubbed my jaw, forcing myself to sound like I didn’t care...

*Because I don’t, damnit.*

“Probably,” Josh said with a shrug. “Bro, look at those two girls.” He nodded to the middle of the dance floor, where two blondes were dancing with each other, each cradling a drink in their hands...

And staring right at us.

They were hot—like *really* hot. The one on the left had a *tight* silver dress on, hugging the curves of her hourglass figure.

*Maybe I just need a means to forget Ally.*

“Maybe we should see if they need another drink,” I suggested, shrugging my shoulders at the thought of *actually* approaching them.

“Well, speak of the devil,” Josh said, his words confusing the shit out of me.

“What?” I turned back to look at my best friend, but then *instantly* froze. My eyes landed on a *sexy* auburn-headed woman with eyes like ice and a pussy that fit my cock like a fucking glove. “What’s *she* doing out?”

Josh laughed. “Looks like Linley must’ve forced her to get out tonight.”

I nodded as my mouth went dry, having not even noticed her best friend walking in with her. I couldn’t get over the black bodycon dress Ally had on—the same one she had worn our first night together...

The one I’d pulled over her head and tossed to the floor of our room.

Just the thought made my cock jump to life.

“You think they’ll come talk to us?” I asked, ripping my eyes from Ally as the two hadn’t even noticed us...*yet*.

“Who knows?” Josh said, whipping his head back around to the blondes in the middle of the dance floor. “Linley is more intimidating than most men with her big-ass personality. I have no doubt she’ll be fine.”

“Yeah, for sure.” My eyes shifted back over to Ally, her back turned to me. I could envision her juicy, bare ass grinding against me, and it took everything I had not to take her straight to the damn bathroom of the bar.

*You can’t fuck her again, Levi.*

And maybe *that* was why I wanted her so bad at the moment. I'd always wanted what I couldn't have—and I definitely couldn't have her. Just as I was about to look back toward where Josh was heading, Ally spun around as if she could feel my gaze on her.

Our eyes locked and I saw the surprise on her face, her plump red lips parting at the sight of me. My heart jumped in my chest, and I *hated* the feelings that were slipping up on me...

She was just a good fuck.

That was it.

But it didn't feel right to think that about Ally. I'd had plenty of women who were good fucks, but *damn*, it felt like she had an iron grip on my heart, squeezing the life out of it with every single second I held those ocean-blue eyes.

And then she took a step toward me.

*Nope. Nope, I can't do this.*

I ripped my gaze from her and downed my beer, setting it on the bar and heading out to where Josh was chatting up the women. There was no way I had the self-control to deal with Ally tonight. I needed more time.

*And a distraction.*

“There he is!” Josh called out as I walked up to him and the two blonde women. “This is my best friend, Levi—the one I was telling you about.”

“It’s *so* nice to meet you,” the blonde in the silver dress purred, running her hand down my bare forearm. “I’ve heard a lot of things about the Lombardi family. It’s nice to finally see you in the flesh rather than just on your social media. I’m Tiffany.”

“Nice to meet you, Tiffany.” I feigned my usually charming smile—the one that always made the women flock to me. As much as I wanted to look behind me, where I was certain Ally was burning a hole into the back of my head, I made myself stay there in the moment with Tiffany. She was hot, though not nearly as striking as Ally in that black dress...

*Stop it, Levi.*

*She’s not an option.*

“I’m Maddie,” the other blonde said quickly, giving me a toothy grin. “But I think I’m going to take your friend.” She gave Josh a wink, flirtatiously batting her eyes at him. “Come on.”

“You don’t have to ask me twice.” He beamed, grabbing her hand and leading her off to dance a few feet away. My stomach dropped as I turned back to Tiffany, whose big brown eyes were staring up at me.

“You want to dance?” I choked out, wishing that the entire moment wasn’t making me feel like I needed to throw up my dinner.

“I thought you’d *never* ask,” she squealed before moving her hips and running her hands down my chest. I felt...

*Nothing.*

I swayed back and forth, trying to focus more on the music playing around us than the woman rubbing her body against mine. Usually, I enjoyed a moment like this—though I never made it sexual. Only Ally had ever brought that out in me.

*Damn it. Stop thinking about her.*

“Can I buy you a drink?” I asked, thinking maybe conversation would be a better alternative.

“Uh, yeah, sure.” She stopped dancing, spinning around to face me. “Are you not much of a dancer?”

“Not really. That, and I’m pretty fucking thirsty.” Just to prove a point, I grabbed her hand, brushing off the ick that came with it. “I don’t know about you, but I’m not drunk enough to really get into dancing.”

She burst into a high-pitched nasal-sounding cackle. “Oh my *god*, you are *so* funny. I had no idea how charming you were. I thought you were one of those typical douchebag kind of guys—no offense.”

“No offense taken,” I chuckled, eyeing Ally, who was on the other side of the bar, chatting it up with Linley. The old me probably would’ve gone up to them and made some smart-ass remark...

But I couldn’t do it.

I felt like I was fresh out of a breakup or something.

“I’ll have a Manhattan.” Tiffany beamed to the bartender, who was waiting on us.

“What about you, Levi?” he asked. Everyone knew who I was back here at home.

“I’ll just have my usual.” I turned to Tiffany, mostly just because it kept me from being able to see Ally. “So tell me, Tiffany, where are you from?”

“Wow, you’re actually acting like you want to get to know me.” She raised a thick manicured eyebrow. “I must’ve really caught your attention, huh?”

“Something like that.” I played it cool. “So where are you from? It doesn’t sound like an L.A. accent to me.”

“That’s because I’m from Boston.” She took the drink from the bartender’s hands, giving him a smile. “I moved here about a month ago, and I *love* it.”

“What do you do?” I took a long sip of my drink, hoping that if I just downed enough beers I could somehow create some sort of attraction to this woman in front of me. I’d never been into redheads anyway...

“I work in marketing for a tech company, but I also act on the side. It’s not a serious thing, but I’ve always wanted to make it, I guess. It doesn’t pay the bills though.”

“Mmm, yeah.” I nodded, not surprised to find an *actress* in L.A. “That’s really impressive. What tech company do you work for?”

“Xelent,” she answered before taking a sip of her drink. “I thought that it would just be a thing I did after college, but now I’ve been there for over five years.” She let out a half-hearted laugh.

*The woman has some depth.*

“I get that,” I said, taking a seat on the barstool. “I’m working on a business plan right now and if I don’t land it, I’m gonna be pretty disappointed. I’m not sure where I’ll go from there.”

“Ah, I see,” she said with a nod. “Well, cheers to your business deal and that it works out for you, Levi. I barely know you, but I’m rooting for you.”

I clinked my beer with her glass, relaxing a little into the conversation and taking another drink.

*I got this. I just had to get in touch with the old me—before Ally.*

“How about we go dance now?” I held out my hand to her, setting my empty beer bottle on the bar. “I’m feeling like you sparkle in that silver dress, Tiff. Can I call you Tiff? Or is that a no?”

She burst into a fit of giggles, taking my hand and gulping down the rest of her Manhattan. “I think I would love nothing more than to show you just how much I can sparkle.” Tiffany leaned in a little closer, her lips only a few inches from my ear. “And you can call me whatever you want to tonight.”

*Great. Distraction it is.*



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## ALLY

“Don’t just sit and stare at him, Ally. It’s weird,” Linley reprimanded me, nudging me with her knee under the bar.

I ripped my eyes from Levi, who was chatting up a cute blonde. “Is it really that obvious?” I turned to my best friend, disappointment filling my voice.

“Um, *yeah*. It’s super obvious. Like honestly, I’m surprised that your brother hasn’t noticed how the two of you are acting so suspect.” Her brown eyes were filled with amicable judgment—and sympathy.

So much sympathy.

“I shouldn’t have told you what happened,” I grumbled, spinning my glass around in circles on the edge of the bar.

“Girl, you’re walking around like you just broke up with a serious boyfriend, not hooked up with your brother’s best friend. You literally are a walking rain cloud—I feel *all* that bad sad juju coming off of you and it makes me want to buy an umbrella.”

“Shut up,” I teased, kicking her shin lightly. “I’m not *that* bad, and I definitely don’t have any bad juju—whatever that even is.”

“You’ve gone through two tubs of ice cream since you got back,” Linley pointed out, sipping on the straw sticking out from her red Shirley Temple. “I think that you need to get out there instead of torturing yourself by watching him flirt with some other girl.”

“I know, I *know*,” I groaned, leaning on my elbow and positioning myself away from them. “I don’t know why it bothers me so much. It was just a stupid agreement and things got a little heated. It doesn’t mean anything at all, right?”

She narrowed her eyes at me. “Ally, I feel like you’re working to convince *yourself* of that—not me. *I* think you went off to the Caribbean and caught some legit feelings for your brother’s best friend, who just so happens to be the biggest douche canoe I’ve ever met, and now he’s totally just fucking with your head. He’s looked over here a million times since you got here.”

“Maybe I should just go talk to him.” I went to slide off the stool.

Linley’s hand stopped me. “Absolutely *not*. That is literally the *worst* idea you could ever have. That makes you seem... *desperate*.”

“You’re right.” I facepalmed. “What the hell is wrong with me, Lin? I literally *never* have problems with this. I’ve never

been attracted to Levi, but the moment we got to that island, it's like he's gotten under my skin—and I can't get him out.”

“Maybe you should just find someone else to use? I mean, if you want my honest opinion, I think that's what Levi is doing—maybe.” She looked past me to the dance floor, and I craned my head to see what she was looking at.

*Ugh.*

Levi and the blonde were dancing close on the dance floor, and his hands were placed lightly on her waist. They moved in sync together, and bile rose in my throat as I watched her raise her arms over her head, smoothly running her perfectly manicured fingernails down the stubble on his jaw.

*I hate her.*

*Wait, no, no I don't. It's not her fault.*

I shook my head, sliding off the stool and heading toward the bathroom.

“Where are you going, Ally?” Linley called after me, grabbing my arm as soon as she caught up. “You can't let him get to you like this. You're still winning—you get thirty percent of the company and that's *totally* worth what happened with Levi. You just have to just remind yourself of *who* he is. He's the same fucking jerk he's always been.”

I stopped, taking a deep breath and running my fingers through my freshly styled hair. “You're right—and I *know* that about him. I just can't bring my heart onto the same page. He's like flipped some sort of switch in me. I *hate* it. I hate that I

can't be like him and just let it all go. But you should've heard the things he said to me, Lin."

Her lips turned downward with sympathy. "Was it during sex?"

I hesitated, wringing my hands. "Uh...yeah."

"Mmm." Her lips pursed. "You can't take anything a guy says during sex to heart, Ally. I once had a guy propose to me right before he was about to cum. It's just—sex just does really strange things to their brains or something. It's like they're brainwashed by their dick."

I laughed, though her words stung. "He said some of it afterwards—like he made it a huge deal that it was our last time to sleep together."

"Yeah, because probably in the moment, he was sad that he wasn't gonna get another piece of that awesome kitty you got," she teased, elbowing me.

"You're too much sometimes." My eyes flickered back to the dance floor, the blonde now facing Levi, a flirty smile on her face as she batted those thick fake eyelashes at him.

*She's his type.*

*Not me.*

I swallowed the hurt, replacing it with determination. "I'll just find someone else to fill the space," I mumbled under my breath.

“That sounds a little unhealthy,” Linley said. “But yeah, okay. Go out and flirt. It’ll at least remind him of how much he’s missing out on. Levi *knows* you’re a catch, and why not play games with his head?” She shrugged, giving me a playful look. “Just don’t be dumb—and pick a hot guy.”

“Got it.” I scanned the sea of people. “It’s just too bad that I’m terrible at this kind of thing.”

“Just go up to the bar and look pretty. I guarantee they’ll come to you.” Linley urged me back toward the bar. “I’ll go to the bathroom, make it seem like you’re alone and then they’ll *really* come for you. You’re like a sexy little piece of meat and they’re all lions.”

“You really need to work on your analogies,” I laughed as we parted ways. I headed back to the bar, forcing my eyes to stay *away* from Levi and his new blonde dance partner. I’d seen him dance with a million women over the years—well, maybe not *millions*...

Or maybe it *was* millions.

He’d been a playboy since the beginning of time, and there was no way one trip to the Caribbean was suddenly going to change that about him, no matter how bad my heart was acting like it wanted him.

And my brother would kill me—I couldn’t forget that aspect of the whole thing.

“You look lonely as hell,” a deep voice said from behind me, grabbing my attention. I turned to see a tall, handsome

blond-headed man. He was around my age, maybe a little older than me, actually.

But whatever.

He looked sophisticated in a light gray suit and tie—like he had just gotten off work. He wasn't *quite* on Levi's level, but at the moment I was probably just being a little biased.

"My friend is in the bathroom," I said, giving him a smile.

"Like *boyfriend* or *friend*, friend?" His blue eyes lit up with amusement, and I found myself drawn to the charisma in his voice.

"Just a *friend*." A flirty giggle escaped my lips.

"So, this *friend* won't try to kick my ass if I offer to buy you a drink?"

"Oh, I think that would make her day."

"Perfect. I love making random strangers' days. Let's get you that drink, maybe dance a little, see where the night takes us."

*Very forward.*

"Okay." I shrugged as he waved the waitress over. He was giving me Ryan Gosling vibes from the movie *Crazy, Stupid, Love*, and I was there for it—even if he was more of a player than even Levi.

"What can I get you?"

"A Shirley Temple," I said to the bartender, giving this new Ryan Gosling a grateful smile. "Thanks for picking up my



drink.”

“Of course.” He gave me a nod. “So, what’s your name? My guess is it’s something sexy, like Brittany or Haley.”

I laughed, shaking my head. “It’s Ally.”

“Yeah, like I said, something sexy.” He chuckled, his tone deep and gravelly. “I’m Connor, and yes, I know. It’s *not* a sexy name, but I make up for my parents’ lack of uniqueness.”

“You are something else,” I said, just as the bartender sat my drink down on the bar. “Lots of swag.”

“Did you seriously just use the word *swag*?” He laughed, amusement filling his face. “I think I’m already in love with you. That’s amazing. What do you do for work, Ally?”

“I’m a CPA for Lisa Lombardi’s office,” I said, not remotely surprised by the reaction on his face.

“That’s fucking impressive.” He leaned against the bar, incidentally a little closer to me. “What’s it like managing a billionaire’s finances?”

“A lot of zeros,” I joked, his eyes intently dancing across my face. He was *hot*, but nothing in my body reacted to the intensity of his gaze.

*That doesn’t mean anything. It’s just all in good fun.*

“What do you do, Connor?”

“I’m the VP of sale for Data Corp.” The pride in his voice was evident, and I didn’t blame him—the tech company was a frontrunner, making Connor a very wealthy man.

“That’s equally impressive,” I said, taking a sip of my drink. I caught sight of Linley, being led out to the dance floor by a guy. She shot me a wink. “Do you like your job?”

“I do.” He nodded, downing the rest of his drink. “Do you want to dance?”

I nodded before basically shotgunning the rest of my own drink—I needed all the courage I could get. I might have danced with Levi, but it wasn’t my norm. I sat the empty glass down on the bar, grabbing his extended hand. “Let’s do it.”

“Man, where have you been all my life?” he murmured, his hand feeling warm in mine. I laughed a little at the strong pick-up line, not bothering to read into it. Connor was probably assuming that he would be taking me home tonight...

But he was sorely mistaken.

I didn’t do that stuff.

However, I played into the moment, letting my liquid courage heat up my face as I swayed to the music, Connor’s hands landing just above my waist. As much as I wanted to, I *didn’t* go looking for Levi in the moment. I didn’t want him to think I was remotely concerned about what he might think.

“You got *moves*, too.” Connor pulled me closer to him, our bodies suddenly against each other’s. My stomach flipped at the contact—but not in a good way. I forced a smile, coercing myself to have a good attitude about the moment.

It was *just* dancing.

However, as his hands slid lower and he leaned toward me, I braced, *not* expecting such a strong move so fast...

But it never happened.

“What the *fuck* do you think you’re doing?” a familiar voice boomed louder than the music, Connor instantly being ripped away from me.

“Whoa.” Connor threw up his hands in surrender as Levi stood there, *fuming*. “What the hell, dude?”

“I saw you trying to get fucking handsy with her,” Levi continued, his voice cold. The blonde he’d been dancing with stood a few feet back, her face mirroring the same shock as mine.

“Bro, you need to calm down,” Connor shot back at him. “She isn’t here with you, is she? I saw you with her.” He pointed to the blonde. “Chill the fuck out. You don’t need to play hero.”

“You’re about to get your ass beat,” Levi seethed, lunging toward Connor.

Panicking, I jumped in between the men, glaring up at Levi as I put my hands on his chest as a buffer. “Stop it, Levi. You’re acting crazy right now—I can handle myself.”

He glared down at me, his hazel eyes alight with anger. “You were seriously okay with that douche touching you like that?”

*He’s seriously pissed at me.*

“It’s none of your business *what* I do, Levi,” I snapped at him, just as my brother suddenly appeared beside him.

“What’s going on?” Josh demanded, his eyes bouncing between the two of us with a puzzled expression on his face.

“*Nothing.*” Levi shook his head, giving me one last glare before spinning on his heels and storming out.

Josh gave me a weird look before chasing after his best friend, leaving me alone in the middle of the dance floor, Connor already long gone.

*Well, that was unexpected.*

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## LEVI

If it were physically possible, my eyes would've bored a fucking hole in my computer screen. It had been *two* weeks since I'd spoken to Ally, and every day was torture, since she was only a short five-minute walk from my office.

But I couldn't bring myself to apologize for making an ass out of myself.

Josh thought I had just been doing the honorable thing, standing up for his little sister—not being a jealous asshole. In truth, it had fucking *burned* seeing Connor Nash put his hands on Ally. Connor wasn't a bad guy, and I was certain that he probably had more game than I did...

And that only made it worse.

I stared at the phone on my desk, tapping the screen—like Ally was going to actually send me a text.

*Why do I care so much?*

My brain was on overload when it came to her, and I still didn't understand what the hell had changed between us. It wasn't like me to take sleeping with someone so seriously—I

mean, yeah, it was the best pussy I'd ever had, but that doesn't usually trip my heart.

*Voodoo vagina magic.*

I chuckled at the terminology in my head before realizing that my phone was vibrating on my desk. Reaching for it, my heart jumped at the name.

*Frank Lewis.*

I cleared my throat as I answered. "Hey, Frank. It's good to hear from you."

"Good to see you answer your phone." Frank chuckled. "How're things treating you in L.A.?"

"They're great, just keeping up with work and life. Did you get caught up on all your work?"

"Oh yeah, took me a little longer than I had hoped, but you know how that goes." His tone was bright and friendly, and I tried to hold back the excitement, apprehension filling my chest. "I'm actually calling because I'm in your neck of the woods today. I thought we might be able to meet up and discuss CyberSecure's future. What's your availability look like?"

"I can make time for you whenever you'd like to meet up," I said quickly, wincing at just how eager I sounded.

So much for nonchalance.

"What's Ally's schedule like? I don't want to leave her out of the meeting."

*Fuck.*

“Uh, I bet my mom would let her go for a meeting,” I said, knowing that was the truth—though I might have to answer for it. She’d been watching me like a hawk lately, though she hadn’t pried into what had happened in the Caribbean. She wasn’t the type to do that, not yet anyway. She would watch from the sidelines for awhile first.

“Perfect,” Frank said. “How about we meet for lunch at one? We can meet at Brewer’s? That’s not far from your office, right?”

“That works great. It’s just down the street, actually.” I pushed myself back from the desk, seeing that it was already noon—and I still had one massive obstacle in my way...

I had no idea if Ally would agree to the lunch.

“I’ll see you two then.” Frank hung up the phone, and I shoved it in the pocket of my black slacks.

*Guess that apology might have to happen sooner rather than later.*

But then again, I knew that she wanted that thirty percent just as much as I wanted the rest of the company—and that provided me a little relief.

I made the walk down the two flights of stairs to her floor fairly quickly, and as her office door came into view, my heart began to thud loudly in my chest. It was annoying, but I did my best to ignore it. Taking a deep breath, I knocked softly on the not quite shut door.



“Come in,” Ally’s voice called out on the other side.

I pushed open the door, and her eyes went wide as I stepped in, closing it tightly behind me. “Hey.” I cleared my throat.

“Uh, hey.” She narrowed those striking blue eyes at me. Her auburn hair was pulled back in a sleek ponytail, bringing out her high cheekbones and heart-shaped face. Her white blouse tucked into black dress pants added to the professional, sexy look—and I fought to keep my thoughts on the task at hand.

“We’re going to get a late lunch at Brewer’s.”

“And *why* would I do that with you, Levi?” She folded her arms across her chest, a dark eyebrow raising slightly.

“Because if you want your thirty percent stake in CyberSecure, you will go with me to the luncheon with Frank—that he has requested you attend.”

“Does he still think that we’re *together*?” The way she emphasized the last word made my stomach flip, her tone sour.

I hesitated. “Uh—”

“Oh my *god*, he *does*,” she groaned out, shaking her head. “You have to be kidding me. Why couldn’t you just tell him that we broke up, but that we’re still amicable enough to do the deal? That would show a lot of maturity.”

“I don’t think so.”

“I don’t want to pretend to be with you.”

“Okay, so then I guess just forfeit the deal.”

“No,” she snapped. “How about you apologize for what you did? Then maybe I’ll consider going with you.”

My shoulders slumped. “Why are you being like this? I just had a little too much to drink the other night, and I didn’t want Connor Nash putting his hands on you. He’s a...he’s a douche.”

“Mm, right,” she snorted, rolling her eyes. “I swear, I don’t think you have the balls to actually apologize for being a jerk.”

*Jesus, she is really being stubborn.*

I checked my watch—we *needed* to be leaving. “Fine. I’m sorry, Ally. Will you please forgive me for standing up for you and keeping you safe from some asshole who probably just wanted to get in your pants.”

“That—that is *not* an apology.” She let out a heavy sigh, but pushed herself back from the desk, grabbing her purse.

“But it got you moving.” I shot her a grin. “And that’s worth something.”

“I’m moving because I want the money.” Ally shot me daggers as she pushed her chair back in and slung the black bag over her shoulder. “Let’s just get this done.”

“You’re gonna have to be happier than how you’re acting,” I said, eyeing her as she walked toward me, her curvy, *luscious* hips making my mouth go dry as she got closer. The scent of that familiar perfume hit me, and for a brief moment I thought she might actually be about to touch me...

Nope.

She brushed right by me and grabbed the door handle, ripping it open. “Let’s go, *honey*.”

I shook my head, feeling both aroused and irritated at the way she was looking at me. However, I bit my tongue, following her out and shutting the door behind us.

“Where are you two off to?”

*Oh, fuck.*

My mom was standing a few feet away, a file in her hands as her eyes bounced between us. “I didn’t know—”

“We’re grabbing a late lunch,” I said, not opening up the conversation for anything more. “I hope that’s okay?”

“Um, sure, but I just—”

“We’re running late, love you, Mom.” I guided Ally by her shoulders toward the exit, quickly evading my mother’s curious gaze. Ally was tense against my touch, and I couldn’t decide if it was a positive or negative...

Did she miss what happened between us?

*Stop it.*

I mentally reprimanded myself, releasing her as soon as we made it into the elevator. I hit the ground floor button and shifted to the back corner, while Ally went to the opposite. My heart was pounding in my ears as I stole a glance over at her, hating how fucking attractive she looked in the moment.

*Why do I want her so bad?*

“What?” Ally’s voice was cold.

I shook my head, embarrassed that I had been caught staring. It had to just be the fact she was being so cold to me—and the draw of her being off-limits. That’s the only thing that made sense.

“Is there anything I need to know before we meet with him?” she asked, her voice going a little quiet as we reached the lobby and stepped out. “Because I don’t want to be blindsided by something.”

I sighed, running my fingers through my dark hair. “Uh, there’s nothing to be blindsided by. I sent the official offer over, but I haven’t heard from him since the trip—and I *do* have a business plan, but I doubt that he’s going to want to go over it at a lunch. I would assume this is more of a catch-up and putting feelers out there.”

“So we need to have a strong front—that’s going to be hard.”

“Only because you’re acting like you fucking hate me,” I snapped, grabbing her arm right as we stepped outside. She spun around to face me, her eyes alight with emotions that I didn’t understand. “What?”

“I don’t *hate* you. It’s just the fact that you didn’t actually apologize for what happened. You’ve been avoiding me like the plague—even more than you did before.”

“Yeah, well...” I paused, not even knowing what to say. “I don’t know how to do this.”

“Do what?” Ally asked, exasperated. “Be a kind, considerate human being?”

“You’re making me out to be something worse than I am.” Irritation burned my chest at her jab. “I’m *not* a bad guy, Ally. I mean, I saw the guy trying to make a move on you—and I know you don’t do things like that.”

She let out a sharp exhale. “I don’t even know what to say to that. It’s not about what the guy was doing. It’s about the way you spoke to me, making me feel like what happened was my fault. You pinned the blame on me.”

“I—I didn’t blame you.” I racked my brain, not understanding. “I was just...I was pissed at the guy. I don’t know. You got in between and stopped me, and I lashed out at you. I’m...I’m sorry.”

*This woman is going to be the death of my pride.*

She narrowed her eyes at me, studying my face for a few long moments—the kind of moments that we needed to be spending *walking* to the restaurant. “Okay. I’ll forgive you *this* time, but don’t go yelling at me like that again. Even my fake boyfriends have to treat me with respect.”

“Oh my *god*, you’re so dramatic,” I groaned, grabbing her hand and leading her in the direction of Brewer’s. My stomach felt uneasy in the moment, and I knew it was the spark from her touch—and just the way she got under my skin.

“You really need to work on a filter.” Ally’s voice was still cold, and not the usual sweet warm tone that it usually was.

And I *hated* it.

“You might want to lessen the cold, fuck-you tone that you’ve got going on there.”

She burst into laughter, startling me. “Levi, this is the best you’re going to get from me if Frank Lewis isn’t present.”

I nodded as I grabbed for the door of the upscale restaurant. “All right then. I guess this is how we’re gonna play this.”

*Bring it on.*

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## ALLY

**Y**eah, I was angry at Levi.

And as Frank stood from the table to shake our hands, it took everything I had not to just rat him out right there...

But then I would lose the deal, too.

“It is *so* good to see you, Frank.” My voice was warm, and I ignored the look that Levi gave me. “I’ve been wondering when we were going to see you again.”

“Oh yes, I apologize for taking a little longer than I initially said,” Frank replied, as we all sat down around the table. “I got busy with work—and then I have to admit, there are a lot of offers for CyberSecure. It’s been overwhelming to be honest.”

“Ah, I understand,” Levi chimed in, grabbing for his glass of water. “It’s a highly sought-after company. You’ve really built a tech empire.”

“Thank you.” Frank leaned back in his chair. “I’m proud of it, which is why I’m so picky about it going to the right



people. I've had a lot higher offers than yours that you sent over, but I just...I like what the two of you bring to the table."

I sat quietly, not wanting to ruin the moment for Levi. My stomach was churning with nausea, as it had been for the last three days. Not even the water on the table looked appetizing.

"What would you like to drink?" A young waiter appeared from seemingly nowhere, a bright smile on his face.

"I'll just stick with water," I said casually, keeping my voice pleasant as Levi's arm draped around the back of my chair.

"Same for me." Levi nodded.

"Me, as well." Frank chuckled.

"Ready to order then?" The waiter's eyes drifted to mine.

My stomach rolled at the thought of food. "I'll just have a house salad."

Levi and Frank both gave me a funny look, like we weren't sitting in one of the nicest places on this side of town. However, neither of them pried, and I was thankful for that, reaching for my water as they both ordered the Scandinavian steak and potatoes.

*Yuck.*

The waiter hustled off as I sipped on the glass, my mouth feeling parched, but also overrun with saliva—the feeling I sometimes got right before I vomited. Whatever bug I had picked up was lingering...

And making this whole lunch experience that much worse.

“So, what have the two of you been up to in the last few weeks?” Frank eyed the two of us, a smile still on his face.

“Well, not much, unfortunately.” Levi chuckled, squeezing my shoulder playfully. “It’s just basically been back to real life for the both of us. She’s been really busy at work, and I have too.”

“But the time we spend in the evenings definitely keeps us grounded,” I spoke up, thinking of the advice that my parents had given me long ago. “We spent last weekend on his yacht, just the two of us. It was a nice getaway.”

“It really was,” Levi added, eyeing me. “It’s the small things for sure.”

“That’s great to hear. A long-lasting relationship appreciates the small things and always is eager to say sorry when necessary. I think it’s that last one that has gotten me into trouble a time or two. I haven’t always been great at apologizing,” Frank added with a chuckle.

“Isn’t that the truth,” Levi grumbled.

I nudged his knee under the table. “Levi’s been learning how to apologize better. I think it’s hard for a man of his stature and intelligence to admit that he has faults sometimes—but he’s really coming around. I’m proud of him.”

“You’re a good woman for recognizing his progress.”

“After she gives me the cold shoulder, of course,” Levi added, his tone playful to the untrained ear—and taking a jab to someone who really knew him.

“Oh, that just means you need to get a little faster with that apology, son.” Frank burst into a giddy, deep laugh, and I joined him, loving the roast.

Maybe lunch wouldn't be so bad after all.

“If you'll excuse me for a second,” Frank suddenly said, pulling his phone from his pocket, the screen lighting up. “I have to take this.” He stood up from the table, leaving Levi and me alone.

*Great.*

“Well, this is going well,” Levi grunted, downing half his glass of water.

“It *is* going well.” I narrowed my eyes at him.

“Yeah, but what's wrong with you? Since when do you just eat house salads at a place like this? You know I'm paying for your meal.”

I bit back the burning offense. “I'm just not feeling well today.”

His brow furrowed. “Because of the argument we had?”

“No, because my stomach just hurts. It has for like three days now.” I let out a sigh, avoiding his eyes.

“Are you okay?”

“It's just a virus, I'm sure. I'm just not feeling like eating much—and I didn't want to be rude and not eat.” I picked at the napkin in my lap, not wanting to drop any of my other concerns—like whether it might be something more.

“Got it.” Levi’s knee was bouncing beside mine under the table, his eyes scanning the restaurant.

“Why are you so nervous?”

“This is just a big deal. It’s my future—*your* future,” he added, his voice growing quiet. “I don’t want to fuck it up, Ally.

“Well, I guess we should probably start with just making it through this meeting, acting like we actually love each other.” Just as I finished, the waiter appeared with the food, setting it down in front of us. The smell of the seasoning on the potatoes and steak left me nearly gagging as I sat there, my eyes boring into my salad.

“You okay?” Levi asked me again.

I looked up at him, seeing the creases of concern in his face. “I don’t really know. My stomach is just really bothering me.”

“Maybe we should go?”

“No, no. I don’t want to mess up this meeting. I don’t want to mess up anything for us.” My voice was rushed, and just as I finished the words, Frank appeared, taking a seat and scooping up his fork.

“Is everything okay?” he asked, studying my face.

“She’s getting better from a virus.” Levi gave me a sweet, sympathetic look. “She thought she was feeling up to lunch, but as it turns out she’s not quite handling the smell so well.”

“Oh no, that’s too bad.” Frank mirrored Levi’s expression. “Well, if you two need to take it to go, that’s totally understandable. I mainly just wanted to touch base with the two of you and invite you to meet with our executives at the end of the week.”

“That would be great.” Levi beamed, grabbing my hand which was resting in my lap. “And I’m sure that Ally will be feeling better by then.”

I nodded. “I just really didn’t want to miss the meeting.”

“That’s very honorable, but I don’t want you to be miserable or sick. The two of you are my top runners for the business, and the fact you showed up not feeling well only confirms to me that I’m on the right track with the sale.” Frank waved to the waiter as I avoided Levi’s gaze. “Can we get a couple of to-go boxes for these two? They’re going to have to cut the lunch short.” The waiter nodded, scurrying off.

Levi pulled out his wallet. “Let me give you some cash to cover us since we’re having to cut this short. I can’t tell you how sorry I am for the inconvenience—I know it seems like a waste of time.”

“No, no.” Frank shook his head. “That’s not necessary. It’s on me, and like I said, I completely understand. When Liz was pregnant, we were at a business meeting with a serious investor, and she was really struggling with morning sickness. I tried to convince her to stay home, letting me work out the deal.” He chuckled as he continued, “She didn’t listen to a

word I said, and in the middle of the meeting—while giving the presentation—she threw up all over the conference table.”

*Pregnant.*

The word stuck out to me, while Levi and Frank laughed. I racked my brain—when was the last time I’d had my period?

*No, there’s no way.*

I wasn’t late...at least, I didn’t *think* so. My periods had been irregular since the beginning of time, so I wasn’t always sure *when* to say that it was late. I had skipped months before too.

*It’s just a virus.*

My stomach flipped with nerves regardless of my attempt to talk myself down. I wasn’t the type to be anxious, but...

“I think I’m going to step out and get some air,” I said quickly, scooting back the chair. “I don’t want to have the same fate as poor Liz.”

Frank nodded, the laughter fading on his face. “You go ahead and go—and don’t you worry about the meeting. It hasn’t remotely swayed me in a negative way. Like I said, it’s only pulled me more in your direction.”

“I’ll be out in just a second.” Levi looked up at me as I stood to my feet.

“Okay.” I gave Frank a small wave goodbye, my head spinning as I headed away from the table. My stomach was

back to churning violently, and as the restroom sign came into view, I took a detour.

Bursting through a stall door, I barely made it to the toilet before I lost what little I had eaten for the day. I wrapped my arms around myself as I trembled, hating the way it felt to vomit. But as I stood up straight again, the nausea resolving, relief landed on my shoulders.

*Just a virus.*

I wiped my mouth and washed my hands before slipping out of the restroom and heading for the front doors.

“Are you sure you’re okay?” Levi’s hand grabbed mine, slowing me down just as I reached the glass doors.

“Yeah,” I muttered, pushing through the door and drinking in the fresh air. “I’ll be grand by the executive meeting—you don’t have to worry about it.”

“I’m not worried about the meeting, Ally,” Levi snapped. “You heard Frank, you showing up not feeling well *helped* us. I just don’t understand why you didn’t tell me that you weren’t up to lunch.”

“Sorry, I’ll make sure to mention it next time.” My tone was harsh as my heels clicked down the pavement, trying to ignore how *right* it felt for Levi’s hand to be intertwined in mine.

“Listen, if you’re going to have thirty percent of the company, we *will* be seeing each other. I don’t see Frank selling it to me and letting you stay a silent partner. He’s too invested in you—so how you feel matters to me.”

I froze, turning to look at Levi, who was holding a brown bag with the to-go boxes in the other hand. To the outside world, in that moment, we *looked* like a real couple...

And it hurt more than it should.

“Would you like for me to provide you with a daily update on my well-being, Levi? Because the only time you *care* about my feelings is when you swoop into my office, giving me *zero* notice about some business meeting—and let’s not forget, *that* is the only reason you apologized for the club. It’s not fucking genuine.”

Levi went silent, dropping my hand, and that’s how we spent the rest of the walk back to the office before splitting up. I had been harsh, but I didn’t care. I was feeling sick, tired, and emotional.

And then it hit me...

*Maybe it’s just bad PMS.*

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## LEVI

“**S**he’s being a full-blown jerk to me,” I complained, spinning my glass of Jameson on the bar top.

“Uh, I don’t see how this is news.” Josh leaned against the black bar top beside me, facing the crowd in the upscale dive. “My sister has always been a jerk to you, just as much as you have been to her. Like, what did you expect? Give her thirty percent of a company in exchange for a fake girlfriend, and *poof!* She suddenly loves you?”

“I don’t need her to *love* me,” I choked out, hardly able to say the word out loud. “I just don’t know why she’s being so fucking cold to me.”

“Well, you did make a huge scene in the club a couple weeks ago, and she told me you never apologized.” My best friend finally glanced over to me, his brows furrowing. “What is up with you though, Levi? You’re not yourself.”

*Because I can’t get your sister off my mind.*

“I don’t know,” I lied. “It’s probably just the stress of this deal.”

“Well, you shouldn’t let it get to you. Ally said that it was going well overall, even with her being sick at the lunch yesterday.”

“Yeah, but she didn’t even *tell* me that she was sick before we left for the lunch. It would’ve been nice to know that, you know?”

“You’re not going to catch it.” Josh snickered. “I highly doubt the two of you got close enough to pass germs.”

“What?” I shook my head. “No, I mean, I would’ve never made her go to the meeting if I knew that she was under the weather. I’m not that big of an asshole.”

“That’s debatable, but I think you’re worrying way, way too much about it all. I think you should be more worried about those two *fine* ladies heading toward us.” Josh gave a nod toward the crowd and I glanced in that direction.

*Great.*

Two women were headed for us, one blonde and the other with black hair. They were attractive, yeah, but I was *not* in the mood.

“You two look lonely,” the dark-headed one greeted us, slipping right in between Josh and me. I scooted over to get some space. “I recognize you both,” she continued. “Josh Montgomery and Levi Lombardi, right?”

“That’s us.” Josh gave them both a wicked smile. “And who do we have the pleasure of speaking with?”

*Grossly charming.*

“I’m Mel,” the dark-headed one said, her white dress making her tan skin look bronzy. “And this is my friend, Sarah.”

“Nice to meet you. Can we get you two something to drink?” Josh eyed me, giving me a look.

“Yeah, nice to meet you two. Put whatever you want on my tab.” My voice was flat, and I couldn’t care less.

Sarah, the blonde, turned to me. “I’ve been following you on social media for like five years. I was wondering where you went though. You haven’t posted in like a month.”

“Yeah, I’ve been busy.”

“With work?” She ran her finger down my chest, and my stomach lurched at the contact. “Or with *someone*?”

I narrowed my eyes, already seeing the game she was playing. “Both.”

“He’s not with anyone,” Josh said quickly, his arm already draped around Mel’s petite shoulders. “He’s just being facetious. Levi’s a joker.”

“Yeah, that’s me,” I grunted, wishing I’d just stayed home. I had *never* felt that way before, especially when it came to a couple of hot women entering the scene.

And it was all Ally’s fault for being so damn cold to me.

“We’re gonna step out and get some air,” Josh said to me, grabbing a fresh couple of drinks from the bartender and nodding to the door. “Wanna go?”

“Nah. I’ll just stay here.”

“Suit yourself. You and Sarah enjoy.” Josh shot Sarah a wink that made her giggle, while Mel clung to him as they turned to go.

As soon as they were out of sight I pulled out my phone, hoping to see a text or *something* to give me a reason to leave—but there was nothing.

“So, can I be blunt with you?” Sarah grabbed my attention, letting out a sigh and pulling out a barstool.

“Uh, sure.” I eyed her over the top of my phone, pulling up a text thread to Ally—one that was devoid of messages.

“I can tell that you’re not into this.”

*Wow, genius.*

“But you don’t look like you’re happy, either—so what’s the deal? Unrequited love with a supermodel? Can’t get the girl’s attention?”

Interesting. The woman had some sense to her.

I pulled out the barstool and took a seat across from her. “You’re kind of right, kind of wrong.”

“Ah, so you’re hung up on a girl, but the guesses were wrong.”

“She’s a business partner of mine—well, *pending* business partner.”

Sarah pushed back some of her blonde hair before flipping it over her shoulder. “I see, and let me guess, you slept with

her?”

“Uh, yeah, it only happened a couple times, but now...”

“Now she’s what? Clingy? Needy? Wants more than you?” Sarah sipped on her Manhattan, her gold bodycon dress hugging her curves as she crossed her legs. She was a very attractive woman...

*So why am I not feeling anything for her?*

I wasn’t even *interested* in the chase. “She’s the opposite of those things. She’s fucking cold and distant. Granted, I didn’t apologize for an incident that happened at a club on the other side of town—”

“Oh my *god*. It’s *that* girl? The pretty redhead? Mel and I were totally there that night, and *wow*, you really went after Connor.”

“Yeah, *Connor*.” The sound of his name instantly pissed me off, my mind flashing back to the sight of his body pressed to Ally’s...

“Connor is my *brother*.”

“Like, for real?” I wrinkled my nose, unfortunately picking out the resemblance in their faces.

“Yeah, for real. He can be a douche though. I didn’t feel bad for him, but *damn*, you left her right there in the middle of the dance floor after totally mortifying the poor girl.”

“Okay, I have apologized for that, and I’m tired of harping on it.” The irritation was burning my throat more than the

whiskey.

“Yeah, yeah, I get that. I think it’s clear that you have feelings for her then.” Sarah laughed. “And maybe she’s being distant because she doesn’t know where you stand.”

“We don’t stand anywhere. We’re just business partners—I just need her to stop being so rude to me.”

“You’re avoiding your feelings.”

“I don’t have feelings—not *really*. And why the hell am I sitting here and playing therapist with you? This is fucking weird.” I slid off the barstool, shaking my head. “I gotta get home. Tell Josh I’m heading home.”

“I think they’re probably already leaving.”

“Okay, well then, I’ll get you a cab home.” I let out a sigh, not wanting to be a total jerk. The woman had tried to talk to me, after all.

“Oh, no way. I’m not going home alone tonight.” She giggled, and my face contorted in annoyance.

“I’m not taking anyone home.”

“Oh, I didn’t mean with you.” She patted my arm as she stood to her feet. “I wouldn’t go home with you even if you asked me to.”

“That’s an unnecessary burn.”

She shrugged, giving me a wink before walking away. I watched her go, wishing that I was my usual self. She was the

kind of women who provided just enough challenge to be fun...

But I wasn't in the mood for the chase.

I pulled back up the text thread as I headed to grab a cab home. My fingers hovered over the keyboard for a few minutes before I finally sent it.

*Are you busy?*

Sliding into the cab, I gave the driver my address and left the phone open on my lap. My eyes stared at the screen, wondering what the hell Ally was up to—was she with her friends? A guy? Home alone?

The three dots popped up on the screen after a few seconds, followed by a message.

*What do you need, Levi?*

“Seriously?” I muttered under my breath. She didn't even fucking answer the question.

*Just want to talk.*

I cringed after I sent the message, realizing that I sounded a little desperate. I *never* wanted to talk to someone. They were always the ones messaging me. My phone vibrated in my lap.

*About what*

My eyebrows shot up at the lack of punctuation, but whatever. She was just being her usual snide self.

*Whatever is going on between us*



I held my breath as I sent the response, inwardly blaming the four glasses of whiskey I'd chugged in the last hour for being so ballsy with her...

And then my phone rang.

My heart jumped, but it wasn't Ally...

It was her brother—and he was *pissed*.

“Where the hell are you?”

“I started getting a headache, so I'm going home.”

“You're full of shit, bro. I wanna know what's going on with you—and I'm already pretty sure I've put the fucking pieces together.”

“And what is that supposed to mean?” I retorted, though the apprehension and dread were already looming over my head.

“You're seeing my sister for real, aren't you? Because see, what happened a couple of weeks ago—that was fucking weird, man. But I told myself, ‘hey, maybe he's just looking at her in a more positive light. Maybe he cares about her.’ But no, that's not it at all, is it? You were being a jealous asshole —”

“I'm not seeing your sister,” I cut him off. “I've just been dealing with the fact that she's my soon-to-be business partner, and we *need* to get along.”

He was silent on the other end of the line.

“Josh, I'm not going to start dating your sister.”

“If you did, I’d have to fucking beat your ass before I considered it.” His voice was still stern, but it was becoming more amicable. “I just don’t think this whole fake girlfriend thing was a good idea, Levi. I know that you have to keep that image up for the deal—but when does it end?”

“I don’t know, man,” I said with a sigh. “Frank wants Ally to be more than a silent partner, which would mean that the two of us would have to work together. I don’t know if that’s a great idea or not, but I can’t back out now.”

“If the two of you can get past your differences, you *might* actually make a good team. You just have to have patience with her, Levi. Ally is only ever cold or snide because she’s secretly hurt under the surface—I’m sure it was just the club incident or whatever. It’ll blow over. Just don’t push it.”

I nodded as the cab pulled up in front of my place in Beverly Hills. “Thanks for the advice. I’ll just try to give it some time. We have another meeting with the executives on Friday, and I just want to make sure we’re both in the best headspace possible.”

“Got it. Can you just promise me something?”

“Uh, sure.” I slid out of the cab into the warm evening air.

“If there’s something more to your relationship, you’ll tell me before you go pursuing something with her, okay?”

“Yeah, yeah. I promise—but there’s nothing.”

“Good, I’d hate to have to kill my best friend. Hope your headache gets better.”

“Yeah, night.” I hung up the phone, nearly facepalming as I opened up the text thread to Ally.

*What is going on between us?*

I stared at the message from her, my stomach knotting up as I thought of the conversation I’d just had—and the promise I had just made.

*Nothing, see you at the meeting.*

*I’ll send over the business plan for you to study.*

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## ALLY

The table of six executives and Frank clapped for us, having just finished the presentation. Thankfully, Levi had taken the lead, with me only commenting on the financial aspect of the slides. It had gone well—from what I could tell, anyway.

“So, what did you all think?” Frank asked the panel, consisting of four men and two women, diverse in their appearance and age.

“I think that the two have a solid plan,” a dark-headed, middle-aged woman named Cassie said, leaning back in her chair. “They seem to have a good dynamic in the way they present themselves as well, and as the head of PR, I think they’d make for a fresh look for us.”

“I disagree,” a white-headed man, Victor, grunted—I happened to know he was the VP of Operations. “I think they’re too young to take on a company like this. Neither of them has even hit thirty yet.”

“Yeah, but it just means that they’re driven,” Cassie shot back at him. “That gives us a lot to work with when it comes

to our relations with the younger start-up companies. They're going to see us as allies, not enemies."

"I don't know." He let out a sigh. "And Frank told me the two of you are in a relationship, right? What kind of relationship? Married? Dating? All it would take is a breakup and the company would be hung up in some nasty legal battle."

"We would *never* let that happen," I chimed in. "Even if our relationship ended, our partnership would continue, and if something very bad happened, I'd just allow for Levi to buy me out."

"Smart woman." Cassie gestured to me. "I think that they're in the right mindset to take this on, regardless of their personal relationship. I think that's honestly irrelevant, though if they *were* together, we could paint them as a power couple—which they clearly are."

"I suppose. I just don't know how I feel about it. I think that's fine of me to have that opinion." Victor folded his arms across his chest.

"And what *is* the status of your relationship?" Sandy, an older woman with a stone-cold face, looked up at us. Her eyes were like daggers, jumping between Levi and me.

Levi smiled, his entire demeanor much more relaxed than mine under the scrutiny. "Well, we are currently dating—and our relationship is serious. I would look for us to be engaged in the next six months or so. She knows it's coming," he added, looking over and giving me a wink.

*What the fuck?*

I forced a smile, somehow managing to hide my shock—and *anger*—as the whole room filled with smiles. “I’m just waiting on him to pop the question.” The words felt suffocating, but everyone ate it up, laughing.

Well, except for Victor.

He looked skeptical as fuck.

“Now *that* is some exciting news!” Frank was beaming as he stood to his feet. “If there are no more pressing questions, I say let’s let these two get back to their other jobs. That’ll give all of us some time to think this over, and then if there are any more questions, we’ll create a list for Levi and Ally to answer.”

“Thank you so much for your time.” Levi went around the table, shaking each of their hands, and I quickly followed suit. “We look forward to getting to know each of you better as we pursue this deal and ensure that it’s best for all of us.”

“Thank you,” Frank said to us both. “I’ll be in touch with you two, but it’s looking good, guys. It’s looking really good.”

I nodded, hardly able to come up with anything to say as I gathered up our materials. Anger and irritation were making my still-upset stomach churn even worse, though I had sucked on a peppermint constantly through the whole thing. I hadn’t bothered to tell Levi that I was still dealing with nausea...

But I was still trying to figure out the *why* behind it, too.

All I knew is that once work was over, I was going to be taking a trip to the drugstore—and I still was coming to terms with that.

*But seriously? Engaged? What the hell?*

“Shall we?” Levi’s hand rested lightly on my shoulder, bringing me back from the dread of what might be to come.

“Of course.” I headed for the door, letting him open it for me as everyone waved goodbye to us. I walked in silence out of the office building, internally *fuming* at the fact that not only was Levi determined to keep lying—he was determined to dig the hole even deeper than it already was.

“That went really well, I think,” Levi remarked, sliding into the back seat of the car. “We really have this in the bag, I think.”

“Right.” I pulled out my phone, typing out a text to Linley and demanding that she meet up with me tonight.

“I wouldn’t worry about Victor, by the way,” Levi continued, his deep voice *grinding* my nerves with every word that left his mouth. “He’s retiring in just a couple of years, so as much as he might be opposed to the younger generation taking over, I don’t think his opinion will sway the rest of the executives. Also, I know that the guy who will be taking his place is very much pro you and me, so I think it’s just a minor setback.”

“Minor setback,” I echoed him, shaking my head. “Is that what we’ll tell them all when they learn that we’re *never* going



to get engaged? Or are we actually going to pretend to do that too?”

“Why are you being so snide about it? You agreed to be in a *serious* relationship with me. We all know that they lead to marriage. I don’t see how an engagement is that startling. It’s clearly taking that kind of ammo to get this deal done.”

“So you’re just willing to say—and lie about—whatever, just to make the deal? Like, don’t you think at some point we need to stop the bullshit? I *hate* lying like this, Levi. It sucks.”

He blew out a sigh as the car pulled up outside of our glass-front building. “I don’t know, Ally. I never intended to have to go *this* far with it, either. I just think that we should consider the benefits of it.”

“Of blatantly *lying* to Frank’s face?” I countered, taking his hand to get out of the car—only because my stilettos were borderline *too* tall for me.

“Yeah, I guess, if that’s how you have to put it.” Levi dropped my hand as we walked to the building, grabbing the door for me. “I mean, people get serious and break up all the time. It’s not that big of a story.”

“Except for the fact that it’s one of the main selling points that you’re playing.” I shook my head as I stepped into the elevator, pushing the button for my floor.

“It’s not the *main* point, Ally. It’s just the only point you pay attention to because for some reason it gets under your skin—and I get it. I get that you never do a damn thing wrong. You

never bend the rules or whatever. But come on, we've got a good thing going. We should be celebrating today."

I pursed my lips in frustration as I stepped out onto my floor. "It's whatever."

Levi grabbed the door, jumping out to follow me—all the way to my office, shutting the door behind us. "It's *not* whatever. We can't keep leaving on terms like this. It's not good for our partnership."

"*Partnership?*" I tossed my bag onto my desk and spun around to face him. "What fucking *partnership?*"

"Uh, the thirty percent I'm giving you makes you my partner, whether you like it or not—and Frank thinks you're going to be involved in the finances. I heard you today at the presentation. You know what you're doing, and I think your input will be helpful for everyone."

"I don't understand you." I let out a groan, running my hand over my face. "You didn't want anything from me, other than to pretend to be your girlfriend, and *now* you're saying you *want* me to be an active part of the company? I'd have to quit my job working for your mom."

"Yeah, I know, but just *think* of how great it would be." His hazel eyes were intently focused on my face, and the excitement in them tugged at my heart.

*It would be great—and heartbreaking.*

I swallowed the emotions I'd been fighting. "I don't know if that's what I want to do, Levi. We'll have to stage a breakup

and working through that. I don't think I can put on that kind of show, to be honest. I don't *want* to."

He nodded. "So you don't really want to do this with me?" His expression was cryptic, his jaw tensing beneath the sexy five o'clock shadow he had going on.

"It's not like that, Levi. It's just...we don't get along."

"But we *do*."

I couldn't help but laugh. "No, we *don't*. We never have, and I don't think we ever will. Like yeah, I think you know what you're doing with the business, and your plan is great. I can get onboard with that, but outside of that, we don't ever see eye to eye."

"I thought things were okay between us, and Josh said that you just needed a little space to cool off after the whole club thing—so I did that, and things are fine."

"But what was with the weird texts you sent me the other night, Levi? What was that about? They didn't start off sounding like business." I winced as the words left my mouth, having buried that whole occurrence deep, deep in my mind, never intending on bringing it up to him. He had sent me for a loop that night...

Giving my stupid heart hope.

"Ally..." His voice trailed off as he took a step toward me, his face suddenly softening. "I just...I just had too much to drink that night, and I let myself worry too much about how

distant you'd been. I've known you a long time and you're Josh's little sister, so of course I care about how things are..."

*Ah, of course. Playing the sister card.*

I cleared my throat, feeling the lump already growing. "Okay, well, I'm glad we cleared that up—and I'll consider being a more vocal partner. Just give me some time to think about it, and I'll get back to you." I turned away from him, needing a break from taking in his handsome, built figure in his black suit.

But his hand on my arm stopped me.

"What?" I demanded, my anger returning as I spun back around.

He didn't answer though, his lips crashing into mine before I could even consider pulling away. A moan slipped from my throat as my body relaxed against his touch, my lips parting as his tongue begged to enter. My chest heaved as his hands ran around my waist, slipping lower to squeeze my ass.

"God, I missed this," he growled, his hands ripping up the bottom of my skirt.

I stopped him, my hands forcefully landing on him as I broke my mouth from his. "What the hell are we doing?" I gasped for air, my pussy already moistening my underwear. "We aren't supposed to do this..."

"Then tell me to stop." He leveled with me, his eyes searching mine. "Just tell me to go away, and that you don't want to do this."

I hesitated, my mind running rampant and my pussy aching for him. As much as I wanted to push him away, I just...

*Couldn't.*

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## LEVI

“I want you,” Ally finally muttered after an intense few moments of silence, her eyes hazy with lust. “*Now.*”

My cock jumped to life in my pants and I spun around, realizing I hadn’t locked the office door.

“Okay, so I guess you changed your mind.”

“Hardly,” I chuckled, flipping the lever to the locked position. “I’d just prefer no accidental interruptions.”

Her gaze dropped to my suit pants, my cock twinging at the way her eyes lingered on my bulge. Ally’s fingers went to her burgundy blouse, tugging it out from where it was tucked into her black pencil skirt. Slowly, she pulled it over her head, revealing a black bra. I caught my breath and picked up my pace back to her. I reached around her, unsnapping the hook and setting her breasts free.

“You’re beautiful, you know,” I murmured, catching her eye as she dropped the bra to the floor. “I can’t think about anyone but you.”

Something flickered in her eyes, but she didn't say anything, pulling me back down to her. My lips crushed to hers, but I didn't linger long, breaking free and trailing down her neck. My hands drifted down her hips, finding the hem of her skirt—and then pulling the whole fucking thing up around her waist.

*I needed* her wrapped around my dick.

She let out a little noise as I lifted her up onto her desk, giving me the perfect angle. I pulled her to the edge, grinding my cock against her through our clothes. Kissing and sucking on her neck, I made my way lower, finally making it to her perfect, perky tits. I kissed around the soft flesh before making it to the erect pink nipple, sucking it into my mouth.

“Oh my *god*,” she cried out softly, her fingers finding their place in my hair, tugging at my locks.

Her hips rocked against my dick and I groaned, letting go of her juicy fucking ass to release myself. I dug out a condom from my pocket—one that I had put there this morning for this *very* instance...

Not that this was planned.

I tossed the condom onto the desk and fumbled with my belt, eagerness and frustration causing my hands to tremble. Finally, I let my dick out, the tip brushing her soaked underwear. As much as I wanted to just push them to the side and just take her, I stopped myself, my fingers replacing my cock.



“I just want you to fuck me,” she panted as I slipped a finger through her wet folds. “I want your cock, Levi.”

“Mmm.” I dropped her breast from my mouth, leaning back. “I want you to cum for me first, Ally.” Her blue eyes were on fire as I shifted her up with one hand, the other tugging her underwear down. “I want to *taste* you.”

She let out a little whimper as I dropped to my knees, dragging her even closer to the edge of the sleek, modern desk. “Oh, *Levi*.”

My tongue stroked her clitoris, her legs quivering at the contact. I followed it with a kiss, her wetness covering my lips. Everything about Ally was sweet, but the fucking taste of her pussy was the sweetest—and it was *all* I wanted anymore. I teased her pussy’s entrance, fighting the urge to stroke myself to the same rhythm as her hips. She rode my face, my tongue covering the length of her. I savored the moment, committing to my memory the way she felt, tasted, and smelled.

“I’m gonna cum,” Ally whined, her legs resting on my shoulders. I grabbed onto her thighs, wrapping her legs around my neck, fully burying my face in her pussy. It was a *dream*, liquid pooling into my mouth as her ass bounced against my face.

*Fucking naughty girl.*

A cry escaped her lips as she orgasmed, her entire body tensing against me. Her fingers in my hair clenched so tightly it nearly hurt, but it only turned me on further, drinking her in

as she finally came down from the high. Her legs loosened as I cleaned her up with my tongue, finally leaning away from her.

“You’re so *good* at that,” she panted as I rose, kissing her on the mouth and letting her have a taste of just how *good* she was. I let the kiss deepen for a few moments longer, my tongue dancing with hers, caressing every corner of her mouth. I had been *dying* to have her again...

And I hadn’t even realized it.

*Maybe this will finally get her out of my system.*

My hands felt along the smooth surface of the desk beside her, looking for the condom I had just set out. Eyes still shut, tongue deep in a kiss, I finally found it. However, Ally stopped me, pulling away.

*Oh shit. She’s changing her mind.*

Her eyes searched mine for a second, before she scooted right off the desk. My mouth went dry as our gaze stayed locked, and I was unsure as to what she might say...

But she didn’t say anything.

She dropped to her knees, her hot, wet mouth wrapping around the tip of my cock. A guttural moan escaped as she sucked me deeper, slipping me *right* down her fucking throat.

“You’re so *naughty*,” I heaved, listening to sound of my dick deep in her mouth as she grabbed my balls. She gave them a tight squeeze, her other hand aiding her tongue. “Holy *fuck*.” My eyes drifted downward, hardly able to contain the urge not to cum right then and there. My fingers gently

threaded through her soft auburn hair, keeping it out of her face—and her in my view.

*I need to stop her before I blow my load.*

But the pleasure was just *too* good.

Ally worked back and forth, my cock wet with her saliva. It was nearly as good as the juices from her pussy, and I let my hands rest against in her hair, letting her have full control of the moment...

She knew what she was doing.

I shut my eyes, feeling the orgasm building in my lower abdomen. “I’m gonna cum.”

She moaned in response, maintaining her movements as I peaked, filling her hot mouth with my semen. Ally’s mouth stayed there, and my eyes fluttered open as she swallowed, the sound turning me on all over again. She stood to her feet, wiping her mouth.

“Turn around,” I growled, her eyes going wide as she looked up at me. “I’m not done.”

Her lips curled up into a seductive smile and she spun around, sticking her round ass out for me. I reached over her, my sloppy wet cock rubbing against her inner thigh. I tore open the foil, leaning back and sliding the latex over my still-throbbing erection. I could go all fucking night when it came to Ally.

I grabbed her tiny waist, my grip tightening as the tip of my cock lined up with her entrance. Without any hesitation, I

plunged into her sopping wet pussy, a groan escaping my mouth as she tightened around me.

“Oh my god, *yes*,” Ally cried out, her hands bracing against the desk, knocking a few things off onto the floor. I kept her bent over, my hips slamming into her over and over, enjoying the second round of sex with her.

I slapped her ass cheek, leaving a red mark, a moan coming out of her after the contact. I scooted my hands back, gripping the flesh of her back end, parting her cheeks to give me a better view of my dick sliding in and out of her. I caressed the second hole, feeling her tremble against the touch.

*Oh fuck.*

I had no intentions of doing anything beyond that, but her reaction was *so* hot, so I kept circling, her moans increasing in volume.

*The whole fucking building is going to know I'm balls deep in her.*

My hips slapped against her, the sound like music to my ears as I felt myself reaching a second climax. She let out a loud moan, her own body tensing...

And then she *exploded* around me.

Her pussy tightened around my cock, pulsing with her orgasm, more moisture spilling around my dick. The sensation was too much, and I came hard and fast, letting out a growl as I fell forward, my hand landing beside Ally on the desk.

“*Jesus*,” I panted, my breaths sharp as I tried to fill my lungs with oxygen. “This is the best sex I’ve ever had.”

Her body froze beneath me as I placed a kiss on the top of her shoulder, breathing in the scent of her skin. I didn’t know why I was so...*addicted* to her. With a sigh, I pulled out of her, running my hands through my hair to smooth it out before pulling off the condom and tossing it into the trash can beside the desk.

She pushed herself off the desk, reaching for her bra and fastening it back into place before turning around to meet my gaze. “What the hell is going on between us, Levi?”

My stomach knotted up at the question, one that I should’ve seen coming. “I don’t know what you mean by that. We just got a little excited.”

The hurt on her face was a knife to the heart. “Right, that’s what it was—the heat of the moment.” She let out a sharp sigh and grabbed her blouse, pulling it over her head. “I don’t know why I even asked. I should’ve known.”

“Known *what*, exactly?” I demanded, suddenly catching a little offense at the way she said it.

“That you’re the kind of guy that does whatever he wants when it comes to women, regardless of their feelings.”

*Feelings.*

“What are you trying to say, Ally?” My heart jumped in my chest, but I swallowed the emotions, reminding myself of what Josh had told me.

“I’m trying to say that you need to leave my office, *now*,” she snapped, pointing to the door as I finished zipping up my pants. “I can’t believe I gave in to you, *again*.”

That stung.

“Are you trying to say you regret this?”

“Just *leave*, Levi.”

“Fine.” I spun on my heels and headed for the office door, unlocking it before hesitating, my instinct fighting me to stay there—to tell her what I was really feeling for her.

*That I’m falling for her.*

I shook my head at myself, knowing that wasn’t the right thing to do. I’d have to talk to Josh before I ever talked to Ally about anything at all, and so I ripped the door open. I stepped out into the hallway, closing it behind me.

“Hey, hon, what’s up?” Mom’s brows were furrowed as she stepped out of her own office just down the hall.

“I was just stopping in to see Ally for a second,” I said carefully.

“About the deal that you’re making with Frank Lewis, right? I think that was a smart move of you to bring Ally on your team. She’s got a way with finances, and she can see things that I can’t—not even after doing this for over twenty years. She’s really something. I think the two of you make a great team, in all aspects of the word.”

I swallowed hard, guilt tugging at me for leaving her the way I did. “She is something. I’m happy that she’s on board with me when it comes to CyberSecure. I just have to work out the final details and I think we have the purchase in the bag.”

“That’s great, son.” Mom gave me a smile as I turned to leave. “Oh, and also, these walls aren’t soundproof, so you might want to keep that in mind next time.”

*Oh, fuck.*

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## ALLY

“So *what* happened in your office yesterday?” Linley nearly spat out her wine as her eyes went as wide as her face.

“Yeah, it’s as bad as it sounds,” I groaned, dropping down to sit on the edge of my coffee table. “I just can’t tell him no—like the sex is *so* good, Lin.”

My best friend shook her head at me. “Normally, I would be jumping up and down, cheering you on for enjoying some amazing sex, but your feelings are starting to get too caught up in Levi—and I don’t want to see you get any more hurt than you already are.”

I chewed the inside of my cheek, running my hands down my bare thighs, sticking out of my knit shorts. “Yeah, I know...but...there’s something else.” My stomach lurched as I said the words out loud, thinking back to the drugstore trip I had taken this morning.

Her face fell. “It’s not just a stomach virus, is it?”

“I don’t know for sure.” My voice was quiet, my eyes flickering to the glass of water sitting on the other side of me. I had skipped the wine tonight—just in case.

“Oh my god,” she said with a sigh. “Does he have any idea that you might be pregnant?”

*Pregnant.*

The word still made my stomach tighten into knots. “He has no idea at all—and honestly, I don’t know if that’s even what it is. You know I’ve been irregular forever, so I don’t know that I should be reading into it. It’s just, the nausea is hanging around, and I don’t know why...”

“Maybe you’re lactose intolerant suddenly,” Linley offered up, giving me a half-hearted smile. “I’ve heard of that happening before.” She pushed her freshly dyed dark hair behind her ear. “That’s just as likely as you getting pregnant, since you used protection—right?”

“Of course we did,” I snapped, wrapping my arms around myself. “That’s another reason why I’ve put off taking the test, because I mean, the chances are nearly zero. It’s not like a condom broke or something.”

“It still happens.” Linley’s voice was quiet. “Do you want me to stay while you take the test?”

I let out a sigh, shrugging my shoulders. “I guess maybe that would make it easier. I just don’t know what I’ll do if I am—like, Josh is going to freak out at both of us. I don’t want to ruin their friendship.”

Linley took a sip of her wine. “That’s on him if he freaks out, which I’m sure he will at first, but I think that he’ll come around. If there’s a baby involved, that means he’s going to be an uncle. I don’t think he’ll stay mad *that* long—not at you.”

“I don’t want him to be mad at Levi, either.”

“Well, there’s nothing you can do about that. Levi could’ve been honest with him about what happened between the two of you, especially since it’s clearly *not* an isolated incident. I think Josh will understand. You’re just going to have to be honest with him about the feelings you have for Levi.”

“No way, that’ll make it *so* much worse for Levi.”

“And *maybe* he deserves that, Ally.” Linley stood to her feet, offering me her hand. “He might be giving you thirty percent of a company, but that doesn’t mean it’s okay for him to playing with your heart the way he is. I think he knows that you have feelings.”

“I don’t know.” I took her hand, her bright red nails glowing under the dim lights of my apartment’s living room. “I think men are oblivious to literally everything half the time. I swear they don’t catch hints.”

“Touché.” She laughed. “So where’s this test? I say we put your mind at ease now, so you can have a glass of wine and let yourself relax a little—and maybe we should make you a new online dating profile. I’ve found a couple of new apps that are gaining some ground.”

“You’re wild, Lin.” I pulled my hair out of my face, tying it up in a loose bun on the top of my head. It felt like I was back in college, prepping to give a speech in front of the entire class.

But instead, I was just about to pee on a stick.

I headed across the living room to the bar, grabbing my brown leather purse and opening it. I fished out the test kit that I’d bought, spinning around and letting out a heavy sigh. “It’s going to be for nothing.”

“Right.” Linley smiled, but I didn’t hear the confidence in her voice that was usually there. “Let’s go do this.”

“Deal.” I headed to the bathroom, tearing open the box on the way there and pulling out the instructions. I’d taken plenty of pregnancy tests in the past, since I had always been irregular, but never once had I felt the nerves that I did this time.

And it’s because my gut wasn’t agreeing with my head.

“Okay, here.” Linley took the packaged test from my hand. “You’re clearly nervous. Let me help you.”

“Thanks.” My shoulders sagged under my oversized sweatshirt. “I don’t know why this is getting to me so much.”

“I do.” Linley eyed me as she ripped the packed open, pulling off the cap of the test and handing it to me. “You’ve only ever taken these when you were in a serious relationship, where you had plenty of security. This isn’t one of those

situations, but I guarantee there's plenty of women who have been in your exact shoes."

"I don't know if that makes me feel any better."

"Well, regardless of the outcome, you have an amazing support system here for you, and we'll be happy no matter what you do—even if Levi is a total jerk and flakes on the whole thing."

"You think he would do that?" I raised an eyebrow, fumbling with the stick in my fingers.

"No, I don't, actually. I'm just trying to give you the worst-case scenario as proof that no matter what, you're going to be just fine—now go pee on the stick, Ally."

I took a deep breath, tugging my knit shorts down and taking a seat on the toilet awkwardly. Linley went back to reading the instructions as I urinated on the end of the stick, hating just how ridiculous pregnancy tests were.

Like, is it even possible to do it and *not* make a mess?

*Ugh.*

I finished up and stood to my feet, taking the cap that Linley held out. "I think I'm going to just sit it on the sink, and then we can go do something else, setting a timer or whatever."

Linley nodded as I sat the test on the sink. "I'll set a timer on my phone for five minutes." She pulled out her phone, setting the timer and then looking back up at me. "What do you want to do?"

“How will I tell Levi?” I blurted out, feeling the tears welling up in my eyes. “What am I supposed to do?”

“We don’t know for sure that you’ll be telling Levi anything, first of all. And secondly, *if* you are pregnant, I think that you should tell him as soon as possible. There’s no point in holding out on him.”

“And Josh?”

“I think that’s something Levi should have to tackle—or maybe the both of you together? I don’t know. Again, let’s just take it one step at a time, Ally. I think that’s for the best at the moment.”

“Okay.” I nodded at her advice, my eyes tempted to look over to the pending test sitting on the bathroom counter. However, I held off for a few more long moments, staring down at my bare feet on the white tile floor.

*Everything will be fine, no matter what.*

I mean, I knew that my parents would be angry—or maybe more shocked than anything, but they’d definitely be there to support me. They had never faltered in that aspect of my life, and this situation would be no different...

It was just *Levi*.

“Ally...” Linley’s voice brought me back from my thoughts, her voice startling. “I think the test is done.” She was leaning over the bathroom counter, her eyes wide as she looked up at me.

*I’m pregnant.*

“It’s positive, isn’t it?” I demanded, rushing to counter and picking the stick up. I could barely breathe as I saw two *bold* pink lines in the little window of the test. “Oh my god. Oh my *god.*” Emotions welled up in my chest, and I felt the tears slip from my eyes, cascading down my cheeks and dripping onto my sweatshirt. However, as much as I was shocked, terrified, worried...

I was also *excited.*

*What the hell is wrong with me?*

The feeling was just as shocking as the positive test in my hand. There was *nothing* good about the situation I was in, yet somehow the thought of actually having a child wasn’t *that* bad to me. I’d always wanted to be a mom, anyway...

This might be the only way I got to do that.

“Are you okay?” Linley’s dark eyebrows were furrowed as she studied my face. “You’re literally smiling like an idiot—and crying at the same time.”

“I-I-I don’t know,” I choked out, wiping the tears from my cheeks. “Like, there’s just this part of me...like maybe this isn’t so bad. I do love babies.”

“And Levi *can* afford to support the two of you,” Linley added, her voice brightening. “There’s no way his parents wouldn’t make sure that you had everything you need, so yeah, that’s definitely not something you have to worry about.”

“Yeah.” I nodded, trying to get in control of the tears slipping down my cheeks. “And you’ll make an amazing aunt of sorts.”

“Damn right I will.” Linley laughed, reaching for me and pulling me into a tight embrace. “Everything *is* okay. You just have to keep thinking about it all like that. There’s going to be some hurdles to get over in the beginning, but you’re already getting in the right mindset to do this—you’ll make an incredible mom.”

“And my parents are going to be grandparents.” I sniffled, leaning into my best friend’s shoulder. “They’ll probably be the crazy kind that smother the baby with way too many gifts and trips.”

“That’ll probably happen from both sides. The Lombardi family will smother the baby too.”

“Oh my god,” I groaned, breaking away from her. “What do you think they’ll say though? Do you think they’ll think I’m a slut?”

“What?” Linley looked shocked. “Why on earth would they think that? Levi is their *son*, and honestly, they love you, Ally. Lisa took you right under her wing as soon as you graduated. I don’t think this will change how they feel about you at all. I do think that Levi should be the bearer of the news though.”

“Yeah, I guess that’s true. I’m still going to be worried about it until they know, though—Josh too.” I held the test in my hand, glancing back down at it.



“One step at a time though.” Linley squeezed my shoulder. “I know that’s easier said than done sometimes, but there’s one person who deserves to know before *all* those other people.”

I took a deep breath, my heart beginning to race in my chest. “I know. I guess I should ask him to meet me for lunch Monday so I can tell him.”

Linley shook her head at me. “I don’t think that’s the way to do it. Get it over with while you still have the courage.”

I swallowed hard, reaching into my pocket. “Okay. I’ll send him a text right now.”

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## LEVI

I stared at the numbers on the screen of my computer, pouring over them for the umpteenth time that day, while my phone vibrated beside me on the couch.

*Probably someone else asking if I'm coming out.*

Ignoring the buzz, I kept my eyes focused on the screen. The last thing I wanted was to go out and mingle with a bunch of people whose sole ambition was to party—I was on the brink of owning one of the biggest tech companies in world. And besides, I couldn't even have fun anymore, anyway, my mind hung up on the one person I couldn't have.

“Hey, you're really staying in on a Saturday night?” Josh called from the kitchen, just before poking his head in.

*And that's why I can't have her.*

“Yeah, man. I'm just trying to make sure this is as solid as possible. Frank wants me to send it out to all the executives on Monday and I just want to make sure that I cover everything. It's a big deal.”

“I’m sure it’s just fine the way it is, Levi.” Josh walked over, glancing down at the screen. He put his hands on my shoulders, giving them a squeeze. “You need to get out of this damn house and enjoy yourself for once. Ever since you started working on this *deal*, you’ve become even more uptight than usual.”

“I *am* enjoying myself right now,” I grunted, scrolling through more of the numbers. “Maybe I can go out next weekend—just not right now. I want to nail this. This is my future.”

“You *are* going to nail it.” Josh’s brow furrowed as my phone went off again, lighting up beside me. “What the fuck?” He reached for my phone, picking it up. “Why is my sister texting you, Levi?”

“What?” I whipped my head around in shock, grabbing for the phone. “What’d she say?”

“We need to talk *now*,” he grunted, his voice taking a dive as he tossed the phone onto my lap. “What the fuck is that about? What does she need to talk to you about?” Josh walked around to the front of the couch, his face going red.

“Uh, well considering that she’s thirty percent of this, and that she’s supposed to be working on the questionnaire they sent out, that’s probably what it’s about.”

*Except I haven’t sent her the questionnaire.*

“Okay, well then call her,” Josh demanded, folding his arms across his chest. “If she needs help with the fucking document,

help her. Don't just sit here with your face in your computer. That text sounds urgent."

*No fucking kidding.*

"Right, sorry," I grunted, shutting my laptop and picking up my phone. However, before I could hit the call button beside her name, another text came through, popping up on the screen.

*Just come over to my apartment.*

Thankfully, Josh didn't see that one, and I quickly shut my phone off. Standing to my feet and reaching for my laptop case, I slid my computer into it and slung it over my shoulder.

"Are you going to just leave Ally hanging?" Josh snapped, looking more pissed by the minute.

"No," I shot back at him, heading toward the garage door. "I left the flash drive with the ledger information at the office, and I need to go pick it up for her. I didn't make a copy of it, so I can't help her without it."

Damn, my on-the-fly bullshit game was *strong*.

Josh nodded, though suspicion was written all over his face. "All right. Well, I'm gonna head to the party in Beverly Hills tonight. I guess I'll just have to go without my wingman while you go fuck around with me sister."

*Oof, wouldn't I like to.*

"Yeah, I get that," I said with a nod. "Maybe I can swing by once I finish getting all this shit to Ally."

“I won’t hold my breath.” Josh headed down the hallway, disappearing into his room as I reached for the doorknob of the garage, swinging it open and hitting the button to open the door. My mind was spinning as I tossed my bag into the passenger seat, my phone still in my hand. I had no idea what Ally could possibly want to talk to me about, but I knew that it couldn’t be good...

*And probably involved her feelings.*

I blew out a sigh, starting the engine and glancing down at the text thread. My fingers hovered over the screen for a moment before I sent a reply.

*Be there in ten minutes.*

Ally liked the message as I backed out of the garage, the headlights flooding the darkness. I stomped the gas, the motor of my white Lamborghini echoing in the quiet of the evening. I hadn’t had a single intention of going out tonight...

But I never saw this coming.

*Maybe I should’ve just called her first.*

My mind was still on overdrive as I pulled into the parking lot of her apartment complex, trying to remember which fucking building she lived in. I’d only ever gone over to Ally’s place if Josh had needed to bring her something—or for the housewarming party that he threw her when she moved in. I stepped out into the warm, humid air, and pulled out my phone.

“Let me guess,” a familiar voice called out. “You don’t know where the hell you’re going.”

My eyes jumped up over the top of my phone to see Linley, an eyebrow raised at me as she hit the unlock button on the car parked beside me. “Nope. I don’t remember. I never come here.”

Her face contorted in disgust. “Second floor, two-thirteen. That one.” She pointed to a second-story door, the porch outside decorated in homey fashion with plants and shit.

*Makes sense.*

“Thanks. Do you know what this is about?” I took a step up onto the sidewalk, my black vans contrasting with the nearly white cement.

“Uh, I think it’s probably in your best interest if you just go and talk to Ally.” Linley gave me a half-smile before heading to her car. “Good luck, though.”

*Good luck?*

*What the fuck am I walking into?*

I couldn’t even mutter goodbye to Ally’s best friend and my gaze shifted back to the apartment, my stomach now churning at the thought of what was behind that door. But I did know one thing...

This was *not* a booty call.

My shoes thudded up the steps, and I weaved around the obnoxious plants on the front porch before ringing the

doorbell. It was a gated apartment complex and that was probably a good thing.

Otherwise, a plant thief would have a heyday.

I chuckled to myself just as the door swung open. Ally's eyes were puffy and red, her mascara smeared slightly beneath her bottom eyelashes.

*Oh shit.*

“Uh, hey.” I cleared my throat, running my hands through my dark hair. “You look like shit—like you're upset.”

Her eyebrows raised, but she didn't say anything, opening the door and gesturing for me to step inside. I glanced around the apartment, seeing that her fascination with plants didn't stop at the porch...

*They're everywhere.*

Shaking my head, I spun back around to Ally, who was shutting and locking the door behind me. “So, what is it that we need to talk about? Did something happen?”

She stayed quiet—*again*. Her blue eyes clung to my face, like she was halfway expecting me to just read her mind or something.

“Ally, you asked me to come over so we could talk. I can't have a conversation with you if you're not talking.” I tried to stay calm, keeping my voice collected, but something about the way she was looking at me was...*unsettling*.



“I know that.” Her voice was timid as she pushed some flyaways out of her face. “This is just a lot harder than I thought it would be.”

“What’s harder?” I narrowed my eyes at her, seeing that her arms were wrapped around herself. “I seriously don’t know what’s up with you, but you’re starting to freak me out a little.”

She rolled her eyes, and I felt relief at the sight of her sass—at least there were signs of the Ally I knew. “Just hang on. I know a better way to do this.”

“Uh, okay.” I stood awkwardly in her tiny living room, trying to decide if I should sit down—or maybe get closer to the front door in case I needed to bail. I had never seen Ally in this state before, and I wasn’t sure how to handle *any* upset woman.

Especially one that apparently had something to show me.

I chewed on my lower lip, peering down the hallway as I waited another few moments, my stomach still feeling uneasy and my heart racing. If I didn’t know better, I’d think I had just run five miles.

Finally, Ally reappeared from one of the rooms, holding something in her hand. “I think this will make it clear.”

“All right,” I said, letting out a sigh as she held it out to me. I noticed that her hand was trembling as I took it, my fingers brushing her skin. “I don’t really understand what’s going on.”

“You will.”

I gazed down at what I recognized as some sort of test in my hand. I noticed two pink lines in a window, and one dark line in another.

*She has COVID?*

“Uh...” I hesitated, holding the test stick out to her. “Is this about me being exposed or something?”

“What?” Her mouth dropped open, her brow furrowing. “What are you talking about?”

“I thought we were kind of past the pandemic thing.” I shrugged my shoulders. “And I thought you already had COVID once.”

“Oh my *god*, you have to be fucking kidding me.” She facepalmed, letting out a loud groan. “I don’t have *COVID*, Levi.”

*Oh.*

*OH.*

*FUCK.*

“No,” I gasped, grabbing the stick from her hands again and flipping it over. Sure enough, there were two tiny words on the back side of the test.

*Pregnancy test.*

My whole body froze as the surrealness of the moment landed on my chest, making it difficult to breathe—like the fucking oxygen had been sucked right out of the room.

“So you get it now?” Ally’s voice sounded distant, like she was talking through a telephone.

I nodded, though it was more of an automatic response as my head went light. “And this is...” My voice trailed off as I got the courage to look up from the test. “This is mine?”

Her face contorted. “Uh, obviously.”

“Sorry,” I mumbled, still feeling shocked. “I just...I just had to make sure. I’m just trying to wrap my head around it—I believe you, I just...*wow*.”

“I know that it’s a lot to take in...”

“Yeah, it’s definitely a *lot*.” I held the test out for her, and she took it from my hands, her gaze still intently focused on me.

Waiting.

“Is that really all you’re going to say?” There was moisture glistening in her eyes as she looked up at me, her expression beginning to fall apart.

*Oh shit. Of course.*

I reached out to her, pulling her into me. “I’m sorry, Ally.” I wrapped my arms around her. “I’m just trying to process it—it’s all going to be fine. I’ll do whatever you want me to. I just...*holy fuck*, this is just sending me for a loop. We used protection.”

She leaned away from me. “So you’re good with me keeping the baby?”

I nodded, not having thought of anything else. “Yeah, you can. I don’t know why we wouldn’t—I mean, I didn’t *exactly* plan on becoming a dad this way, or this soon, but we can figure something out...”

“Okay, now you just have to tell Josh about it.”

*Oh the hell I am.*

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## ALLY

“**W**hy wouldn’t *you* tell your brother that you’re pregnant?” Levi dropped his arms from around me. “He’ll take the news *way* better from you than me.”

“Are you serious?” I exploded, throwing my hands in the air. “You have to be kidding me. He’s *your* best friend—not mine. You know him better than I do.”

“Yeah, and I know that he’s going to fucking murder me when he finds out that I knocked up his little sister.”

“Don’t say it like that,” I snapped, folding my arms across my chest, offended. “That makes it sound like I was just some kind of floozy.”

He chuckled, somehow finding humor in the moment. “You’re not, but I should probably point out that this is all the result of a couple of hot one-night stands—neither of us look squeaky clean.”

My mouth dropped open. “You’re making me feel *terrible*.”

“No, I don’t mean it like that,” he said quickly, his hands going up in a small surrender. “I just don’t know how else to

put it. It's not like we're together."

"Well, Frank Lewis thinks we're together—and whoever else. I don't even know what everyone is going to think..." I plopped down on the edge of the couch, my head falling to my hands. "I *never* sleep with men outside of a relationship, and the *one* time that I do, *this* happens." The frustration was nearly as overwhelming as the reality of having a baby...with *Levi*.

"I mean, my mom probably won't be surprised," Levi said, shrugging his shoulders as I looked up at him, narrowing my eyes.

"What does that mean?"

"She may or may not have heard our little rendezvous in your office on Friday—and she was under the assumption that we were going to the Caribbean as, you know, a couple. I don't think it'll shock her the way it will everyone else."

Embarrassment flooded my cheeks. "Oh my gosh, that's literally *so* unprofessional of me. God only knows what she thinks of me now."

"She thinks I'm *into* you." His voice came out in a weird tone—one that I couldn't decipher as I stared across the coffee table at him.

"So what do we do now?" I asked, deciding not to press into his feelings. No matter how I felt about him, I didn't want him to pursue something real with me just because I was pregnant—that's not the kind of woman I was.

“Uh, that’s a great question. We probably should start with just telling Josh, don’t you think? Maybe schedule a doctor’s appointment? I don’t know.” He looked overwhelmed, but surprisingly calm given the situation. I had expected something much, much worse.

“Okay, yeah. I can schedule a doctor’s appointment.” I took a deep breath, a silence settling between us as we sat, staring at each other.

“We should tell Frank.”

*Ugh.*

“Can we *not* talk about that deal right now?”

He gave me an incredulous look. “Why not? This is like icing on the cake. He’ll be stoked for us, and it’s just legitimate proof that we’re a real thing.”

“But this *is* a real thing, Levi.” My irritation was growing, and I suddenly felt like this was all just another part of the game for him. “This is a *real* child that we’re going to bring into the world. You’re going to be a dad.”

“Yeah, I know,” he snapped, rising to his feet. “I’m just trying to point out the bright side of the situation. We’ll just have to fucking co-parent and try to get along.”

*Co-parent.*

*So he really isn’t considering a real relationship at all.*

I hadn’t planned to talk about it, but it still stung—more than I wanted to admit it did. “So should we tell Josh now?”



Levi shook his head. “No, he’s at a party for the night in Beverly Hills. I don’t think it’s a good idea to go this late, anyway. We should wait a couple days, make sure that we’re as put together as possible. I have no idea what his reaction is going to be.”

*But it’s not going to be good.*

“I’ll go with you when you tell him.” I nearly cringed at the thought of being there, but...

I was just as responsible for the baby as Levi was.

Levi ran his hands over his face. “Do you wanna like get some food or something? Maybe just hang out for the evening?”

“Uh...” My voice trailed off, surprised by the suggestion. “I guess we can?”

“I just don’t feel like going back to the house, and if Josh shows up, he’ll know that there’s something up—he already knows there’s something up with me.”

*Well, that’s news.*

“What do you mean?” I leaned back on the couch, studying the way his expression faltered as he looked at me like he had admitted something he shouldn’t have. “I didn’t think anything was up.”

“It’s not, I just...I haven’t been going out or whatever because of working on the business deal with CyberSecure, and he thinks something is wrong because of that. I don’t miss parties very often—but I’ve just been busy or whatever.”

“Right...” I bit my lip, not sure if I believed his reasons, though I had no idea what else it could be. If having a baby wasn’t a reason to admit your feelings for someone, then I didn’t know what was, honestly...

So that wasn’t it.

“Yeah, so pizza? Do you like pizza? Does it make your stomach sick? Is *that* why your stomach has been so off?” He pointed to my belly, nervously pulling out his phone. “I don’t know who delivers here.”

“I think it was morning sickness, yeah,” I said, trying not to laugh at Levi tripping over his words for the first time in his life. “But it’ll pass by the second trimester.”

“The second what?”

“You know, like the second trimester of pregnancy?”

“I have a lot to learn, don’t I?” An apprehensive laugh slipped through his lips as he looked at me.

“You do, but so do I. We’ll just figure this out together.” I ran my hands down my thighs before standing to my feet and grabbing my phone off the coffee table. There was a text from Linley, asking if everything had gone okay.

*He took it better than I expected.*

I sent the message before heading to the kitchen to get myself a much-needed refill of water. “I like cheese pizza from wherever, by the way.”

“Cool.” He nodded as I walked by him, his face in his phone in the moment.

My fingers were still trembling as I turned on the faucet, filling my glass back up with lukewarm tap water. For some reason, ice-cold water made my stomach feel less than great—and now that I knew I was pregnant, I would just have to accept that fact.

*But he didn't get mad about it, so that's good.*

As soon as I turned off the sink, I felt hands slip around my waist, startling me. I spun to see Levi right there, his body pressed to the front of me.

“We’ll figure this out.” His voice was soft, and strangely comforting as I leaned toward him, letting my shoulders drop against him. “I don’t know anything about pregnancy, childbirth, babies—whatever, but I think that if we can do this business thing together as well as we have, then why can’t we co-parent a kid?”

*Right.*

I tensed up a little, breaking apart from him. “We should probably start by *not* blurring the lines of our relationship.”

“What?”

“Yeah, you know, *blurring* the lines,” I reiterated, taking myself and my glass of water a few feet away from him.

Just for safekeeping.

“I don’t understand what the hell you’re saying, Ally.” His voice was growing defensive. “What lines are there to blur?”

“Uh, the one you just did?” I shot back. “Not to mention, you’re trying to order pizza and act like we’re a couple or something—but you keep saying *co-parent* and it’s confusing as fuck.”

“Okay, so then what do you want me to do? I’m just trying to be here for you in whatever way you need me to be. I mean, at this moment in time, who else do we have? We need to be able to get along. It’s just *pizza*, I’m not asking you to be my girlfriend or something.”

I took a deep breath, his words stinging all over again. “Yeah, okay. I’m sorry.” I shook my head, slipping past him and back into the living room.

*It’s just the pregnancy news getting to me.*

“Ally, wait,” Levi called after me, grabbing my arm. “I don’t understand what you want from me. We have to take all of this one step at a time for now. Having a baby is more serious than buying some massive company. I don’t think there’s any reason to complicate the working relationship we have right now.”

“Working relationship?” I said, exasperated. “You *fucked* me in my office. What kind of working relationship is *that*?”

His eyes widened. “I don’t know. I got caught up in the heat of the moment—the same thing that happened when we were in the Caribbean. Now we have to deal with the consequences

of that, and if we're going to co-parent then we *have* to get on friendly grounds with each other.”

“Then stop *fucking* me.” My voice came out cruel and sharp, tinged with the anger and hurt I was feeling in the moment. “Friends, business partners—whatever you want to call us, *don't* screw each other, Levi. I don't know how that works in your world, but it's crossing a line in mine.”

He went silent, his square jaw tensing. His broad shoulders looked even more massive in my small living room, and while he looked sexier than ever in his black t-shirt and light wash jeans...

I wasn't going to let him in again.

I'd already given him more than enough, and my heart was beginning to fracture with the feelings that I'd developed for him. He *clearly* didn't have the same feelings as me, no matter *what* he said in the middle of sex. It was just like Linley had said...

Guys say things they don't mean when they're thinking with their dick.

“I'll make sure that I don't *blur* the lines anymore, Ally. I didn't realize that it was such a problem for you, considering *you* could've just told me no. You wanted me just as bad as I wanted you in the moment. It feels unfair for you to hold this over my head like it's just *all* my fault.”

“I never said it was all your fault. I just don't want to keep making everything so difficult. We're already going to have to

explain all of this to Josh—and we need to be on the same page. You know he’s going to ask a lot of questions.”

Levi groaned. “I *know* he is, and we’ll just be honest with him. Things got a little hot and heavy in the Caribbean, and we got caught up in the moment. It happens, and we’re friends, business partners, and that’s it.”

*Just keep driving the point home, Levi.*

“Just friends.” I cleared my throat just as the doorbell rang, echoing through the apartment. “Bet that’s the pizza.”

“Yeah, probably.” Levi shook his head, going for the door, while I stood there staring at the place he had just been standing.

*Just friends.*

I chewed the inside of my cheek, my mind already picturing my big brother’s reaction to the news. There was *no* way he was going to buy that I didn’t have any feelings for Levi...

He knew me *way* too well.

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## LEVI

*Just tell him the truth.  
I got your sister pregnant.*

*But we're just friends.*

My knee bounced up and down as I sat on the couch, while Ally paced the floor in front of me. We had waited two days, letting the weekend pass before telling Josh. The two of us had gotten off work early, coming to my place, waiting for Josh to finish up and arrive.

“What is taking him so long?” Ally turned to me, letting out a sharp, nervous breath. “It’s almost six.”

“He probably just got stuck in traffic.” I tried to sound nonchalant, not wanting to get her anymore worked up than she already was.

Besides, it was taking everything I had not to lose my lunch.

“Jesus, he’s going to kill us, Levi,” she grumbled, going back to pacing, her heels clicking on the bamboo floors of my living room. “Like, he may never want to talk to me again.”



“I think that’s a little dramatic, but I do have an ambulance on standby for myself,” I joked, though part of me wondered if I should’ve.

“Yeah, and that’s not dramatic.” She laughed, shaking her head at me. “Maybe we’re freaking out for nothing though—he might take the news better than we think he will. I mean, *you* took it pretty well.”

“There was no other way to take it. Freaking out on you wouldn’t have been helpful for either of us.” I took in her figure, her tight black pants making her ass *so* fucking appealing.

*Just friends. No blurring lines.*

She had been difficult to read Saturday night, and part of me had wanted to ask if she *wanted* something more from me—but then she went into all that “blurring the lines” talk and I just...

I just didn’t want to ruin anything more than I already had.

“There he is.” The sound of the doorbell rang through the house and Ally stopped pacing, pausing to folding her arms across her chest. “We can do this. You tell him, and then I’ll back you up.”

*Right.*

Josh appeared in the living room a few seconds later, his expression puzzled as his eyes bounced between the two of us. “Uh...is it my birthday or something?”

*Fuck, I wish.*

I forced a laugh, though it came out lopsided and awkward. “Nope. We just were hoping to talk to you for a little bit.”

“Okay, you two are being fucking weird, and I don’t like it.” Josh sat his bag down in a black leather chair across from me. “If this is some weird fucking way of telling me you landed the deal, I don’t like it.”

“Well, we *did* kind of land something,” I said, cringing immediately at the daggers Ally shot at me. “I mean, we didn’t—we haven’t landed the business deal yet. I think we will though. It’s looking good.”

“Okay, so then why are you and my sister sitting in the living room, both of you looking like you’re about to burst.” Josh grimaced, and *nothing* about his shifting demeanor was making me feel any better about what I was about to say. “Someone better fucking say something, *now*.”

“Go on, *Levi*,” Ally said to me, her eyes urging me to speak.

My mouth felt like it was full of cotton as I forced myself to speak. “There may have been something that happened in the Caribbean—”

“*What?*” Josh demanded, cutting me off. “What the *hell* is that supposed to mean? Is this some sort of messed up way of saying that you screwed my sister? Because I should’ve known that you can’t go anywhere and keep your dick in your pants.”

*Okay, this is already going really bad.*

But I kept my voice calm, already seeing Ally shrinking away. “Well, I mean, this *is* kind of that.”

Josh’s face went red as his foot began to tap against the floor. “And?”

“And she’s pregnant.”

Josh *lunged* across the table, coming right for me, and I stood to my feet, my chest taking the brunt of the hit as I tried to hold him off.

“What the hell is wrong with you, Levi?” he roared, the solid six inches I had on him doing me a favor. “You make me a promise and then you just go and knock her up?” He swung at me and I dodged it, his fist *barely* missing my nose.

“Stop it!” Ally shouted, suddenly grabbing for her brother’s arm. “It’s my fault too.”

Josh froze, dropping his hand from me and spinning to look at Ally. “Yeah, you know what? You’re right. What the hell were you thinking, Ally? Like did you forget how much of a shithead he is?”

“Hey,” I called out, growing defensive. “I’m not *that* bad of a guy. She could’ve done much worse than me...”

I don’t think he heard me though, his red face of anger directed at his sister in the moment. “After *everything* I’ve told you about him, you still got in bed with him? Why would you do that—why would you *want* to? You can’t change a guy like him, Ally. He’ll never be what you deserve, and now you’ve just gone and complicated your life to an ungodly extent.”

I wanted to punch him square in the jaw for laying into her like that.

“It’s not like I thought that I *could* change him,” she fired back, her tone growing sharp. “We got caught up in the heat of the moment, and shit happened. And I don’t think it’s fair for you to come after me like that—like you don’t fucking sleep around with whoever you want to!”

*Whoa. Go, Ally.*

I was sincerely impressed with her in the moment, not holding back or taking any shit—but she also didn’t deserve to take the brunt of his anger. “Dude, I fucked up and I broke the rules we set. It just happened, and now there’s consequences to it.”

Josh spun back to me. “And you *never* planned to tell me what happened?”

“I don’t—I didn’t...I don’t know,” I stumbled over my words, shocked by the hurt in his voice. “Listen, I wasn’t expecting to go through with this deal and have things happen the way they did. I just—”

“You just couldn’t fucking keep your dick in your pants!” Josh was still burning up with anger, and I knew there was *nothing* we could say that would change his feelings in the moment.

“Maybe you should go, Ally.” I turned to her, seeing the hurt written all over her face. “Let me handle it from here.”

“No, that’s not fair.”

“Aw, how sweet,” Josh seethed. “The two of you are just one happy fucking team now, aren’t you? How long have you known? Is it official?”

“We’re not together,” I said flatly, beating Ally to the punch.

“Oh my god,” Josh groaned, shaking his head. “So you really knocked up my sister, and you don’t even have the balls to be a man and *be* with her? Like, are you okay with this, Ally? I *know* you don’t sleep with people that you don’t have feelings for.”

My stomach tightened at Josh’s words, my gaze drifting to Ally, who looked mortified. Her eyes darted to me for a split second before going back to her brother.

“We’re just friends—and business partners,” she muttered, her voice losing some of the confidence that she had earlier.

My heart sank.

*Does she have feelings for me?*

“I can’t deal with you two.” Josh threw up his hands. “Have fun telling Mom and Dad about this, Ally. They’re going to be *so* stoked to know that you got knocked up on a one-night stand with my best fucking friend.”

“I mean, it was more than *once*,” I clarified.

“Shut up,” Ally and Josh snapped at me simultaneously, both of them shooting the same set of blue daggers at me.

*Yikes.*

*What a fucking welcome to the family.*

“I think I am going to go,” Ally said finally after a tense few moments. “I promised Mom that I would call her.”

“Does she already know?” Josh demanded as I raised my eyebrows at her.

“Yeah, I couldn’t hold back the news.” Ally looked embarrassed by the surprised looks on both our faces. “I know that we said that we would wait to tell everyone else after Josh knew—but I couldn’t keep it in.” She gave me an apologetic look.

“It’s okay,” I tried to reassure her, ignoring Josh nearly melting down just a few feet away. “Everything is fine, just like I said before. Just go ahead, Josh and I need to talk.”

“Obviously.” Josh’s voice was cold to me as he turned to Ally. “We’re not done talking, but yeah, I think it’s best you go ahead. I’d rather Levi’s ass-kicking *not* be interrupted again.”

She let out a sigh. “Yeah, okay. Please don’t do something stupid, Josh.”

“Love you too,” he snapped, shaking his head at her as she gave us both a sheepish smile, heading toward the front door.

“Dude, I had no idea that this was going to happen,” I said as soon as I heard the front door shut. “I should’ve come clean about what happened between us in the Caribbean, but I just thought—I thought it was just a couple of times...”

Josh surprisingly dropped his shoulders, plopping into the chair across from me. “I don’t understand why you didn’t fucking tell me, Levi. Like I get that I’ve always made Ally off

limits...but come on. This is a big deal. How long have you known?"

"I didn't find out until Saturday night..."

He put the pieces together. "Right, when she said she needed to talk."

"Yeah, I had no idea at the time. Things have just been so *weird* between us."

"That's what happens when you have a casual fling with someone that you can't just ghost and forget exists." His tone was still cold, though the redness was dissipating from his face, finally.

"I don't *want* to forget she exists..."

His eyebrows shot up at my words. "That's a new one."

I shifted uncomfortably on the couch. "I know, and I haven't figured out exactly what's going on. I just know that I'll be there for her with all of this pregnancy stuff, and I'll do whatever she needs me to."

Josh was silent for a few long moments. "Are you...are you falling for my sister?"

I shook my head, though my heart jumped at the question. "That would really make things messy between us."

"That's not an answer to the question." Josh perked up, his eyes narrowing at me. "I asked if you had feelings for her."

"I don't know," I groaned, not expecting the conversation to take this turn. "I thought that it was just a fling..."

“But then you saw her with the dude at the club.” Josh facepalmed. “I *knew* something was up with that—you *never* gave a shit about what Ally was up to prior to that trip.”

“I don’t know.” I was starting to sound like a broken record.

“Holy shit.” He leaned back in the chair, running his hands along the blond stubble on his chin. “You’re going to be a dad and I’m gonna be an uncle—I did *not* see this coming.”

“Yeah.” My voice was quiet. “Me neither.”

“I guess I should tell you congratulations, but I still want to punch the shit out of you right now for screwing my sister.”

I nodded, a smile tugging at my lips. “I can give you a cheap shot if you want it, if that would make things better.”

Josh laughed, some of the tension draining from the room. “Nah, I don’t want to send you to a hospital, but I do have one more question...”

My stomach tightened again. “And what’s that?”

“You’ve fucked her since the Caribbean, haven’t you?”

*Shit.*





## ALLY

“So I guess the two of you worked it out?” I asked, sitting next to Levi in the waiting room of the imaging clinic that the OBGYN had sent us to.

“I mean, yeah.” Levi shrugged his shoulders, his eyes stealing a glance at me. “The best we could, anyway. It was definitely not a pleasant conversation after you left, but I think everything will blow over.”

“That’s good,” I said with a nod, leaning back in the chair. “So this is weird, right?” My heart was bopping with anxiety at the thought of being poked and prodded—in front of Levi.

“Uh, yeah. It’s a little weird,” he chuckled. “But we just have to get used to it. We’re gonna be going to a lot of these appointments together. Mom made it pretty clear that this is my job.”

I couldn’t help but laugh. Lisa had surprisingly taken the news better than anyone, showering me with affection and excitement at the office—though she was still under the impression that Levi and I were seeing each other. It was

awkward, but only because I was having a terrible time deciphering who thought we were together...

And who knew the truth.

“So I haven’t heard anything back from Frank,” Levi spoke up, his eyes drifting to the TV hanging in the corner of the dull room. The colors were a mixture of rose pink and gray, giving me an unwelcomed seventies vibe.

“He’s a busy guy,” I commented, running my fingers down the smooth wood grain of the chair’s arm.

“Yeah, and I guess we’re fixing to be really busy ourselves.” Levi let out a sigh, resting his chin in his hand. “We’ll have to figure out all the details of how we’re going to work this out.”

“Hmm.” I didn’t try to decipher what he was talking about, as Levi was growing more and more cryptic as time passed. He alluded to working things out and the future, but never went into detail.

And so I chose to just ignore it.

Because there was *one* thing he had been *very* clear about—and that was that we were just friends.

*Having a baby together.*

“Ally Montgomery?” A woman stuck her head out of a door, giving me a bright smile as I stood to my feet, nudging Levi. “Are you ready?”

I nodded. “Yeah, let’s do this.”

Levi trudged along behind me, his large frame filling the narrow hallway that we walked down. The woman pointed to a dark room, lit up only by the ultrasound machine. She gestured to the bench.

“I’ll go ahead and have you undress from the waist down, we usually have to do the first ultrasound vaginally.” She handed me material to cover my lower half, before slipping out of the room.

I looked up at Levi, whose face was bright red. “What’s wrong?”

“Being a woman is weird, man. No one ever asks me to drop my pants at the doctor—not usually, anyway.”

Laughing, I unbuttoned the top of my jeans. Levi’s eyes went right to the motions of my hands, his lips parting slightly.

“Absolutely not.” I motioned for him to turn around.

“Oh come on,” he whined. “I’ve already seen you—*all* of you.”

“Friends don’t peep vaginas.”

“*Ugh*,” he groaned as he spun around, his back to me. I smiled as he dropped his head back in frustration.

*Such a man-child.*

I slipped out of my jeans and underwear, folding them up and setting them in a second chair as I positioned myself on the gray bench, draping the sheet over me. My heart was pounding, nervous as to what we were fixing to see.

*I hope the baby is okay.*

“Can I turn around now?” Levi asked, his voice full of impatience.

“Yeah,” I said, just as the door opened back up, the tech reappearing.

“I’m Jamie, I’ll be doing your ultrasound today. I’m guessing you’re Dad.” She gestured to Levi.

“Uh huh,” Levi answered her, taking a seat in the chair beside me.

*Dad.*

*To my baby.*

“How long have the two of you been together?” she asked, taking a seat on the chair beside me. “You’re a cute couple.”

“Thanks,” Levi spoke before I could. “It’s gonna be a cute kid, isn’t it?”

She laughed, her brown eyes sparkling. “It definitely will be. We’ll see and hear the heartbeat today, and then you’ll get some cute little pictures.”

I took a deep breath. “And you’ll be able to make sure everything is okay, right?”

She nodded as she readied the probe. “Yeah, we will. We’ll also check to see just how many babies are in there.”

“How many?” Levi echoed, his face going white.

“Yeah, how *many*.” Jamie put the gel on the end of the probe before handing it to me. “Go ahead and insert this into

your vagina, and then I'll take it from there."

I took the end of the probe, ignoring Levi's wide eyes as I shifted, slipping it under the sheets. If I wasn't so focused on the screen, I would've laughed my head off at his reaction...

But the moment I saw the little bean, I caught my breath.

"Is that the baby?" I gasped, my heart swelling at the sight.

"That is." Jamie smiled. "And here in just a second, I'll let you hear the heartbeat. It looks like it's going nice and strong." She pointed to the heart monitor on the screen, adjusting the probe slightly. "Here." Her fingers clicked on the keyboard, the sound of a fast heart rate filling the room around us.

"Oh man." Levi's voice was soft, coming out in nearly a whisper. I whipped my head around to him, my heart squeezing at his sweet expression...

And the tears in his eyes.

"That's your baby." Jamie beamed as she began to pull measurements, clicking away on the keyboard. "Congratulations."

"Thank you." I dabbed at the tears welling up in my own eyes with the back of my hand as she finished printing out the ultrasound picture.

"Here you go." Jamie handed the picture over to me and I took it from her, the crisp smooth photo baby glimmering under the light. "And I'll get these images sent over to your doctor." With a smile and nod, she stood up, leaving me to

clean up and get dressed—and Levi sitting in dead silence beside me.

“You okay?” I scrutinized his expression, his eyes still a little hazy from the emotional moment.

“Yeah.” He cleared his throat. “I don’t know why I wouldn’t be fine. The lighting in this room is just shit.”

“Right,” I snorted, flipping the sheet back. My face went hot as I realized my careless mistake, my entire lower half suddenly on display. It didn’t feel...*sexy* in the moment, not even as Levi’s gaze slipped over for a brief second. However, he quickly stood to his feet and turned away.

“Sorry.”

“I forgot you were here,” I muttered, feeling ridiculous as I swung my legs over the side of the bench.

“Right, because you weren’t *just* talking to me.” There was an edge to his voice that was irritating—like I had done something wrong.

*Typical Levi.*

I grabbed for my underwear and pants, quickly covering the bare bottom half of my body. “It’s not like you haven’t seen me. We’re having a *baby* together.” I should’ve held my tongue, but I couldn’t help it.

He let out a sigh as he turned back around to me, his eyes boring into mine. “Are you really going to go there, Ally? I’m trying to be a mature adult about this.”

I raised my eyebrows. “And so me simply pointing out that you’ve seen my body before is somehow immature?”

“No.” He shook his head, walking past me and grabbing at the door handle. “It’s not like that at all. I just don’t know how to navigate our complicated relationship—but I don’t think that we should do anything that blurs the lines anymore.”

“You’ve said that multiple times, Levi.” I slipped through the open door, following the exit signs back to the waiting room. Smiling and giving a nod to the ladies at the front desk, I headed straight for the main glass doors. The warm, slightly humid air hit me in the face as I headed out into the parking lot toward Levi’s black Mercedes. The guy only had enough cars for a small army.

“Ally.” A hand grabbed my wrist gently, stopping me just as I reached for the passenger door handle. “Don’t go getting all worked up.”

I was slapped with the musky, masculine scent of his cologne as I spun around. “I’m not getting all worked up,” I choked out, my throat tightening as his eyes studied my face. My back was against the warm black metal of his car, butterflies erupting in my stomach. He was closer to me than he had been in what felt like ages, though it had only been since the escapade in my office.

But *so* much had happened since then.

“Good.” His tone was husky as his fingers brushed some of my auburn hair behind my ears. “Because as outrageous as this



entire situation is...I don't think I would change anything about it."

My eyes widened, my heart jumping in my chest. "Really?"

"Yeah. I mean, I've always wanted kids—and this isn't *exactly* what I had in mind. I figured I'd be having one with a wife, not a friend, but this is going to be good." A smile tugged at his upper lip, but I didn't mirror the same emotion. My mind was still hung on that stupid little word...

*Friends.*

"We're having a *baby*," he reiterated, his smile growing wider as his voice grew soft. He opened the door for me, gesturing for me to get in. "And I'm so excited for us. I think it's all gonna work out."

I glared up at him. "Except for the fact that everyone thinks we're *actually* together. I even had to lie to my parents and say that we're dating, because I knew that your mom would call mine—and that's exactly what happened." I cringed at the lie, one that was getting tough for me to keep straight. My mom had been more shocked by the fact that I was seeing Levi than the fact that she would soon become a grandmother.

"That's just details, Ally." Levi chuckled, climbing into the driver's seat. "We'll land the deal long before we ever have to worry about the hard questions coming. The breakup will hit long before the gender reveal party does."

"How can you be so nonchalant about it?" I asked, exasperated, pulling the seat belt across my lap. "I'm so tired

of lying to everyone.”

*And about my feelings.*

“You just have to stop focusing on that aspect of all of this—and that shouldn’t be too hard, considering we have a baby to plan for.” He put the car in drive, whipping out of the parking lot and heading toward the main road. “I don’t think people will focus on the relationship between you and me once the baby comes into the picture.”

I scrunched my nose up at him. “Uh, wouldn’t a baby bring *more* attention to the relationship we have? Because a baby is a pretty big step in a relationship.”

“Nah.” He shook his head, a deep chuckle filling the car. “They’ll be so busy watching us killing it with CyberSecure and being bomb co-parents, they won’t even think about the sketchy-ass details of the relationship.”

“*Right.*” I drew out a breath, not bothering to point out how fucking *delusional* he was sounding in the moment. “We’ll just keep navigating it your way.”

He glanced over at me, a curious look on his face. “*My way? Do you have a better way of doing this, Ally?*”

I met his eyes for a split second before looking away, my heart fumbling. “Nope.”

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## LEVI

I stared at the picture Ally had posted on her Instagram, her little baby bump more pronounced now. It was cute— *she* was cute.

But I didn't let my mind go there.

It'd been *months* since we'd hooked up, and now that the whole world knew that I had slept with Ally Montgomery, and assumed that we were in a relationship, you'd think the sex would keep coming...

But nope.

And the reason why was sitting *right* next to me.

“So after your meeting with Frank, we've got to pick up the shit for the nursery.” Josh ran his hands along the steering wheel. “And hopefully this meeting will seal the deal, because Mom has already asked me twice if Ally is going to be moving in soon. She's mindblown that the two of you would live separately if you're *together* with a baby.”

I exhaled sharply in the passenger seat of Josh's car. “Dude, I don't know when the deal is going to close. I thought it

would've been done by now—really.” I didn't hide the irritation from my voice. It had been driving me *crazy*.

It was like I was with her, but not *really* with her.

“I just think that it's taking a toll on Ally. The lies can't be good for her stress level. Other than Linley and me, the whole world sees her as your girlfriend. I'm just worried how it's affecting her.”

*And what about me?*

I pushed the selfish thought away. “I get it, but it's not like she didn't agree to doing this with me. She gets thirty percent of the company—let's not forget that.”

“*If* you can actually land the deal.” The unsureness in his voice was potent as he pulled up alongside the curb. “I get that Frank is a slow-moving kind of guy—I just thought that you guys had this in the bag months ago. Now it's being strung along, and yeah, you've had meetings—and Frank went on a month-long vacation...but come on, Levi. It feels like he's just giving you the runaround.”

*Or hearing everyone else out.*

The professional rumor mill had been spinning that one around, and I'd heard that some other major financial players coming into the ring to make a pitch for the company. Any suave businessman would hear out every single one of them, and as much as Frank came across like a kind-hearted man—and he was...

He was also a *very* suave businessman.

“Good luck,” Josh said to me, patting me on the shoulder and gesturing to the door. “Sorry for the shitty pep talk. I know I didn’t help anything.”

“Nah, you’re good, man. I get that you’re just trying to look out for what’s best for Ally.” I pushed open the car door and grabbed my bag, slinging it over my shoulder. “I know that I can land this deal—and it’s going to be worth it for everyone, especially our little guy.”

“Or girl.” Josh shot me a wink. “You definitely come across like the kind of guy who’d end up as a girl dad.”

“Bring it on.” I laughed, shutting the door. However, as I spun around to walk into Frank Lewis’s office, my smile faded. It was true that the deal would make it that much better for my son—or daughter.

But I wasn’t sure that I could land the deal anymore.

My confidence was fading, and I felt that even more as I walked through the main doors of the building and headed toward the elevator. The impromptu meeting had left me missing a doctor’s appointment with Ally and she hadn’t been able to make this meeting...

I hated doing any of the CyberSecure meetings without my business partner.

*And mother of my baby.*

“Good afternoon, Mr. Lombardi,” Tina, the receptionist, greeted me as I walked into the waiting area outside of Frank’s L.A. office.

“How’re you?” I asked the middle-aged woman, who, if I landed the deal, would be my own receptionist.

*Wild.*

“I’m doing well.” Her dark chocolate eyes were bright as they looked up at me. “Where’s your better half?”

I chuckled. “She’s at a doctor’s appointment. It’s difficult to move the OBGYN appointments around.”

“Ah, that’s just too bad. I haven’t gotten to see her in a few weeks, and I bet that little bump is growing.”

I nodded, pulling my phone out and bringing up the picture she had posted to Instagram. “Here it is today, actually.”

“Oh my goodness.” Tina beamed, her cherry-red fingernails flying up to her mouth. “How adorable is she? I’m just so excited for the two of you.”

“Thank you. Is Frank busy with meetings today? He didn’t have much wiggle room in his schedule.” I glanced toward his heavy oak door, seeing that it was closed.

“Oh yes, he’s really trying to nail down a buyer.”

*So the rumors are true.*

“I know you and Ally are still frontrunners,” she said quickly. “You guys were a bit ahead of the curve, and once it hit the public, things got a little overwhelming—and you know how Frank is, he’s a very thorough man.”

*Suave.*

“Yes, it’s an important quality to have as a businessman of his level.” I gave her a smile and took a deep breath, sinking into one of the black leather waiting room chairs.

“I’m sure he’ll be done in no time.” The phone ringing kept Tina from saying anything more, and she picked it up, chatting casually.

My attention went back to my phone, the picture of Ally still pulled up on the screen. She was in an olive-green tank top and black leggings, her auburn hair in waves past her shoulders.

And a big smile on her face, her hand lightly over the little growing bump.

*She’s fucking gorgeous.*

And of course, she had tagged me in the photo, the whole world thinking that I was probably right there in the middle of it all with her—and I *was*.

But not in the way that I wished I was.

“Levi,” Frank’s cheery voice called from the doorway.

I looked up, seeing a gray-headed slender man slipping out the doorway as Frank waved at me. “Mr. Lewis.” I cleared my throat, jumping to my feet. “It’s good to see you this morning.”

He laughed, giving me a firm handshake as we headed into his pristine, luxurious office. The place made mine look mediocre at best, with the ultra-designer vibe, everything looking like it shouldn’t even be touched.



Or breathed on.

I took a seat in my usual spot, a white Italian leather chair. “Ally has a doctor’s appointment today, otherwise she would be here.”

A wide smile stretched across his face. “Ah, how far along is she now? Rachel keeps up with her, but I have to say, with everything going on, I can’t keep up with the time myself.”

“She’s nearly twenty weeks,” I answered, my stomach flipping at the halfway mark. It wouldn’t be long and there’d be a baby...

And I did *not* want to still be negotiating this deal.

“Wow, she’s really coming along.” Frank nodded, reaching for a folder on his desk. He picked it up and flipped it open, reaching for his glasses there on the desk. “So, I called you to this meeting for a couple of reasons.”

I nodded, taking a deep breath. My whole body felt jittery with apprehension as he pulled out a slip of paper, and I hid my trembling hands by running them down my thighs.

*Maybe the deal is off.*

“So, I’m sure you’ve heard that I’ve had a lot of offers by now.” Frank sat the paper down on the desk, and I could see that it was a list of offers—some much bigger than what I could even swing.

*Jesus.*

“I’ve heard of some pretty big names,” I said coolly, though I had no idea how I was maintaining such composure. I felt like I might pass out at any given time.

He shrugged. “I’m not one to worry about names—or really numbers at this point. I think the future of the company is what’s most important, and I’d really like to extend that to you...”

*But...*

The hesitance in his voice had my heart dropping and I braced as he continued, a sharp exhale escaping his lips. “But we won’t extend the official offer until the company party this Friday. That’s how the board wants to do it.”

I nodded, hardly believing what I was hearing. “That’s no problem. Ally and I can be there, for sure.”

“Of course...” He paused, eyeing me. “I will admit that some of the board members are very conservative...”

“I don’t think I’m following...”

“Well, you know, Ally is pregnant with your baby.” The look on Frank’s face finally connected all the dots in my head.

*Oh, that kind of conservative.*

My mouth moved before my mind could finish thinking it through. “We’re planning on getting married before the baby is here.”

His eyebrows shot up at the same time my own did. “You are? I wasn’t sure if that’s how people did it these days. We’ve

always been pretty heavily pro-marriage.”

*So this is more about Frank than just the board.*

“Yeah, my family is too.”

*Sort of.*

“Anyway.” I cleared my throat. “I was planning on proposing to her at the gender reveal party, but maybe I could do it at the company party? Right before we sign the papers?” My mouth just kept moving faster than my mind...

And my ability to bullshit right there on the spot was impressive.

And concerning.

But the excitement on Frank’s face was undeniable. “That would really be something. I bet the whole company would get a kick out of that. It’d really show just how personal this whole thing has been for you.”

*Oh, you have no idea.*

*Conceived a child.*

“It’d show them they’re all just a part of the family.” I smiled, though my eyes diverted to my phone, which was buzzing with a text from none other than Ally herself. “I know that Ally would love for it to happen like that as well. It means just as much to her as it does to me.”

“Well, does she know that a proposal is coming?” Frank leaned back in his chair, his demeanor shifting from professional to friendly and casual.

*No way.*

“Uh, she has some idea, but I’m not giving her any specifics. I think this will be the way to go—I know it’ll be perfect, actually.”

*Because she’ll know it’s coming.*

“Well, I look forward to being a part of it—and finally handing the company off to you,” he added, pushing himself to a standing position. “It’s about time that I retire. I know I sound like a broken record, but damn, these last few months have been turbulent with all the potential buyers. It’s amazing what people are willing to do just to make a deal.”

*Oof. No kidding.*

“I’m sure.” I chuckled, my stomach flipping. “But I know myself and Ally couldn’t be more happy with the decision for you to go with the two of us.”

“Oh yeah, absolutely.” He placed his hand on my shoulder as we headed to the door of his office. “I knew from the beginning that you two were my first choice. I just had to hear everyone out—I felt like that was the right thing to do.”

“I completely understand. You’ve worked very hard to build this company, and I know there’s a lot of risks that go hand in hand with that decision.”

“Of course.” Frank nodded, grabbing the door handle. “I think you understand that so well, given your history and the path you’ve carved for yourself at such a young age—and that’s why I’m sure you’ll understand why I’ve got a backup

buyer who will also be there Friday, just in case things don't go exactly as planned."

*What?*

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## ALLY

I stared at the bubbles in the tub as I sank further into the warm water, my tense muscles relaxing. Missing the meeting with Levi had me concerned, though mostly just because I was curious about what Frank had to say.

He was taking *forever* to make up his mind on a buyer.

And I was starting to wonder if it was going to happen at all for us... Or if I was ever going to date for real again.

*Well, after the baby.*

My hand ran down my bare stomach, my baby bump more evident—though still concealable most days. I rolled my shoulders, my auburn hair darkening as the water soaked it. I bit my lip, my mind slipping back to Levi, who I was *dating* but not *dating*.

*Ugh.*

I wasn't the type to think about sex much, but ever since Levi and I had happened, I wanted him *so* bad. My pussy came to life at the thought, my hand drifting down my lower

abdomen until two fingers made it to my clit. A light moan slipped from my lips as the pleasure deepened.

*Fuck, I want you, Levi.*

My hand kept circling as my free hand squeezed my breast, pausing to stimulate my erect nipple just beneath the surface of the water. I let out a sharp breath, letting my mind run wild.

*“Tell me that you want me to fuck you,” Levi growled, climbing over the top of me. His strong knees gently pushed at my inner thighs, spreading me out before him.*

*“Please fuck me,” I whined, looking up and into his potent hazel eyes, interlocked with mine. “Please.”*

*He grinned down at me, observing silently as I touched myself in front of him, moisture covering my fingertips as I plunged inside my pulsing pussy.*

A sharp moan escaped from my lips as my back arched against the tub, my eyes squeezing shut a little tighter.

*“You feel so fucking good,” Levi groaned, his hips slamming into mine as our bodies collided, his cock filling me. I kept touching myself, rubbing my clit as Levi’s eyes stayed locked with mine, his lips slightly parted.*

*“I’m gonna cum,” I panted, my legs tensing up as his hands tightened around my thighs. “Do you want me to cum for you?”*

*He nodded, his whole face darkening with lust as he gazed down at me. “You better fucking cum for me.”*



“Oh my *god, Levi,*” I moaned, my pussy bearing down around my fingers, now inserted deep inside of myself. I came hard and fast, just like I always did when I was alone, and my eyes fluttered open...

Reminding me that I was alone.

My phone buzzed on the edge of the tub as I sat up, my wet hair trailing down my back. Picking it up, I saw a text from Josh.

*Are you not home?*

*Come answer the door.*

Laughing to myself, I pulled the drain on the tub and stood up, the cool air causing me to shiver. I grabbed my towel off the hook and wrapped it around my body, stepping out onto the rug. My phone vibrated again, and I rolled my eyes, Josh continuing to bombard me.

*Taking a shit?*

“Brothers, I swear,” I grumbled as I headed through my bedroom and into the living room. The knocking finally reached me there, and I moved a little faster to the front door, swinging it open.

“Jesus, Ally,” Josh greeted me, holding an armload of baby things. “I know everyone assumes that you’re going to be moving in with Levi, but I know the truth, so I bought you this shit that was on sale.”

“Well, that’s kind, I think.” I stepped to the side, letting him walk through the doorway. He headed to the couch, setting

down the random items. “So what all did you get?”

“Uh, this rocker thing.” He pointed to a box. “And that’s some sort of—I don’t know, like diaper thing? You put the dirty diapers in it.”

I laughed, shaking my head. “I appreciate it. That’s thoughtful of you. I know once Mom and Dad know that I’ll be staying here, they’ll pitch in and get things for here.”

“Yeah, I would assume so, but I don’t know, Ally.” Josh looked over to me, his blue eyes mirroring mine. “This whole thing with Levi is just so weird. It’s not what I thought it was going to be at all—and don’t get me wrong, I’m excited to be an uncle...but I don’t know if in hindsight I would agree to all this.”

“Well, it’s not really your decision,” I snapped at him, instantly regretting my harsh tone. “Sorry, I just—this is just weird for me too.”

Josh eyed me for a few minutes, silence settling between us. “Ally, can I ask you something?”

“Sure, but can I at least get dressed first?” I tugged the white towel a little more snug under my arms. “Because the way you sound, this isn’t going to be simple.”

He chuckled. “Yeah, go ahead.”

I slipped back to the bedroom, my phone still in my hand as it vibrated again. I lifted it up so I could see, Levi’s name coming in across the screen.

As a call.

“Hello?” I answered, tucking it in between my ear and shoulder, the towel dropping to my feet as I went digging into my dresser drawer.

“Hey, I meant to text you back, but it happened right in the middle of the meeting with Frank.”

“That’s okay,” I said, awkwardly pulling on a pair of black underwear. “I figured you were busy.”

“I’m glad the appointment went well,” he continued, his voice sounding a little...*off*.

“Did the meeting go bad?” I asked, putting him on speaker as I sat the phone on top of my dresser to pull my t-shirt over my head.

“What are your plans tonight?”

*Avoidant, great.*

“I don’t know. Josh is here right now, but I think he has plans with Laura—that girl he met at the gym last week. I think he really likes her.”

“Right, the girl from the gym.” Levi chuckled. “I give it two weeks. She’s way too smart for him.”

“Not his type at all,” I agreed, smiling as I pulled on a pair of knit shorts. “But no, I don’t have any plans after Josh leaves.”

“Can I stop by?”

“I take it then you’ll tell me about the meeting?” I picked the phone back up, taking it off speaker and putting it to my

ear. “Because the suspense is killing me.”

“Yeah, yeah. You’ll be fine. I’ll bring that weird barbeque pizza from Willy’s that you like?”

I smiled. “Yeah, that sounds good.”

“Perfect. Just send me a text when Josh leaves.”

“Deal, see you later.” I hung up, my heart squeezing a little as I sat the phone back on top of my dresser.

I knew I was in love with him.

And even though I had settled into the friend, business partner, and co-parent role with him, it didn’t keep the little tinge of hurt from hitting me every once in a while.

“You alive in there?” Josh’s voice carried through the house.

*So freaking demanding.*

“Yeah, I’m coming,” I called back to him, swinging open my bedroom door. “What’s wrong with you?”

“I’m hanging out with Laura tonight and I don’t want to be late.” He shrugged his shoulders, plopping down on the couch beside all the baby stuff he had bought. “So, now that you’re decent, let’s have a real conversation.”

“I don’t like the way that sounds,” I groaned, taking a seat on the loveseat across from him. I grabbed the throw blanket from behind me, spreading the warm red fleece material across my bare legs. “But go on, what’s this burning question, Josh?”

“Uh, well, I don’t know how to really ask...”

“Okay, then maybe we should just let it go?” I leaned back, letting out a sigh.

“Are you still sleeping with Levi?” Josh blurted out the question, his nose instantly crinkling up at me.

*I wish.*

I blinked a couple of times. “No, I’m not.”

He nodded. “I didn’t think so, but...”

“But what?”

“Listen, Ally, I *know* you. I know you’re keeping *something* from me, and I just can’t figure out what it is.”

I raised my eyebrows. “I don’t think that I’m keeping anything from you?”

He was quiet for a few moments, his eyes dropping to his lap for a second before going back up to mine. “Do you love him?”

I nearly choked on air, though feeling as if there was none at all in my lungs. “Uh...*who?*”

“You do,” Josh said in a quiet voice.

“I really don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Stop it, Ally. You know that I’m talking about Levi. I’m not an idiot, and I saw it that night at the club—the way that you were looking at him with that girl. You’ve never looked at him like that before.”

My heart did that annoying painful squeeze. “It’s not like that.”

“Really? It’s not like what? It’s not like you went to the Caribbean with him, and then fell in fucking love? I *know* you, and I *know* that you don’t just go sleeping around. At first, I tried to just sit back and accept that maybe you had a few, but it’s so obvious—like *painfully* obvious.”

My stomach tightened into knots. “You think he knows?”

Josh laughed in a sarcastic tone, tilting his head back. “Yeah, right. You could say it right to the guy’s face and Levi still probably wouldn’t know. His whole mind is caught up on this stupid deal with Frank. He can’t see anything but that right now. He never wants to go out, see friends, or even fucking watch a movie at the house.

“Oh,” was all I managed to choke out, my hand running to my stomach.

“Oh, yeah.” Josh gestured to my hand. “He does talk about the baby a lot.”

“Well, maybe it’s just the baby then,” I said carefully, eyeing the clock behind him. “It’s changed a lot for all of us.”

“Yeah, but this started way before the baby, Ally. It started with all this CyberSecure shit. I think he’s so obsessed with making the deal that he’s willing to do anything—and that’s why I think you should keep your feelings to yourself.”

*Right, so I don’t get hurt.*

“Levi is a good guy, but he has a one-track mind sometimes. I think right now is one of those times.” At my silence, Josh continued, “I think that his intentions are pure, but man, he’s

just taking this fake relationship thing *so* far—and he’s willing to do whatever it takes to get that deal. I don’t think he sees how it’s affecting you.”

I pursed my lips. “So, what exactly are you trying to say?”

“Maybe once this deal is done—whether you two land it or not, you should tell him how you feel, but *not* before that. I don’t know what he would do if he knew now.”

“You mean, he might fucking lie just to keep the deal moving? Because I can’t actually see him being *that* low,” I admitted, studying Josh’s face.

“No, it’s not that...” His voice trailed off, his finger nervously picking at the hem of his black t-shirt.

“Then what is it?” I demanded, my heart jumping with apprehension. “You know that he doesn’t feel the same as me? Is that what it is?”

“You deserve a guy who can’t get you off his mind—no matter what else is going on,” Josh finally said, letting out a sigh. “And I don’t want to see you heartbroken in the middle of trying to pretend to be more than just co-parents.”

*Too late.*

*Too fucking late.*

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## LEVI

I knocked on Ally's apartment door, waiting for her to answer, the pizza balancing in my other hand. My heart was pounding, the ring box in my suit jacket pocket...

Like it was real.

I nearly laughed as the door swung open, Ally standing there, her auburn hair in a messy bun on top of her head. I was starting to get used to this Ally...

And I loved it.

"What're you out here laughing about?" she asked, peering around. "Is Sherry doing bikini yoga outside again?"

"No, thankfully not." I laughed at the thought of her seventy-something-year-old neighbor's strange habits. "Are you hungry?" I leaned down, brushing my fingers along her little bump as I walked through the door.

It was the only excuse I had to touch her.

She caught my hand though, my heart jumping as I stopped. "Levi...I need to ask you something." The heat of her resting against my touch as I caught those icy blue eyes with my own.

Despite the cool blue hue, they always set my fucking body on fire, my dick already coming to life.

“Yeah?” I choked out, taking a step closer to her. “Something wrong?”

She hesitated, parting her lips like she might say something, but she dropped my hand instead. “Josh just brought a bunch of baby stuff. Did you want to see if you want any of it for your place?”

“Right.” I leaned over her, her face only inches from mine as I sat the pizza down on the counter. “And that’s all it is?”

Her eyes bounced between mine, the scent of her shampoo filling my nostrils as we lingered in the moment. “Yeah, yeah.”

I swallowed hard, my cock throbbing—I *wanted* her. I caught myself closing what little space there was between us, my mind beginning to spin with the possibilities of her body on mine. My nose brushed hers, and she went rigid.

“No.” She held up her hands to me. “No, we’re not doing this.”

“Right.” I cleared my throat, shaking my head and taking a couple steps back from her. “Anyway, there’s your favorite pizza, in all it’s gross barbeque glory.”

“You should really give it a chance,” she countered, reaching for the box and carrying the entire thing to the couch.

“Nah, that’s okay.” I chuckled, adjusting myself in my pants to conceal the raging hard-on I had in the moment. “So I guess

Josh just came by to drop off all that?” I took in the random baby items, wondering why the hell he’d bought them in the first place.

She’d get everything she needed at the baby shower, and if she didn’t, I’d buy it for her.

“Yeah, I don’t know why he does the things he does.” Ally shrugged, opening the box and picking up a piece of pizza. “But he *is* worried with this continued fake romance thing we have going, people won’t get me things I need to take care of the baby here.”

“Hmm.” My jaw tensed as I took it in, shifting my weight. “Have you considered moving in with me?”

Her mouth dropped open, still full of pizza. “What?”

“Yeah, I mean, I could keep covering the lease for this apartment, so you’d still have it at some point—but it would make it easier to tag team the baby.” I hadn’t really given the idea *that* much thought, but seeing all the baby gear piled on her couch made me consider it. “I don’t see why it would be a problem.”

*Other than the cockblock of a best friend I have.*

“I don’t know...”

“Why don’t you know?” I sat down in the open area at the end of the couch across from her. “I’ve heard of plenty of couples doing that—well, not like *couples*, but people who have babies together who aren’t really together. The house is

big enough for you to have your own room, so your life can go on as normal.”

“And what *is* normal, Levi?” She raised an eyebrow at me, covering her legs with the throw blanket as she continued to eat.

“I don’t know.” She was really out to stump me tonight.

“We don’t even have a normal—unless you count our fake fucking relationship,” she snapped, shooting me a glare.

*Oh shit. Here we go.*

“It’s not forever, Ally, and in fact it’ll be over before you even have to worry about it.” I kept my tone steady and calm, already feeling her energy rising in the room. Pregnancy hormones were a real fucking thing.

“You say that after every single meeting and I know that everything looks promising, but we’ve both heard of other people pursuing the company. You said that there’s higher offers than yours, anyway.”

“Yeah, and that’s true, but today’s meeting wasn’t like the others. It’s over for us, Ally...” My voice trailed off as her brows furrowed.

“So he went with a different one?”

“No, we sign Friday at the party.”

“What?” She dropped her pizza back into the box, jumping up from the couch, her eyes widening. “Oh my god! We got it then?”

I nodded. “Yeah, we did.”

She ran around the coffee table, crashing into my lap and hugging my neck. I wrapped my arms around her still-petite waist, relishing the moment.

“I can’t believe it!” Her blue eyes were bright, and the moment I caught them with mine it was over. I took her mouth with mine, my tongue diving through her parted lips. Never mind the taste of the pizza, I fucking *missed* her.

A sweet little moan escaped from her mouth as I shifted her, letting her straddle me, putting her pussy right over my cock. She instantly began to grind against me, and I ran my hand around to her round ass, giving it a good squeeze.

*Perfection.*

Ally’s kiss was just as desperate as mine, her fingers running along my jaw and tracing down my neck. I shivered under her touch, having been *starved* for her. My hands pulled at the bottom of her shirt, lifting it up and over her head. Her breasts were more full than before, held back by a t-shirt style bra. I reached around her, unsnapping the clasp and dropping them free.

“You’re so beautiful,” I muttered, leaning down and sucking her nipple into my mouth. I ran my tongue around her erect nipple in my mouth, her grinding growing more aggressive as she rode me through our clothes. My hands went to the top of her knit shorts, tugging them down a little. She took the hint, sitting up tall so I could pull them and her underwear down.

Ally sat down and fenagled them the rest of the way off, tossing them off to the side.

“Take this off,” she panted, pulling at my suit jacket. I did as she asked, shrugging it off as Ally worked the buttons on my white dress shirt free.

“Let’s go to the bedroom,” I urged as she stripped me down to my bare chest.

She shook her head. “No, right here.” Ally undid my pants, freeing my cock as I ran my fingers through her wet folds. “I want to fuck you right now, Levi.”

*Oh shit.*

“Then fuck me, Ally,” I growled, just as she slid her wet pussy down my bare cock. A loud guttural groan erupted from my throat as she wasted no time, bouncing her body up and down. I cupped her breasts as her head tilted back and pleasure rolled through my body.

*This is breaking all the rules.*

But I pushed the invasive thought away, not even bothering to worry myself about it. I was already balls deep in her—about to fucking blow.

“Oh my god, Levi,” she cried out, her hand running down her body in front of me as she started to rub herself.

“Fuck, Ally,” I panted, my hand flying up and grabbing the back of her neck. I pulled her mouth to mine, biting her bottom lip and lifting my hips from the couch. I slammed back

into her. She moaned out, the sound followed by the slapping of our bodies against each other filling the apartment.

“I’m gonna cum,” she whined, breaking our lips apart for a second. Our eyes locked just as her orgasm pulsed down my shaft, squeezing down.

*Don’t cum, don’t cum.*

It took everything I had not to explode right there inside of her, but she didn’t let me. Ally slipped off my cock, stepped back off the couch, and dropped to her knees.

“Oh fuck, Ally,” I groaned as she dropped her mouth over the tip of my dick. “Oh my god.”

She slipped a hand around my balls, squeezing them as her hot mouth wrapped around my cock. Her free hand gripped the base of my erection while her head moved up and down, my entire cock wet with her saliva. My hand threaded into her soft auburn hair, letting it rest as she did all the work.

*Ugh.*

“I’m gonna cum,” I huffed as all my muscles tensed, the sensation building. “Ally, oh my god.” I exploded, filling her mouth with my cum.

And she swallowed.

Lifting her head, she wiped her mouth and then reached for her t-shirt on the floor beside her, slipping it over her head. “So is it just a meeting that we do the signing at?”

*What?*

I stared at her amused look, trying to get my bearings.  
“What?”

“CyberSecure.”

“Oh yeah,” I said quickly, shoving my cock back inside my pants and pulling them up as I got my train of thought back on track. “There’s actually going to be like a company party that we’re going to do the signing at.”

“That’s going to be fun.” Ally slid her underwear up, covering herself. “I guess it’s a big deal.”

“Yeah, but there’s still one more thing,” I said carefully, my eyes flickering to the suit jacket on the floor. “I think that Frank was a little caught up on the deal—and he has a back up buyer.”

“Why?” She furrowed her brow.

“Well, I think that some of the board members—and maybe even Frank himself—were a little unhappy with our relationship status.”

Her slight smile turned to a frown as she took a seat on the edge of the coffee table, handing me my dress shirt. “What do you mean? They don’t like that we’re together?”

“No...” My voice trailed off as I threaded my arms through the sleeves of my shirt. “It’s the fact that we’re having a baby, but our relationship isn’t moving forward.”

The realization hit her face. “That’s not really their business.”



“I guess in a big deal like this, it is?” I shrugged, before standing to my feet and tucking my shirt back in. I leaned over to the floor and grabbed up my suit jacket. “I covered us though.” Digging the box out of the pocket, I handed it to her.

“No.” Her face contorted with a mixture of disbelief and anger. She looked back up at me, glaring. “I’m *not* doing this.”

“What? People break off engagements all the time.”

“At what point do you decide that enough is enough? Levi, I am *not* faking an engagement? What’s next? A fake wedding and marriage?”

I furrowed my brow, standing to my feet. “I guess it’s whatever it takes to land the deal, right?”

Her eyes went wide at me. “You really have no fucking boundaries at all, do you?” Ally shoved the box back into my hand. “Absolutely *not* doing this.”

“This is how we get the deal, Ally,” I reasoned, running my hands through my hair. “This is it. We do this, and we sign the papers—and it’s *ours*.”

“Until they want us to wait until after the wedding!”

“This is a life-changing—”

“No, *this* is life-changing.” She motioned to our baby. “*This*. And you know what, Josh is right. All you fucking care about is this stupid deal. I can’t do it anymore. I quit, Levi. My *whole* life has changed because of this—and I fell in *love* with you.”

My whole body froze, and I shook my head, not even sure that I'd heard her right. "I-I-I don't...it won't...you know, we can't—"

"I don't want the thirty percent. Just get *out*," Ally demanded, pointing to the door. "*Now*."

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## ALLY

I slammed the door behind him, my heart still breaking in my chest as I locked the door. He didn't say more than just a little handful of gibberish.

*Because he doesn't feel the same.*

Tears spilled over and down my cheeks as I made my way back to the couch, my eyes staring at the open pizza box on the coffee table. Usually, it was nothing for me to eat nearly the entire medium pizza, but tonight...

No way.

I flipped the lid and carried it into my kitchen, putting it away in the fridge. I felt like a robot, going through the motions, my mind racing with so many thoughts. Part of me wished that I would've just kept my mouth shut, going through with the entire engagement thing—and even playing house, moving in with Levi.

But my heart just couldn't fucking take it anymore.

I either wanted it to be real or be nothing at all.

My bare feet were silent as I padded across the kitchen and back into the living room where my phone lay on the table. No one other than Josh and Linley knew that Levi and I were just a made-up joke, so my options of *who* to call were limited. I glanced over at the clock, seeing that it was nearly nine, and that meant that Josh would be on his date with Laura...

And I didn't want to ruin his night.

Or get Levi in too much trouble—not yet, anyway.

I picked up the phone and fell back on the loveseat, calling the only person I had left.

“Hey girl, isn't it past your pregnant self's bedtime?” Linley laughed on the other end of the line, the sound of people chatting filling the background behind her.

“Oh, I don't want to bother you if you're out,” I said quickly, my shoulders dropping as I hid under the throw blanket. “I was just hoping that we could talk.”

“What happened, Ally?” Her tone of voice shifted. “Is everything okay?”

“Not really,” I admitted, fresh tears streaming down my cheeks. “I don't know why I put myself in this mess.”

“I mean, accidental pregnancies happen, honey. It's just part of life—you know how babies are made.”

“Lin, stop. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about this fake fucking relationship with Levi. I called it off tonight. I can't do it anymore.”

She was silent for a second. “What happened?”

“He had a meeting with Frank today, and we were supposed to be signing for the business on Friday. And I know that sounds exciting—and it was, until I found out he wants to *propose* to me. Like can you believe that? He bought a fucking ring and everything!” I threw my hands into the air, letting out a frustrated groan. “What is he thinking?”

“And he’s not proposing for real, right?”

“No,” I snapped. “And I made myself look even more stupid when I admitted that I *love* him.”

She gasped. “Oh no, you didn’t.”

“I did,” I cried. “And Josh had *just* been here telling me not to admit my feelings for him because it would just end in me getting heartbroken, but I did it anyway. Like this is so embarrassing, Lin. He probably thinks I’m so pathetic.”

“Who gives a shit what he thinks?” Linley shot back. “I mean, honestly. This whole deal started with two weeks in the Caribbean, and it’s turned into a pregnancy and *months*’ worth of a relationship. If anyone should be feeling pathetic it’s him. You didn’t do anything. It’s amazing you’ve made it this far with all his stupid moves.”

“We fucked again tonight too,” I blurted out, needing to get it all off my chest. “I don’t know why he gets to me like that.”

“Okay, well, who cares? He’s just some dumb guy—and the child support he’s going to pay for the baby the two of you have will be enough to make up for the damage he’s caused. I

think you should just count yourself lucky that you got out when you did. It could be worse—you could be walking down a fake wedding aisle.”

“You know, at first,” I began, sniffing. “At first I thought that the box might be real, and *that* is why I blew up the way I did. I mean, we get along so well when we’re not going back and forth over the fake relationship thing. He even brings my favorite pizza over...”

“You’re not listening to a word I’m saying.” She let out a sigh into the phone. “When is this party?”

“Friday.”

“Why don’t you just come with me to the Hamptons then? My parents aren’t going to be at the house there, so I was planning to fly in and spend the weekend getting a little east coast sun. It could be fun for you. Call it your babymoon.”

I hesitated. “I don’t know. It might be better for me to stay here. I don’t know what kind of fires I might have to put out with all of this.”

“Ally, it’s *not* your responsibility to worry about whatever fires Levi’s choices create. He didn’t have to plan some fake engagement. He’s so desperate to get the deal that he’s stepping all over whoever it takes.”

“I’m sure Frank will still let him buy it,” I said, letting out a sigh. “Maybe I should go talk to him. I know that he listens to me.”

“Absolutely not,” Linley argued. “Levi *has* to face the consequences for his decisions. I get that you love him—I do, but the guy has made your life hella complicated and maybe facing that fact is exactly what he needs to grow the hell up.”

“Maybe so.”

“And I think Josh *should* kick his ass.”

I giggled a little. “Yeah, maybe that wouldn’t be so bad, but I’m *not* going to be the one who tells Josh about it.”

“There’s the girl I know.” I could hear Linley smiling on the other end. “I know that this all seems really complicated and confusing—and I know it hurts, but you’ve got this, Ally. You don’t need the deal at CyberSecure to support you and your baby. Lisa won’t fire you because of all of this blowing up with Levi.”

“Do you think he’ll tell everyone the truth about us?”

“And what truth would that be? Because honestly, I think it’s safe to say that the two of you *did* have some kind of fling or relationship. You had feelings for him, and there’s nothing wrong with just calling it what it was...”

“A mistake.”

Linley went quiet for a moment. “No, I don’t think so. To be honest, based on how Levi acted at the club, I think that he had feelings for you. I think he still *does* have feelings for you. However, I don’t think he’s man enough to admit them—or it has something to do with Josh.”

“But if that’s the case, then why didn’t he just say that?”



“Probably because it breaks man code or something.” She laughed, her tone growing light again. “You’ll probably just forever be the one that got away, and he’ll miss you for like fifty years, while you’re riding your hot model husband’s dick every night.”

“Wow, okay.” I burst into laughter, wiping a rogue tear from my cheek. “I have no idea how you come up with these scenarios of yours, but there’s no one else I’d rather have as a best friend.”

“Good, so I leave tomorrow for the Hamptons, are you coming? I know it might be hard for you to get off that quick with work, but while you send Lisa a text, I’ll see if there’s a free seat on my flight. Okay?”

“You’re going to make a good mom one day.”

“Thanks.”

“Okay, I’m putting you on speaker,” I said to her, pulling the phone from my ear and lighting up the screen. I hit the speakerphone button and went to my text messages, my heart skipping a beat as I saw one from Levi.

*Ally, I know things are complicated, but let’s just finish the deal. Then we can talk about everything.*

My face contorted with frustration, shaking my head at the freaking audacity he had to say such a thing to me. My fingers angrily typed back a reply, hardly able to refrain from chewing him out.

*No deal. I’m out. Figure it out yourself.*

I hit the send button, and then opened up a message for Lisa. The little bit of reluctance I had about going to the Hamptons was now completely gone—and there was no *way* I was missing this trip. I typed out a professional text to Lisa, explaining the surprise opportunity to go with Linley for the weekend, and apologized for such a late text. After sending it, I went back to the thread with Levi, waiting to see if he'd read it.

“Are you there?” Linley's voice came through the background.

“Yeah, I am.”

“Did you send Lisa a text?”

“Yeah, I did.” I stared at the text to Levi, the read receipt flashing as he must've opened it up. Three dots appeared across the screen...

But no message came through.

“Has she replied?”

I sighed as a notification came through, and I opened it. “Yeah, she said it's all good, and to have a nice time.” I read the basis of the message out loud before texting back a short and sweet reply to her.

“Okay, so this is going to be *so* much fun,” Linley said. “I was able to get you a seat on the plane right next to me too. It's just a sign that it was totally meant to be. We'll go to the Hamptons, find a super rich, sexy man who's into pregnant

women—or who wants to be a stepdad, and then all your problems will be solved. It'll be perfect.”

“I think that sounds a little creepy.”

“No way,” she argued. “Women totally find the love of their life when they're pregnant. I've read about it a thousand times.”

“A thousand times, really?” I rolled my eyes.

“I'm sure it's happened that many times. You're seriously *glowing* right now, and you deserve to have a nice weekend, where you're not having to put on some kind of show for the world to see. You're not Levi's girlfriend and baby mama anymore—well, you are his baby mama, but you get what I mean.”

“Yeah, I do.”

*And I don't know if I like it.*

Because at least when I was fake, I was *something* to him.

“Everything is going to be just fine, I promise. Now get to packing—our flight leaves at nine.”

“Oh shit,” I groaned, jumping up and heading toward my bedroom.

“Yep. I'll pick you up at seven. Love you!”

“Love you,” I muttered, hanging up the phone. Letting out a sigh, I headed to pack my things. However, I couldn't help but pull back up the thread of messages from Levi, hoping that

maybe somehow I had just missed his response. I mean, he *had* been typing something out to me, right?

But my heart sank as I stared at the screen.

*Nothing.*

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## LEVI

“Tonight’s the night,” I said to myself, staring at my fresh appearance in the mirror of my bathroom. I was in a fresh tux, and my dark hair had been cut only hours before. However, as much work as I had put into myself, I still looked like *shit*. I was exhausted, hardly having been able to sleep since the blowup at Ally’s.

*She fucking loves me.*

But it wouldn’t—it *couldn’t* ever work between the two of us, right? She had to know that I had feelings for her, but there was *nothing* we could do about them. So what was the point in putting them out in the open? To torture ourselves?

“Yo, what’s up?” Josh called from my bedroom. “Are we doing this thing or not? I feel like I’m betraying my sister with this. I just wanna get it over with.”

“Yeah, I know,” I said back, spinning around and leaving the bathroom. “But it’s only a couple of hours. I don’t know if I’ll be able to convince Frank to let me sign anyway.”

Josh stood in the doorway of my room in his own tux, leaning against the black frame. “You know I have zero fucking sympathy for you, and if you weren’t my best friend—and if the stupidity hadn’t been mutual between the two of you, you’d be going to this thing alone.”

“Obviously.” I grabbed my wallet off my dresser, dropping it into my pocket. “I get that you’re mad at me for all of it.”

“No, I’m just honestly shocked that you thought faking an engagement was a good idea—like what the fuck was going through your head with that, man? I get that the deal is important, but doesn’t that cross a line?”

*It’s the closest I’ll ever get to actually having her.*

“I don’t know.”

“What do you mean, you don’t know? Like come on, Levi. You act like you can live your life with no consequences. My fucking sister fell hard for you, and you broke her heart—I see it all over her face.”

“What?” I spun around to face him. “How did I break her heart? She told me she loved me, but I don’t—”

“You’re such an idiot,” Josh groaned, running his hands over his face. “She doesn’t want to be in a fake relationship, she wants a *real* one, and the fake one hurts, man.”

*But I feel the same way.*

“We can’t be together,” I shot back at him before slipping past him and heading for the door. “It’s just fucking

impossible. Nothing about it would work. She's always been off-limits."

Josh was quiet as he slipped into the garage behind me. "Why?"

"Because you said so, bro," I chuckled over at him, trying to make the situation feel lighter than before. "I'd never pursue a relationship with someone that you didn't approve of." I slid into my Mercedes, starting the engine and fastening my seat belt across my lap.

"So do you *have* feelings for her?" Josh's voice came out even more quiet as he looked over at me, his expression puzzled. "Why the fuck wouldn't you tell me if you did? Is *that* what's been wrong with you? Are you in love with Ally?"

I blinked at him a couple of times, ignoring the question as I backed out of the garage into the evening. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Holy shit," Josh gasped. "You do. You love her."

"You're sounding insane over there," I snapped, stomping the gas and heading toward the city.

"Just be honest." Josh's voice was getting an edge. "Is it just because you can't have her, so you want her? Or is it something real?"

I weaved in and out of traffic, trying to ignore what Josh was asking. We were best friends, but we *never* talked about shit this deep—not me, anyway. "I don't know."



“So if I said it was okay to date her and to be with her for real, would you do it?” Josh’s eyes were boring into my face, and I felt myself beginning to sweat.

“Is this a trick question? Because I don’t want to get my ass beat before this party.” I rolled my shoulders, apprehension and anxiety coming from all directions. “I just want to get this night over with. It’s going to be bad enough having to explain to Frank what happened—and what I did.”

“You’re going to tell him the truth?”

My jaw tensed along with my grip on the steering wheel. “Yeah, I think I’m just gonna come clean about the entire thing. It was wrong, and it’s not how I want to make the deal. I’ll just tell him the truth and try to land it with that.”

“That’s ballsy.”

“Yeah, I know, but you’re right, I took this mess too far. It started out about the deal—and it *was* about whatever it took, but then I liked the idea of being with...someone.”

*That someone being Ally.*

“My sister.”

I didn’t answer him, turning into the driveway of the mega mansion on the outskirts of Los Angeles. Everything about being here felt wrong, and it wasn’t because of the elite party...

It was just because *she* wasn’t here with me.

“Name?” the valet asked as I opened the driver’s side door.

“Lombardi,” I answered him, glancing over to Josh, who was eyeing a group of women heading into the house.

“Got it. Have a nice evening.” He nodded to me as I walked around the front of the car, joining Josh as we headed toward the large double doors.

“What kind of business party is this?”

“A very, very special one,” I grunted, taking a deep breath as I grabbed the handle of the door. “It’s a little over-the-top, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, I’d say so.”

Both of our eyes went wide as we stepped inside. Don’t get me wrong, I came from a long line of wealthy individuals, but *this* house was *insane*. Frank was making *bank* with all his investments and businesses.

“She went to the Hamptons.”

“What?” I whipped my head over to Josh, who was staring at a strange purple and gold abstract painting on the marbled walls.

“Ally. She went to the Hamptons with Linley. She said she needed to get out of town for a while. She tried to play it off as a babymoon, but when you asked me to come along to the party, I knew. I thought I’d be beating your ass, but I guess I just need to give you my—”

“Levi!” Frank called, his voice booming through the halls of the house. “All of the guests have headed to the courtyard.

That's where the party truly takes place. We try to keep it contained to a small area."

"Of course." I nodded. "I knew you had purchased a new home, but this—this is very nice." My nerves were fried as I eyed Josh, who was giving me a funny look. I wasn't my usual self. My voice was weak and my demeanor...*awkward*.

*What the hell is wrong with me?*

"Thank you, Levi." Frank looked over to Josh, his brows furrowing. "It's good to see you, Mr. Montgomery, but I figured your lovely sister would be the one joining us this evening. Is she unwell?"

"You could say that," Josh snorted, patting me on the shoulder before slipping off toward the exit. "I think I'm going to get some air real quick and give Laura a call."

"Yeah." I gave him a dirty look as he shot me an unprofessional wink. "Sorry about that. He's not used to these kinds of events."

Frank laughed, shaking his head. "It's fine. He's always been a little bit quirky, and it's nice to see that it hasn't changed, to be honest. I think too often we find ourselves losing those quirks as we get older."

*Oof, this is gonna be hard.*

"I agree." I nodded, running my fingers through my dark hair, disheveling what little style I had been able to give my hair.

“So, is Ally unwell? I couldn’t really decipher what Josh was referring to.” Frank had some concern in his eyes as we stood there, the massive entryway of his home feeling as though it was closing in on me. “Is she all right?”

“Not really, if we’re being honest,” I forced out, digging deep for the honesty—and courage—to face up to Frank. “She’s very upset with me.”

“Oh no.” Frank’s thin lips turned to a frown. “Those pregnancy hormones can be tough to sort through. Liz’s hormones were all over the place when she was pregnant with Trey.”

“Yeah, but I don’t think Ally’s is just hormones. She *is* definitely hormonal—and craves some weird things, like barbeque pizza, but that’s not what this is,” I continued, trying not to keep stumbling over my words. “She and I aren’t together.”

“You broke up?” Frank nearly gasped. “Well, I’m so sorry, Levi. That sure is a shame to hear. The two of you appeared to be quite the power couple.”

“Yeah, I wanted us to be,” I admitted, which was surprisingly the truth. “We really had something going, but she’s right—we can’t keep lying.”

“What?” Frank’s voice dropped.

*Just say it.*

“I lied about our relationship. I took her as a date to the wedding, hoping to prove that my life was at the right place to

buy CyberSecure. I brought Ally, because she's incredible, beautiful, smart, witty—you know, she's everything you could ever want in a potential life partner. I tried to convince her to be my fake girlfriend, but she wouldn't do it without a thirty percent stake in the company." I chuckled.

But Frank didn't.

*Yikes.*

"So, I agreed to it, and we moved forward with that."

"Ah, and she's not actually pregnant." Frank's voice was ice-cold.

"Well." I wiped the sweat from my forehead. "She *is* pregnant, and it *is* mine. Some things happened between us—and I've been trying to do everything I can for her. That thirty percent would set her up for life, and on top of that I know that she was planning to retire her parents. But it was wrong of me to keep doing this to her."

"I suppose you haven't grown up as much as I presumed you had," Frank grunted, rubbing the white stubble along his chin. "This is quite a shock, Levi. I thought we were going to be celebrating an engagement and signing over the company. I suppose it's a good thing I have a backup buyer."

I nodded, the disappointment washing over my body. "I completely understand that. Part of me just wanted to send over an email and withdraw my offer—and part of me wanted to tell you that she ran off or make up another lie to cover her

absence.” I paused, the realization hitting me square in the chest. “But honestly, I can’t buy this company without her.”

He didn’t say anything for a few moments, before finally letting out a sigh. “So you’re withdrawing your offer now, then?”

“I think I am,” I said, my voice dropping off. “I don’t think I want this if she can’t be here with me. I don’t want fucking anything if it’s not with her.”

“Very strong language there, Levi,” Frank said, letting out a chuckle. “Like I said, this is quite a shock to the system. I have a courtyard full of people who are ready to celebrate the exchange of ownership. If you were willing, I would’ve let you sign for the company tonight—as the sole owner. However, if you’re not willing to sign for it tonight, I’m afraid I’ll have to accept the backup offer.”

I blinked a few times, realizing that he was putting the offer out on the table for me to take...

Without Ally.

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## ALLY

“It’s a *gorgeous* morning,” I said, grabbing up the orange juice and pouring it into my glass. My eyes shifted out the window of the beach house. It had rained the previous day, but now the sky was clear and blue, beckoning me to come outside and enjoy it. “I think I’m going out to read for a while.”

“You go do whatever your little heart wants you to. I just wish that there was a little champagne in that,” Linley joked, looking half asleep as she slid onto a bar stool. “I think I’ll pass up going out on this morning excursion of yours though. I’ll be out there later. I’m going to have to combat this hella bad headache before I go doing anything.”

“Yeah, you look a little hungover.” I took in her messy hair, her dark eyes bloodshot and tired. We had stayed out late the night before, but because I couldn’t drink, there was no hangover that followed me—I guess that was a strange perk to being pregnant.

If that could even be considered a perk.



Linley suddenly sat up though, her face brightening up. “Hey, I totally forgot. That guy thought you were cute last night, are you going out with him tonight? He seemed like a super nice guy. He had amazing biceps, and that’s always a plus.”

I shook my head, my mind recalling the overzealous—and very drunk—man from the night before. “I’m not really in the mood for dating right now. I think I’ll just focus on myself and this little one.” I placed my hand over my baby bump, which had seemingly grown overnight. My white tank top felt a little snug around it, but I didn’t mind. It was my favorite physical attribute of mine at the moment.

“He was *so* hot though, and he’d be the perfect rebound. He’s no Levi Lombardi, but he’s still a someone who has a dick—and he could put it inside of you.”

“He was also extremely drunk and had no idea that I was pregnant. I don’t think that’s a good idea at all,” I reasoned, laughing as I sipped on my orange juice. “Your intentions are great, and I appreciate it, but I think you should just focus on the house guest that *you* brought home last night. He’s still upstairs, you know. I kept thinking that he was going to be slipping out in the early hours, but nope, he’s *still* here. He must like you.”

“Oh *shit*. I forgot that he was there,” she groaned, facepalming. “What’s his name again? Ben? Jim? It’s going to be so awkward if I have to be *that* bitch that has to tell him to leave the house.”

“Well, first off, his name is Darren.” I raised an eyebrow at her. “And I kind of like him. He’s nice, and you had a *lot* of fun with him last night. These walls are *way* too thin.”

“Great. At least someone remembers what I did last night. What’s the guy do for a living? Because knowing me, it’s going to be something terrible—like HR or something. The last thing I need is peacemaker.”

“Oh, I think he’s actually a male dancer.” I shot her a wink and blew her a kiss as I headed for the back door. “That’s the kind of entertainment that’ll keep you on your toes.”

“You’re kidding, right?” she called after me, her voice riddled with concern and amusement.

“Well, why don’t you go ask him yourself? He’d probably love nothing more than to actually get to know you this morning.” I giggled, opening up the French doors and stepping out onto the deck. The warm air hit my face, the sound of the ocean waves like music to my ears. My mind threatened to bring Levi into the moment, wondering what it might be like if he was here...

But I pushed it away.

*He doesn’t want it. He’s probably hungover and celebrating his new company.*

My hair blew around in the ocean breeze, and I was wishing I had put it up as I headed down the steps and toward the beach chairs and umbrella that we’d set up the day before—all

while Josh and Levi were probably killing it at the CyberSecure party.

And I hadn't heard a thing from either of them.

I pushed away the hurt and heartache, knowing that this was just the first of many things that I would never be a part of when it came to Levi. He didn't owe me a place in his life—only our baby. I had done my best to flirt the previous night, but it had been impossible, my heart only stuck on one person. It was going to take time to get over Levi...

Lots of it.

Clutching my orange juice in one hand, I followed the path to the chairs, taking in the morning sun rising in the sky. I kicked off my shoes and took a seat in the chair.

But I didn't feel like reading or playing on my phone.

Instead, I sat there, sipping my juice and staring at the boats on the horizon. I didn't regret stepping away from the deal, and I knew that everyone would understand why I had done it. No money was worth continuing to break my heart. I could figure out another way to help my parents retire someday.

The sound of a plane engine caught my attention, sounding as though it was flying low in the sky. Placing my hand over my brows as a shield, I peered up into the sky, my eyes landing on a small plane with a banner attached.

*That's cute.*

I squinted, wondering who was being proposed to—in real life. However, my heart nearly stopped as I read the words

scrolled out on the material flying in the sky.

*I'm sorry, Ally.*

“What the fuck,” I muttered, dropping my orange juice off my lap as I jumped to my feet to get a better view of it. “Oh my god.”

“Too much?” a deep familiar voice called out from behind me.

I spun around to see Levi heading toward me in a white t-shirt and pair of dark shorts. “What are you doing here?” I choked out as he gave me a huge grin.

“Well, I was trying to apologize in a big way.” He pointed back up to the plane, which was making another round in the sky. “I thought that might be what it takes for you to actually accept my apology—and I’m also sorry that you spilled your juice.”

“Right,” I mumbled, studying his face for a few moments. “It’s fine. I just wanted to do what was best for me, and I just don’t think that us doing the fake relationship was the right thing for me anymore.”

“Ally,” he said, his voice growing soft. “This isn’t about the fake relationship—I mean, it *is*. It was wrong, but I don’t regret going on that wild ride with you. I only regret that it was fake.”

A lump grew in my throat as I held his gaze, tears forming in my eyes. “Really?”

“Yeah, I want to do this for *real* with you, Ally. I don’t want to be fake, and I don’t want to make any deals in my life if they’re not with you—and *that* is what I told Frank last night when I went to the party.”

My mouth dropped open. “Did you tell him the truth?”

He nodded. “I did. I told him the entire truth, including the part where I fucked it all up because I didn’t have the nerve to tell you that I fell in love with you months ago. He had to sign the company over last night, so he went with the backup buyer. I just couldn’t do it without you. You’re all I think about, and you’re all I want—and maybe I was trying to live out what I wanted with you through our fake relationship.” He grabbed my hand, pulling me toward him. “I love you, Ally.”

“This is *not* what I expected to happen today.” I laughed, wiping the tears from my face as he cupped my cheek, leaning down and kissing my lips. His kiss was hot and heavy, setting my pussy on fire.

And then his phone rang.

“*Ugh.*” He pulled away. “I swear if Josh calls me one more time asking if I’ve talked to you yet, I’m going to—” Levi stopped as he stared at the phone.

“What?”

“It’s Frank.”

“Take it.” I bumped his arm. “Go on.”

He hit the answer button, putting him on speaker. “Hey, Frank, what’s up?”

“I just wanted to know how things went for you after the party.” I looked across at Levi, who was eyeing me too.

“I’m here now with Ally, actually. I flew out last night and made it this morning. It was worth it. I appreciate you calling me.”

“So the two of you are together?”

“We haven’t quite made it to that part of the conversation —”

“Yes, we are,” I cut Levi off, giving him an amused smirk. “He had a nice plane fly by with a banner attached to it. It was a little cheesy and over-the-top, but I appreciated the effort.”

Frank laughed on the other end of the phone. “I have to say that I’m impressed. I wasn’t sure he could pull that one off, but I’m glad that it worked out for the two—well, *three* of you. You’re going to make a lovely little family.”

“Thank you,” Levi said, squeezing my hand as he said the words. “I appreciate you keeping the whole matter quiet—and I’m sorry that we wasted your time.”

“Well, now, I wouldn’t go that far. I was actually hoping that the three of us could meet up when you make it back to town. I know that I said I wanted to sign the company over to the backup buyer last night, but I had a change of heart. I’d like to still sell the company to the two of you—*if* you want it.” Levi and I exchanged a glance, my heart jumping at the excitement.

“Uh, yeah.” Levi nodded, holding my gaze. “But only if Ally comes in at fifty percent. I want the company to be fifty-fifty.”

“Are you sure?” I couldn’t hide the surprise. “I don’t know.”

“Fifty-fifty.” Levi repeated himself. “Put her down for fifty percent of the company and we’ll be back in town Monday to sign it over and pass the check.”

“Deal. I’ll see you at nine.”

“That works great,” Levi said, his voice sounding a little breathless as Frank hung up the phone. He looked up at me, sliding his phone into his pocket. “I think we just did it.”

“I think you’re right.”

“Holy shit,” he exclaimed, grabbing me up and spinning me around. “We just did it—after *all* that, we still landed it.”

“You landed it.” I brushed my fingertips along the stubble on his jaw, my eyes searching his as he held me. “You did it, Levi. I didn’t have any part in what happened last night.”

“Yeah, you did. You forced me to man up, Ally—and you’ve done nothing but make me a better man this entire time.” He smiled up at me, before chuckling. “But I do think that you should move in with me now. There’s no reason we can’t do this parenting thing—without the “co” before it.”

I laughed, leaning down and swooping his lips back up with mine, wrapping my arms around his neck. He might’ve landed the buy with CyberSecure, setting us both up for life...

But I landed the better deal getting to spend it with him.

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# EPILOGUE

**One Year Later**

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## LEVI

“Good morning,” Ally’s soft voice said as my eyes fluttered open. “You’ve literally been sleeping *forever*.”

“Has it been forever?” I chuckled, rubbing the sleep from my eyes as I reached for her, pulling her into my arms. “Because I was thinking that I just slept for a wink.”

“It’s nearly ten.” She was already fully dressed in a bathing suit and a white cover-up over it. “And Ella has been asking about Dada for *hours*.”

“Ah, where is she?” I asked, sitting up slightly to look around the bedroom of the Hampton house we had just purchased.

“She’s with Linley and Darren. They’re feeding her a snack before we all head out to the beach.”

“So we have a few minutes then.” I gave her a mischievous grin, wiggling my eyebrows as I rolled us, landing her on her back and me on top of her. My cock was already hard as always in the morning...

But rarely did I get to take advantage of it at that time of day.

“We could be interrupted,” Ally warned me as I kissed down her neck, my fingers working the white fabric up around her waist.

“Mmhhh,” I murmured, sucking and caressing her skin as I made my way down her body. My hand slipped the black bikini bottoms down over her hips, her sweet pussy already beckoning for me to taste it. “I just thought we should start the first day of our vacation out right.”

“I’m not... *Oh,*” she moaned as I reached her clitoris, sucking her gently into my mouth. It didn’t matter how many times I had her, I’d always want more. My tongue circled her while my hands squeezed her inner thighs. I buried my face deeper in between her legs, working my mouth along the entrance of her soaked pussy. Her hands were in my hair as her hips began to grind against my face.

*Fuck, I love it when she does that.*

My cock was throbbing, ready to take her and fuck her however she wanted me to, but I ignored it, slipping a finger inside of her as her moans became more rhythmic.

“Cum for me, baby,” I instructed, my voice low as her grip tightened in my hair.

“*Oh, Levi,*” she moaned, moisture gushing from her, filling my mouth and covering my lips. I drank her up, never tired of the way she tasted or felt when her legs were wrapped around me. “That’s always so fucking good.” Her voice was breathy as she pulled at me. “Come kiss me.”

“You don’t have to tell me twice.” I chuckled, lunging for her and taking her mouth with my own. I could taste the coffee on her breath, and I nipped at her plump lips as I fumbled with the nightstand drawer beside the bed. Her hand slipped to my

hard cock, stroking it as my fingers finally landed on a condom. I pulled it out and ripped it open, handing it to her.

She gave me a wicked grin before stretching it slowly over my dick. “Fuck me, Levi.”

“How?” I could hardly choke out the word, her sexy little grin making my heart stutter.

“Like this.” She spun around and stuck her ass up at me, giving me my favorite fucking view. I grabbed her tiny waist, pulling her soaked pussy right onto my dick. I plunged it inside of her, a groan escaping my lips as she tightened around me.

“Fuck me hard, Levi,” she demanded, her voice strained with pleasure as I rammed into her. “Oh my *god*.” I gave her ass cheek a solid slap as it bounced against my cock.

I’d never get tired of this view.

But today was a special day, and I wanted more.

I pulled out, grabbing her waist and flipping her onto her back. She was still mostly dressed, and I tugged at the tie on the front of her cover up, flipping it open. Her black bikini top barely held in her breasts. I slid the thin material to the side, releasing her tits. My mouth salivated at the sight of them, and I couldn’t help but lean forward, kissing the soft fleshy skin.

“*Oh*,” she whined as I ran my tongue around her erect nipple, sucking it deeper into my mouth as I palmed her other breast. “*Levi*, I want you inside of me, *now*.”

*Yes, ma’am.*

I sat up, grabbing her hips firmly. Lifting her petite body off the bed, I brought her back onto my dick. Her pussy was dripping with wetness for me, and I slid in and out easily, both of us slick with her juices.

“I love you, Ally,” I muttered as I grabbed her arms. Carefully, I brought her back up off the bed, so she was sitting on my lap.

“I love you too,” she panted, her lips crashing into mine as she wrapped her legs against my waist. I bounced her up and down my shaft, my arms doing most of the work as I canvassed her mouth with my tongue, as if I didn’t know every fucking inch of her body like the back of my hand. My hands gripped her thighs, and she dug her fingernails into my neck and back as she clung to me, her moans filling my mouth.

“You’re so tight,” I groaned, her pussy bearing down on my cock as I tried to catch my breath for a moment, my chest heaving with the anticipation of what was to come.

“Are you gonna cum for me?” she whined into my ear as my lower back tensed against her legs. She squeezed them a little tighter, my abs burning up at the sensation of her hot skin against mine. “I love it when you cum for me, Levi.”

“And I fucking love it when you talk to me like that,” I growled, her wet, tight pussy taking me over and over, faster and faster. She was always so ready for me, and it drove me crazy, my cock always fucking throbbing for her. It didn’t matter how many times I’d had her, it was always exciting and sexy. Her moans grew in volume, and they sent me right over

the edge of my orgasm. I released, nearly falling forward onto the bed as my cock pulsed inside of her, filling the condom. “You always feel so good, baby.” My voice was ragged.

“So do you,” Ally purred at me, slipping off my cock and onto the bed. She grabbed up her bikini bottoms, letting out a heavy sigh as she pulled them on. “We’re going to have to try and keep Ella out of the water though. You know how much she loves water.”

“I’m sure we’ll be able to keep up with her, baby.” I gave her a reassuring smile, already seeing the motherly worry taking over her face. “We’re on vacation, relax a little. Josh and Laura are coming too. It’s going to be a really great day. I know it.”

*It’s the day.*

She gave me a funny look. “You’re acting weird.”

“Nah, I’m just excited for this vacation. We’ve been so busy with the business that we haven’t had a chance to really relax and enjoy ourselves.”

She smiled, climbing off the bed and grabbing for me, placing a kiss on my jaw. “I’ll see you downstairs then.”

*elle*

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## ALLY

“Mama!” Ella called out, barely able to waddle through the sand as she held her arms up for me to pick her up. She had Levi’s nearly black hair, but my blue eyes, and they were bright under the sunshine of the mid-afternoon.

“Are you having fun with Aunt Linley?” I asked her as I swooped her up into my arms, placing a kiss on the top of her head. Ella giggled in my arms, and I glanced over to Linley, who was relaxing against Darren. “So what do you do for work again, Darren?”

He rolled his eyes at me as Linley burst into laughter. “I swear, that joke is getting old. It’s been a year, and everyone still wants to pretend that I’m a male dancer.”

“Wait, you’re not?” Levi perked up from the book he was reading. “What do you do then?”

“Josh, what *does* he do?” Laura faked her confusion, pushing some of her blonde hair behind her ear. “Because I was hoping to go see his Thunder from Down Under show on Friday.”

“Ha ha.” Darren shook his head. “I still don’t know how the hell you guys got microbiologist confused with male dancer. They don’t sound the same.”

“They do when you’re drunk,” Linley pointed out, shrugging as she snuggled in closer to him. “But I don’t know what Ally’s defense is.”

“Just not listening.” I looked over to Levi, who was smiling at Ella and me, giving us this giddy smile.

*Something is up.*

He had been giving us that look *all* day, and I still couldn't figure out where it was coming from. He was the kind of person who was nearly always in a good mood...

But this was excessive.

“How's the business going?” Josh asked, grabbing my attention for the moment. “I heard the company is growing.”

“We've had a profit increase of almost thirty percent, actually.” I bounced Ella in my arms, feeling her head resting heavily against my shoulder. “I look for us to be almost double that by the end of the year. I think the new branch will continue growing at a higher rate than we initially projected.”

“Damn, my woman is smart,” Levi chuckled from a few feet away. “She might as well run the whole company.”

“I think she does a better job of running the daycare in the office,” Josh grunted, giving me an amused look. “Ever since I started there, you're always just carrying Ella around.”

“Best mom in the world.” Levi adjusted his sunglasses, setting his book down.

“You are just throwing out compliments like candy in a parade today.” I spun around, narrowing my eyes at him. “Don't get me wrong, you're always sweet, but this...this is wild.”



He laughed, just as the sound of an airplane engine filled the skies around us. “There it is. I swear, he must’ve been running late.”

I whipped my head toward the sound, squinting into the afternoon skies over the Atlantic Ocean. The gasps around me and the words on the banner caused my heart to nearly stop, before skipping a few beats.

*Will you marry me, Ally?*

I read the words over and over, the lump growing in my throat and my vision growing blurry. I felt a gentle tug on my hand, and I turned to see Levi down on one knee, his deep hazel eyes tinged with the color green and tears.

“Ally, our love story is a lot different than what you might read in a fairytale, but it doesn’t make it any less magical. It’s special and unique—and I happen to think it’s the best one I’ve ever heard, but maybe that’s just because it’s ours. I love you so incredibly much, Ally.” He paused, taking a deep breath, pulling out a ring box from his pocket. “Which is why I think it’s about time that we make this thing really official. Will you marry me? And maybe have a couple more babies with me?”

“Yes and yes,” I cried as he stood to his feet, pulling the ring out and slipping it on my trembling ring finger. “I love you.”

Levi pulled me into a hug, Ella asleep in my arms. “I knew today was going to be a good day.” He leaned down and

placed a hot and heavy kiss on my lips, all our friends and family clapping and cheering around us.

“Finally got the most important deal of my life done.” Levi kissed the top of my head, taking a stirring Ella from my arms.

“Me too.”



Thank you for reading *Baby for my Brother's Best Friend!*

You'll love *Accidental Baby for the Billionaire* – *An Enemies to Lovers Surprise Pregnancy Romance.*

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# Accidental Baby for the Billionaire Sneak Peek

**He was supposed to break my bed, *not my heart.***

Mr. Hottie-with-a-Body ghosted me a year ago,  
and now he's my new boss.

Still cocky.

Still hot *AF*.

Still thinks he can take whatever he wants.

And he wants *me* to be his fake wife.

He'll get his promotion and I'll get my debt erased.

At first, he drives me crazy pushing all my buttons.

But the way he stares at me gives me goosebumps,  
And soon his rock-hard body is all that fills my thoughts.

Now, I love pretending to be husband and wife.

Except we pretend a little *too* perfectly,  
Because I'm staring at a big, fat plus sign.

He's promoted,  
And I'm pregnant.

*So who's going to tell the playboy he's a baby daddy?*

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## PROLOGUE - AVA

“Another!” I said, leaning on the bar. My heels were killing me, and standing on them had become hard now that the world was spinning slowly around me. Everything seemed to have tilted on its axis.

“Are you sure you should drink more?” the bartender asked.

“Come on...Johnny.” I squinted to read the name tag on the bartender’s shirt. “Are you cutting me off?”

“Are you driving?” he asked.

“No way,” I said and giggled. “I’m way too drunk for that.”

He grinned and raised his eyebrows at me.

“I came in a cab, Johnny. Come on, just one more. My dad died this week, and I can’t face the real shit sober.”

At that confession, Johnny’s face fell.

“I’m sorry,” he said and grabbed a glass to pour me another vodka cranberry.

“That’s a great line,” someone said next to me.

When I looked up at him, the bluest eyes I'd ever seen looked down at me. And God, this man was *hot*. At least, I was pretty sure he was hot...I was really drunk. But he looked edible. Bronze skin, sandy hair, and those eyes—the color the sky was named after.

“I'll have to remember it for when Johnny over here wants to cut me off next,” he added.

I shook my head. “It's not a line. My dad died this week. See the black dress? We buried him today.”

The handsome stranger glanced down at me, and back up at my face. Maybe my expression told him how dead serious I was.

“Shit,” he breathed. “I'm sorry.”

“Yeah,” I said. I wrapped my fingers around the full glass Johnny pushed in front of me. “Me too.”

“What happened?”

“Does it matter?” I asked. “He's gone.” And he left us with a mountain of debt my mom and I hadn't known about. How the fuck did someone do that to their family? How had he hidden it from us for so long that he'd gambled and drank all the money away? Now, the banks were after us for the money. They didn't care that it wasn't our fault. They didn't care that we didn't have the money to fix it. By definition, the fact that they were coming after us for it meant that it was *our* money that he'd gambled away.

I shook it off.

“Enough about me,” I said with a smile. “Tell me about you. You’re way too attractive to hang out in a joint like this.”

He laughed, surprised. “Are you using a line on me?”

“Did it sound like a line?” I asked and sucked on the straw in my glass. I was being ridiculously flirtatious.

“It sounded like the kind of line I would have used on a girl like you,” he said.

I giggled again. “Well, now that the line is out of the way... I’m Ava.”

“Ava...do you have a last name?”

“You bet,” I said. “And I’m not giving it to you.”

“What?” He looked confused.

“There are way too many stalkers out there, you know? And God knows what people can do with next to no information at all these days.”

“You think I’m a stalker?” he asked, his face a mixture of a frown and a grin.

I tilted my head to study him. The room swam around me, but his angelic face was in perfect focus.

I shook my head.

“No, you’re right. Stalkers are usually less attractive.”

He burst out laughing. “It sounds like you have experience. I’m Noah.”



“Noah. Well, if my ex is anything to go by...I mean, you know how people say it's not about looks, it's about personality? It's such a noble thing to say. But it turns out he wasn't hot *or* interesting.”

Noah kept laughing. “I would hate to get on your bad side.”

I sighed. “Yeah, you wouldn't want that.”

“So, how about I get on your good side?” he asked. He took a small step closer to me. His cologne wrapped around me, and I breathed in deeply. I was drunk. And that made me horny. And this man was like a gift from the gods on a night like tonight, when it felt like my whole world had fallen apart.

“How are you going to do that?” I asked.

He kissed me. I melted against him, and he wrapped an arm around my waist, cupping my cheek with his other hand. His tongue slid into my mouth, and he tasted just as good as I figured he would.

When he broke the kiss, my skin was hot.

“Like that,” he said. “Did it work?”

I nodded and swallowed hard. “Yeah, it worked.”

He smiled at me again, a charming smile that made me weak in the knees.

“How about we get out of here?” I asked. “I happen to have more good sides you can get on.”

“Yeah?” He grinned, already taking out his wallet to pay for our drinks.

I didn't usually do this. I wasn't the type to initiate a one-night stand or sleep with strangers. But I'd broken up with Kyle two weeks ago, and a week later, my dad had died of a heart attack. And just like that, everything about my life changed.

I just wanted to do something that wasn't *me*. I wanted to do something that made me feel like this wasn't *my* life.

"Let's get out of here," he said and took my hand.

I let him lead me out of the bar. A black car pulled up a moment later. I frowned.

"Is this a cab?"

"No," he chuckled. "I sent for my car."

"You have a car you send for?"

He grinned at me, again looking a little baffled.

"You don't have any idea who I am, do you?"

"Should I?" I asked.

He shook his head. "No, you shouldn't. But in a short while, I'll show you exactly who I am."

I giggled again, and he opened the car door for me, letting me get in first.

"Where do you live?" he asked.

I hesitated.

"I'm not going to stalk you," he added.

I laughed, feeling stupid, and gave the driver my address. Noah was on me in a flash, his lips on my neck, nibbling the delicate skin. His hand cupped my breast, massaging and kneading. We were way past baby steps and taking it slow. But I'd asked for this when I'd told him to come home with me.

We were going to do this. I needed him to fuck my brains out so that I would stop thinking about the hell my life had become. I needed him to worship my body, to make me feel so good that nothing else mattered anymore.

When Noah slid his hand down my crotch, it was a silent promise that he would deliver.

The house was dark when we got out of the car.

"You live here?" he asked, looking at the old house. It was a large house with a gabled roof, half-timbering, and a covered porch, straight from the Victorian era.

"Well, I do now," I said. "My mom needed help after...so I moved back home."

"She's not here, is she?" Noah asked, his steps faltering.

"God, no. I wouldn't invite you back if she were. She's out tonight. She'll be back tomorrow."

Noah let out a breath and ran his hand through his hair.

"Not a fan of meeting the parents, huh?" I asked.

Noah shook his head. "That's not how I play the game."

We climbed the steps onto the porch, and I turned to him, running my hands over his chiseled chest. "A game, huh?"

“You bet this is a game,” he said, nibbling my lower lip, and talking through his kisses.

“Well, a game should have rules,” I said in a breathy voice. God, I wanted him so badly.

“Okay, rule number one...no clothes.”

I giggled and pushed the front door open.

Noah started undressing me the moment the door was shut, and we were alone inside. He pulled my dress over my head and dropped kisses along my shoulder while he unclasped my bra.

I fiddled with the buttons on his shirt and peeled it off his shoulders. He was built like a *god*. The muscles moved under his skin as he pulled off my bra and ran his hands down my back.

When he pushed me against the living room wall, I gasped from the cold. But Noah’s mouth found a nipple, and I forgot all about the temperature in the room.

I gasped as he sucked on my nipples—first, the right one, and then the left. I groaned when he massaged and squeezed my breasts, pushing them together and planting kisses between them.

I fiddled with his buckle while he kissed, nibbled, licked, and sucked me. When I undid his button and zipper, I reached into his pants and pulled his cock free.

He was impressive, with silky smooth skin, and the tip was slick with lust.

I ran my thumb over the tip of his cock, and Noah groaned.

“You’re driving me crazy,” he said.

“I know,” I murmured and pulled away from his grasp and onto my knees.

Noah groaned and pushed his hips forward. I sucked the tip of his cock into my mouth and swirled my tongue around it, tasting the saltiness of his need for me. When I sank my head further into him, taking him deeper and deeper into my mouth, Noah sucked a breath through his teeth. He pushed his fingers into my dark hair, curling them into fists, and pulled me closer. He pushed further and further down my throat.

I bobbed my head back and forth, stroking him in and out of my mouth. I got wetter and wetter as I sucked him off, melting into my panties.

“Fuck, Ava,” Noah said through gritted teeth, and he yanked back so that his cock slipped from my mouth with a plop. “I’m going to lose it, and I want to be inside of you when I do.”

He grabbed my hand and pulled me up, kissing me hard before I could reply.

“Where’s your room?” he mumbled.

I took his hand and teetered half-naked on my heels toward my bedroom. When we stepped into the room, Noah pulled my panties down from behind, and I kicked off my shoes. He grabbed my ass with one hand and cupped my pussy around the front with the other. He ground his cock against my ass, and I moaned.

When he ran his hand up my back, he pushed me forward, so that I leaned on my bed, naked and ready for him.

Noah ran his hand between my legs, his fingers finding my slit.

“You’re so wet,” he said.

“Yeah,” I answered simply.

None of this was like me. But it felt so good to just live in the moment.

Noah paused, retrieving his hand. His pants rustled as he kicked them off. I heard the rip of a foil packet. When he touched me again, he gripped my hips, and the rubbery tip of his condom-wrapped cock pressed against my entrance. I gasped, and Noah pushed into me. He moved slowly like he was as aware of his size as I was. I moaned as he slid into me, filling me up.

When he was buried to the hilt, his hips flush against my ass, I paused, trembling around him.

He pulled back and pushed into me again, and I cried out as he started to fuck me. Noah picked up his pace, stroking in and out of me, and I moaned and cried out as he pounded into me harder and harder. His balls slapped against my pussy, and every stroke was pure pleasure.

In no time, an orgasm built inside me, his cock stroking me in all the right places so that the pleasure burned and grew inside me.

When I orgasmed, my pussy clamped down around Noah's cock, and he gritted his teeth and grunted. He gripped my hips, fingers digging into my skin, and I sank my chest onto the mattress, weakened with the pleasure that crashed into me with every stroke.

I trembled, and Noah bent over me, planting a kiss on my back.

When he pulled out, I moaned again.

I rolled over and shifted onto the mattress. Noah crawled over me, and my legs fell open for him. He positioned himself between my legs and slid into me again.

He kissed me, and his eyes locked on mine when he bucked his hips again, fucking me anew. He rammed into me harder and harder, breathing hard. His lips were fractions away from mine, our gasps and moans mingling and twisting together, and I held onto his shoulders as he rode me.

My second orgasm wasn't far off—alcohol always loosened me up. I came that much easier in this state.

When I cried out, grabbing onto Noah's shoulders and holding on as the orgasm ripped through me a second time, Noah bit out a cry.

He was right there with me.

His cock jerked and pulsed inside me as my body contracted, milking him as we came together.

When it was over, Noah collapsed on top of me, out of breath.

He rolled off a second later, allowing me to breathe.

“Fuck,” he said in a breathy voice. “That was fucking incredible.”

“It was,” I said with a smile.

“You were right. You had plenty more good sides to you.”

I giggled and pressed my hand against my forehead. The alcohol was starting to wear off, and now that I’d had a release to take care of the urgent need that had ruled me the last couple of days, reality started to set in.

Noah was a stranger. And I’d brought him back to my place.

I sat up and crossed my arms over my chest.

“You should probably go,” I said softly.

Noah sat up, too. He frowned. “Why?”

“Because I don’t usually do this. I’m a mess right now. I have a lot of stuff to work through. I mean, this was great, but —”

“Hey, it’s okay,” Noah said gently. “I get it.”

“You do?”

He nodded. “I know all about what it’s like to try to get away from the life you usually live.”

I let out a shuddering breath. “Thank you.”

“It’s going to be okay in the end,” he said. “And if it’s not okay, it’s not the end.”



I rolled my eyes and snorted. “You know that line is all over the internet, right?”

He shrugged. “It’s still true.”

“Hmm,” I said.

“Can I call you?” he asked.

I frowned. “Why?”

“Because I don’t want to be the guy who hit and run when you’re going through hell.”

I giggled despite the unsettled feeling in my stomach. “That’s what you call it?”

He shrugged. “I prefer to cuddle after sex, but I know you need your space. So, compromise.”

I nodded. “Yeah, okay.”

He shifted off my bed to find his phone in his pants that he’d kicked off and handed it to me. I programmed my number into it.

“Ava,” he said with a grin.

“No last name.”

He laughed and pulled on his pants. I found an oversized shirt and a pair of shorts in my closet and pulled them on to let him out.

“I’ll call you,” he said when we walked to the front door together.

“Will you?” I asked.

He nodded. "Of course." He flashed another of his charming grins at me before he turned.

The black car that had brought us appeared out of nowhere, and Noah climbed in. When the car drove off, I closed the door and leaned against it.

My body felt amazing after having had sex. And alcohol. But neither of those had driven away the fact that my dad was dead and he'd left us with a shit ton of debt.

But I will figure that out again tomorrow. Right now, I needed Tylenol, water, and sleep.

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# AVA

## One Year Later

“I’m home,” I called out, hanging my keys on the hook behind the door. I put down my handbag and kicked off my heels, curling my toes downward. My feet ached after a full day on them.

I arched my back, hearing my spine pop. This was the fifth day in a row I’d worked overtime, and I was exhausted.

My mom didn’t answer me.

I picked up the stack of mail next to my handbag and sifted through them. They were all for my mom, but they were all bills. I knew the envelopes by now. Looking at the stack of bills made my stomach twist. There was no way I would get all those taken care of on my measly salary. Not where I was now.

“Mom?” I called again. I fished a red envelope from the center of the stack and tore it open.

It was a final notice of foreclosure on the house.

I squeezed my eyes shut. I’d known this was coming, but now that it was here, I felt sick to my stomach.

It meant we only had thirty days to pay the outstanding mortgage, or we were out on the street. And I had no idea how we could get that money together in a month.

“Mom?” I asked, again, padding on stockinged feet through the house. The setting sun fell into the windows, casting lines of gold on the floor.

When I popped my head into my mom’s room, she was asleep on her bed. She looked thin and frail—a shell of the woman she used to be.

I tiptoed into the room and pulled a blanket over her. She sighed, her brow furrowed in worry even as she slept.

“We’ll figure it out,” I whispered, and stroked my fingers through her hair once before I left her room again.

I hoped to God we could figure it out. Mom hadn’t worked since Dad had died. The grief had sent her spiraling into depression, and instead of giving her the time she needed to recover, they’d let her go. Finding out about all the debt my dad had left behind for us had only made it worse.

I’d moved back in to take care of her, to help her pay the bills. I couldn’t just leave her.

After a year, I couldn’t do what I’d set out to do—I couldn’t save her or the house.

My phone beeped with a message from Paige.

*Are we still on for tonight?*

Before I could type an answer, my phone rang. I didn't recognize the number.

"Am I speaking to Ava Brooks?" a female voice asked on the other side of the line.

"Speaking," I said. If this was another debt collector trying to track us down, I would throw my phone against a wall.

"This is Belinda Byers. I'm calling you from Solomon, Forger, and Riggs."

My stomach twisted again, this time with hope.

"Oh, I've been waiting for your call." I'd given up hope, thinking that the call wouldn't come. And they wouldn't call me if I didn't make it through, right? That was what they always said after interviews and applications—if I didn't hear back from them in two weeks, I had to assume it was unsuccessful. She wouldn't call me to tell me I'd failed.

Again.

"I'm happy to say that your application was successful. The managing partners have reviewed your resume and considered your interview recording. We'd like to invite you to work for us."

"Oh," I breathed. "Yes. Thank you."

"We'll see you on Monday, Miss Brooks."

"I'll be there," I said.

I remained composed until we ended the call. As soon as I ended the call and I was sure Belinda Byers wouldn't hear me,

I squealed and threw my hands up in the air.

Finally! I was catching a break.

This was the third law firm I'd applied to, in the hopes that I could land a better job with a higher salary. I needed the financial boost. I needed something—anything—that would get us by.

I considered waking my mom to let her know, but decided against it. The poor woman barely slept at night. She was stressed and depressed. I wanted her to get all the sleep she could get.

Instead, I picked up my phone and typed a reply to Paige.

*We're on. I'll meet you at nine.*

I hopped into the shower and washed off the day, changed into jeans and a top and ballerina flats—no heels for me—and pulled my hair back into a ponytail.

Before I left, I took a microwave meal from the freezer and prepared it for when my mom woke up. I left it on the counter with a note.

*I got the job! Have dinner, I'm out with Paige. I love you!*

I left the house quietly and drove into town.

The Seattle skyline was breathtaking at night. The space needle, along with all the tall buildings, created an urban backdrop against the inky sky, and as the sun sank away further and further, the lights in the city came on. Up above,

stars were pinpricks of light in the sky, as if the heavens reflected the city below.

I walked into Olive and Twist and glanced around. Paige waved at me from a booth.

“Did you only get off work now?” she asked when I hugged her.

“Not too long ago. I had time to shower and change. You’ll notice I’m not meeting you in a pencil skirt and heels.”

“It’s a nice change,” Paige said, rolling her eyes before she grinned at me. “You work too hard.”

“Someone has to do it,” I said.

When we sat down, Paige pushed an Apple Martini in my direction.

“You’re a saint,” I said and lifted the glass to my lips to take a sip. “I have news.”

“Yeah?” Her green eyes sparkled.

“We’re losing the house.”

Paige frowned. “I thought you had good news.”

I nodded. “I do. I got the job with Solomon, Forger, and Riggs.”

“What!?” Paige cried out. “Ava, that’s amazing! You should have led with that. What the hell!”

I giggled, and when Paige lifted her glass in salute, I clinked mine against hers. We each took a sip.

“It’s a big increase, and I start on Monday,” I said. “But that doesn’t mean we’ll definitely keep the house. We still have so much to take care of, and they’re after me like I’m the one that fucked up. Debt collectors are a special brand of evil.”

Paige shook her head and glanced across the bar.

“It’s ridiculous that they’re willing to put you out of your house after what your dad did. And with your mom in her condition...”

“I know,” I said. “But there’s no use feeling sorry about it now. It is what it is. I just have to figure something out.”

“Will you be working with Noah Forger?” Paige asked.

“Who?”

The look she gave me made me burst into giggles.

“He’s only the god of the legal world,” Paige said.

“I know, I know. I was kidding,” I said. “I know who he is. I’ve heard the name. And I’ll be an idiot if I don’t know my new boss’s son’s name. Although I heard he believes he is god’s gift to mankind, that he’s doing everyone a favor just by being on this earth.”

“You forget to mention how drop-dead *gorgeous* he is,” Paige pointed out.

“I don’t actually know what he looks like,” I admitted.

Page shook her head. “Well, he’s *dreamy*. That counts for something. And he’s a top-shelf lawyer. I’m jealous you get to look at that face all day every day come Monday.”



I laughed and shook my head. “I don’t know if I’ll be working with him. He might be on a different floor. I doubt he’ll notice a measly paralegal like me anyway.”

“Don’t you dare talk about yourself that way.”

“That’s how he’ll see me,” I said with a shrug. “Besides, I don’t care about him. I care about his dad, Archibald Forger, and the fact that he’s signing my paychecks. It’s all about who you keep happy.”

“You’ve always been so diplomatic,” Paige said with a grin. “What will you do if you end up losing the house?”

I shivered just thinking about it. But it was a very real possibility.

“We’ll figure it out. I think I can afford something small for the two of us, just to get us back on our feet. I can sell whatever won’t fit in a new apartment, and we’ll take it from there.”

Paige shook her head and ran her fingers through her light brown hair.

“I wish I could help somehow. If I had the cash, I’d bail you out in a snap.”

“I know,” I said.

Paige was a personal assistant to the CEO of a company in town. I kept forgetting what it was the company actually did. I just knew that Paige practically ran the guy’s whole life. She was the kind of person who had everything under control. She could multitask like a demon and look good while doing it.

“You probably wouldn’t have accepted it anyway,” Paige said with a laugh. “You never accept help, not even from Kyle when you two were together.”

I snorted. “Like Kyle ever had something to offer that would help. Seriously, he had his hands full saving his own ship from sinking, let alone mine.”

Paige laughed.

“He called me two days ago,” I said.

“What?” Paige cried out. “Really?”

I nodded and swirled my drink. “Yeah, he said he wanted to meet up, that he feels like we have unfinished business.”

“Are you going to meet him?”

“God, no,” I said and rolled my eyes. “I can tell you what his ‘unfinished business’ is. That new girl of his probably dumped him, and he’s fresh out of options for a wife. You know he just wants to get married. He doesn’t care to who. So, he’s going back to the drawing board. But I have enough problems as it is.”

“I think you’re better off without him, anyway.” Paige leaned on the bar and tilted her head so that her blonde hair hung over her shoulder.

“I thought you disapproved of me being single.”

“I’d rather you’re single than with *him*,” Paige said.

I laughed and nodded.

“It’s a pity that guy never called you back,” she added.

“What guy?”

“The one you slept with.”

I groaned. “That was a year ago, and I wasn’t looking for anything serious. It was just a one-night stand. And so unlike me, anyway.”

That was true, but it pissed me off that he hadn’t called me back after he’d told me he would. I hadn’t asked for it, he’d offered. But whatever, it didn’t matter.

It was a hit and run, just like he’d said.

I shook my head and forced myself to get back to the topic. “Thanks for being so caring, Paige. But you don’t have to even *think* about helping me. This isn’t your mess to deal with.”

Paige sipped her martini. “It’s not your mess, either,” she pointed out.

I nodded. She was right—this mess was all my dad’s. It was convenient for him that he’d checked out early, leaving the bullshit for my mom to deal with. I missed him—a lot. Sometimes I wished I could go back in time. Not only to see him again, but to shake him by the shoulders and ask him what the hell he was thinking.

How could he have done that to my mom? To me?

He must have known that something like this could happen. Like I kept telling Paige, there was no use looking back at the past and wondering how things might have been different. I had to deal with what was in front of me.

Maybe one day, far into the future, we will finally be rid of this burden. My mom would be okay again, and I would be able to live my life.

“My house is always open for you. You know that, right?”

I nodded. Paige was a great friend. No matter what, she would help where she could. We’d been friends since grade school, and she’d had my back since day one when we’d decided to be best friends forever.

No matter how badly things went, though, I wasn’t going to impose on her space. Paige lived in a loft apartment, and I wasn’t going to barge in on her privacy with my mom and all of our stuff.

“So, what are you doing about the bar exam?” Paige asked, changing topics on me. “They’re going to let you work there as a lawyer once you pass, right?”

“I’m not taking the exam again,” I said.

“Come on, why not?” Paige asked.

“Because after failing it twice, I get the message loud and clear.” I sighed heavily and drained my martini glass. “I’m just not meant to be a lawyer.”

“That’s bullshit. I’ve never seen anyone on their toes like you. You can argue with anyone into a corner, with a memory like an elephant, and you miss nothing. They’ll be lucky to have you. You just have to pass that exam. Third time’s a charm.”

I laughed and lifted my hand to flag a server so we could order another round.

“Are you hungry?” I asked. “I haven’t eaten yet.”

“Sure, let’s split it.”

I nodded.

“You’re not going to distract me from the topic with food,” Paige warned.

I chuckled. “Wouldn’t dream of pulling one over on you.”

The server appeared, and we ordered more martinis and a platter of food to share. As soon as the server left with our order, Paige got on with me about passing the bar exam and finally becoming a lawyer like I’d always dreamed of. But that wasn’t going to happen any time soon.

I sucked at writing exams. I clammed up, getting some kind of stage fright, and everything I’d studied flew out of my head as if I’d never studied anything at all.

It looked like being a paralegal was my future.

And right now, all I cared about was paying the bills so Mom and I could finally breathe again. I would focus on fulfilling my dreams again another time.

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