



# CONSUMED

*by Desire*

CENTRAL PARK SOUTH BOOK 1

# BIANCA VIX

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# Consumed by Desire

by Bianca Vix

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# Consumed by Desire

## Central Park South: Book 1

*MMMMF Bisexual Reverse Harem Menage Romance*

I'm determined to have the kind of Manhattan lifestyle that I've always wanted.

A fantastic address. My dream job. A glamorous life.

I didn't know my new life would come with three neighbors I can't get out of my mind. Especially since one of them is my old high school enemy.

I never thought I'd see Logan Blair again. Every time I do, sparks fly between us. Back in high school I would've been happy to hurt him back for what he did to me.

When his secret comes out and everything changes, that's the last thing I want to do. That can't be right. This attraction has to stop. It's Logan's best friend who I'm into. Asher and I are dating. Sort of. It's complicated.

I never believed for a single moment that I'd consider being shady to get what I want. When there's so much at stake, the rules change. One wrong move and I could get everything I've ever wanted.

Or end up losing what's really important.

# Chapter 1

## Elena

“I’ve got an offer you can’t refuse. Seriously, Elena, you’re not going to believe this,” Riley says.

“Yeah?” I’m used to my best friend getting excited over everything. It’s how she rolls and I love her enthusiasm, but today there’s no way I can match it.

“It’s big,” she insists. “I’d do it myself but I can’t and I’m regretting that very hard. Believe me, I tried everything I could think of to make it work out. It could be the answer to all of your problems.” She pauses. “Maybe not all of them, but one of the major ones. This place is perfect for you.”

“Place? What’s the deal?” I stop folding my laundry and catch my phone right before it slips out of my grasp. I so, so need to move. I can’t afford this tiny apartment since my ex moved out. I’m beyond happy that Owen’s gone but now I’m afraid I won’t be able to pay next month’s rent.

Every single person who’s answered my ad for a roommate has been super sketch, if not outright creepy. I’ve gotten so many vibes of I’m-going-to-murder-you-in-your-sleep, I can’t even count.

One guy showed up with a python wrapped around his neck and shoulders. A python. As if that’s the most normal thing in the world to have, let alone walk around with in public. I was so scared I wouldn’t let him come in.

Although I was more afraid of the guy than the snake.

Of course he probably would’ve been better than my ex, who still insists on dropping in randomly for things he ‘forgot’. Maybe I should’ve accepted snake guy so he could scare Owen away once and for all.

“I’ve not only got somewhere for you to live, it’s an amazing place,” Riley continues. “It’s a housesitting gig for a

very wealthy couple and as much as I want to, I can't do it myself."

"A house? Where is it? I don't want to leave Manhattan if I don't have to."

"No, not an actual house. It's a gorgeous penthouse in a great building. I've seen pictures and you won't believe it. It's huge and it's on 59th."

I perk up, all my senses on high alert. "Which part of 59th?"

"Oh, you know," she teases. "Somewhere you might like."

"You don't mean Central Park South, do you." She can't. There's no way Riley's talking about one of the most expensive neighbourhoods in the city. My goal in life is to live right there.

Riley laughs. "I wouldn't joke about something like that. That's exactly it, babe. Billionaire's Row."

I can't speak. Visions of exclusive parties, high fashion and a super glam lifestyle dance through my mind. That's what must come along with a really cool address like that. It's practically guaranteed.

"It's in one of the most luxurious new buildings," she continues. "You're going to love it."

"What would I have to do?" I ask, skepticism seeping in no matter how hard I try to push it away. I love my instant fantasy of having the best possible Manhattan life there is. There's no need for reality to intrude too soon.

"That's the best part. There's literally nothing to it. You don't have to do a single thing except be there. The owners just want their place to be occupied," Riley says. "You know, house-sit. Make it look lived-in."

"Really? If it's a penthouse, who's going to know that the owners aren't there?" I ask.

"I know, right? It's not like an actual house where someone might notice the owners being gone. This is what the super wealthy do these days. It's a whole thing. Usually how it

works with this kind of situation is that you'd just check in every few days and make sure everything's good. In this case, the client's worried because there was a robbery in another building. It's kind of ridiculous since it was ten blocks away. In the end, it turned out to be the couple's son who was sneaking their jewelry out and selling it off."

"Seriously?"

Riley laughs. "It wasn't even a real break-in, but there's no convincing these clients of that. They want someone living in their place while they're away on an extended trip. You remember my friend who does this kind of thing full-time? She has a lot of these housesitting gigs and she goes around checking in on a few of them every day. She takes care of the plants and hangs out for awhile before going on to the next one. All she does is rotate between them. That's her whole job. It's got to be the easiest one in the world. I wish I'd thought of it."

"So why isn't she doing this one?" A glimmer of hope rises up in me but I'm trying to be cautious. This is New York. Everything comes with a price and if it seems too good to be true, it always is.

At the same time, my mind's jumping to all the possibilities this could bring me. Having a great address in this city is a big step towards to having a fabulously sparkling life. That's all I've ever wanted. When I was a student along with Riley, we'd watch reruns of all the housewives shows and dream about how we could live our own glam lives some day.

Going to law school means that Riley's much more on track for achieving that lifestyle than I am, but I still want it too. My dreams of becoming a investigative journalist aren't the best way to get there, but still. I'm determined to pull it off somehow and a great address is a massively positive step in that direction.

"She can't, she's going on vacation and she's already arranged everything. She doesn't want to cancel. I'd do it myself but it's too much commuting time for me to take on now. So I said you would."



“You already told her I would? Really, Riley?” It’s not like her not to ask first. “Why?”

“I had to. She needed someone right away. Isn’t it the perfect solution for you?”

“Yes,” I admit. I have nowhere else to go and I have so much debt, I don’t even want to think about it. My uncertain future’s been keeping me up every night for days. The manager’s been extremely understanding so far when I’ve been late for rent and I always paid eventually, but now I’ve used up all of the grace that he can give me. “You’re not messing with me, are you?”

“Of course not.” Riley sounds offended and I cringe. I know she wouldn’t do something like that but this seems too good to be true.

“I just mean that it sounds like such a great deal. I’m only checking.” I backtrack quickly. I trust Riley more than anyone else I have in my life. “There aren’t any hidden expenses?”

“None,” Riley confirms. “If I were you, I’d jump on it. I mean, the only downside is that it’s just for two months. You’d have to leave eventually but it buys you a lot of time to figure something else out.” She pauses. “So. Do you want it? She’ll have to find someone else right away if you’re not into it. Should I tell her you can’t do it after all?”

I take a deep breath. “You’re sure there’s no catch?”

“I guess you could say the catch is that they’re not going to pay you. They consider it an exchange because they’re providing a place to live rent-free. It’s completely legit, I swear. It’s an unbelievable gig and I wish I could do it myself, but exams are starting way too soon and I’m going to be living in the library. Every moment counts for me these days.”

“Okay. Then I’m in.”

“Good,” Riley says. “I didn’t even think I’d have to convince you this much.”

“You’re right. I’m sorry.” I lie down on my bed and squeeze my eyes shut. I’ve gotten a lot less trusting after living

so long with Owen's constant gaslighting and I've got to get over it.

As Riley gives me the details, I try to focus but I only manage to half-listen. It's sinking in that I suddenly have a new place to live. Not only that, this deal gives me two whole months to figure out the rest of my life.

Why not live in luxury while I'm doing it?

# Chapter 2

## Elena

I drag myself out of bed even though I'm still exhausted. Did I even get five hours of sleep? I can't remember when I went to bed. I don't mind working as a waitress but the nights are starting to get more grueling than they used to be. My shift ran so long last night that I was too tired to go out with everyone afterwards like usual.

Now that I have a brand new place to live, it's time to focus on getting my career on track. All I've ever wanted to do is to be a writer. I can't wait to start out but it's insanely competitive. What I really want is to be able to report on serious issues and write news features. It's a field that's only getting narrower but I can't help wanting it. It's my passion and I have to go for it. When I first dove in to job hunting I found out that there are a lot more publications I could work at than I ever expected. So far I still haven't been able to find one that wants to hire me, but it's got to happen sometime.

Searching for writing work is a total nightmare and I can't even say it's because I've gotten a lot of rejections. Instead I get completely ignored. I know there must be thousands of others vying for the same spot but it's hard not to take it personally. Even the auto-responses don't always come through. It's so frustrating because I'm always left wondering what I need to do to get a foot in the door. I'd do anything. If I only knew what that would be.

I start to check my phone absently while I make myself some instant coffee. I nearly drop my kettle when I come to a very unexpected message. It's from an online magazine and instead of DoNotReply, the email's from an editor. Not just any editor either. It's from Zan Stokes.

It's so brief, I have to read it twice before it sinks in.

Will talk with you at 1pm today.

She doesn't even call it an interview but it's some actual human contact and that's massive. Getting any response at all is a big deal and to speak to an editor is unimaginable. Zan Stokes is a big name in the publishing industry. Every magazine she's worked for has gotten way more popular once she's the one in charge. On top of that, she's with City Scan. It's absolutely one of the main news magazines that I'm dying to work for. The company that started it up is pretty groundbreaking in the industry. They moved from being print-only and jumped online way ahead of everyone else at the time.

If this call leads to something more, I'll be ecstatic. Getting a foot in the door is huge, but I also asked for extra shifts at the restaurant yesterday and I got turned down. Not having to pay rent for a couple of months is a big help but I still need some money flowing in. I can't even look at my credit card balance. It's way too scary.

I need to check my internet connection because it's been dropping a lot lately. Energized, I open up the thin desk drawer that I keep my laptop in.

It's empty.

What the hell? I haven't used it in a few days but I never leave it out when I'm not using it. I search the small apartment frantically. I can't find it anywhere. Try to tamp down my rising panic, I check in increasingly unlikely places. It's nowhere to be found.

There's only one other person who might know anything about it.

Anxiously I tap out a text to Owen.

Do you know where my laptop is? I need it right now.

I'm about to start hyperventilating as I wait when I start to see him replying.

*Yeah I've got it.*

What the hell? I text him back so furiously I'm giving autocorrect a workout.

What are you talking about?

I stab at my phone as I type. I never said Owen could use my laptop at all, let alone take it out of the apartment. Not that I'd ever expect him to do that. Does he even know my password?

*My battery was too low. Needed to do some work, so I took yours.*

You just took it without asking me?

*Yeah. You don't use it much.*

I clench my phone tightly. He's not even going to apologize? Why would he even want to use mine? His is newer and way faster. Owen used to make fun of my laptop sometimes for being secondhand, even though he knew it was all I could afford.

*I can bring it by tonight.*

I want to scream. Texting's just not a satisfying enough way to express my frustration with him.

I need it right now. I have an interview.

I scowl at my phone. Why did I tell him my reason? He doesn't need to know I have an interview. I don't want Owen to know a single thing about my life anymore. Now that I've finally gotten him out of my life, things are going to get so much better. He'd only try to hold me back, like he always did when we were together.

*Tonight's all I can do. I'm working right now.*

I don't believe for a single moment that he's telling the truth. Even if he is, his coworking office is too far away for me to get to and get back in time for my meeting.

He's typing some more but I ignore him and tap at Riley's number.

"What's up?" She asks anxiously before even saying hello. We only call each other for urgent news whether it's good or bad, but I have zero time to text back and forth.

"I really need your help. Can I borrow your laptop?" I explain what's up as fast as I can. "Owen took mine and he won't bring it by until tonight."

"Of course you can. He's such an ass." I can almost hear Riley rolling her eyes. She knows my ex all too well. She

actually met him before he and I got together. She thought he was a nice guy and she sort of fixed us up. It was when we were out with a group that included him. She took me aside and told me he might be a great guy for me.

Owen seemed perfectly nice and decent at the time. Riley had no idea what he was truly like as a person. Neither did I. Not until the moment we moved in together.

What a huge mistake that was.

“Where are you?” I ask Riley, crossing my fingers that she’s not too far away as I spring up and grab my bag.

“I’m about to head to campus. I’ve got one of my big exams today, remember?”

“Right.” I’m calculating time as I rush out. “I can meet you halfway. Or at any subway stop that’s on your way. Once I’ve got your computer, I can go somewhere close by.”

Having a virtual meeting in a coffee shop isn’t really acceptable, but thanks to Owen it’s my only option now. I have to take this interview no matter what. I can only hope that if it’s noisy, I’ll be forgiven.

“I’d set you up at my place but all my roommates are here. You’ll have much better luck somewhere else. None of them like to use headphones,” Riley says.

“Yeah, no.” Riley’s place would be noisier than any coffee shop for sure. “Just tell me wherever’s good for you. I don’t want you to be late.” A thought strikes me as I lock the apartment door behind me. “Don’t you need your computer?”

“Not really. I’ll figure it out. Your interview’s way too important for you to try and do it by phone,” she says.

“You’re the best,” I tell Riley as I burst out of my building. I practically jog to the subway station as she and I work out the details. There’ll be just enough time for me to grab her computer and get myself set up somewhere without making either one of us late.

Once I’m on the subway, I realize my big mistake. I should’ve taken a cab. Too much can go wrong down here. I

can't count the number of times I've been on the train when it just stops randomly and everyone's waiting and waiting with no idea of when it will start up again. Sometimes it takes thirty seconds. Sometimes more than thirty minutes. I can't risk that today. What was I thinking?

I start to scroll around on my phone without taking anything in, desperately trying not to check the time every five seconds. I exhale in relief as the doors slide open. For once, there were no delays. Racing up the stairs, I almost crash into Riley at the top. She grins as she hands over her bag to me.

"You're a life saver," I say breathlessly as I catch her up in a quick hug. "Thank you so much."

"No problem. Don't worry, you've got this." Riley walks off. I don't understand how she can be so relaxed. I know that her exam's a big one. She mentioned it before and it only slipped my mind since I've been flipping out over my stupid ex taking my computer.

"Good luck," I call out to her. She turns back around and waves, not breaking her stride. "You too. Go on and kick ass."

I'm left wishing I had Riley's easy confidence and it's not the first time but I can't think about that now. I'm already flustered from all of this crap thanks to Owen. I've got to get my mind settled and I'm trying to slow my breathing down even as I hurry off to one of the good cafés that I know is around the corner.

Thankfully it's not too busy. I've got barely a couple of minutes to spare to grab a coffee before my interview starts. After a quick glance in my compact mirror and a quick adjustment to tidy my hair up, it's on.

I clear my throat as the session starts up. Zan Stokes appears on the screen and she already looks distracted. I'm not going to let that shake my determination to nail it. This meeting is going to go so smoothly, it'll be the best interview ever. I straighten my spine and put on my best smile.

She finally looks at the screen. "You're Elena Olson?"

“Yes, Ms. Stokes,” I say brightly. “Thank you for taking the time to interview me. I’ve been wanting to work for City Scan for a long time.”

Her mouth twists up with deep disapproval. “Call me Zan. So tell me, Lana. Why do you think you’re the right fit for us?”

I catch myself an instant before I correct her. She couldn’t sound more bored, but I’m ready. I studied every single job site I could find and memorized exactly how to start out like they all recommend.

Zan’s expression doesn’t change as I speak clearly and hit the high points. I’m in the middle of my best one when she interrupts me.

“As you know, City Scan’s a newer, more up-and-coming magazine than the others we’ve been publishing for a longer time. It’s highly targeted to hit a specific audience. One that’s interested in diving into deeper, behind the scenes type of stories. Not just skimming headlines.”

“Yes, absolutely. That’s exactly the kind of research and writing that I want to do. I’m excited to grow with City Scan and be a part of its future.”

“Okay,” Zan says absently. Maybe it’s not me, maybe she sounds painfully bored all the time. For my own benefit, I decide to stop talking until she asks me the next question. “One of our regular staff writers who’s been with the company for a long time is taking a leave. You’d be filling in for her until she comes back. It’s a temporary contract position but if you work out, I might consider giving you the chance at a more permanent position in the company.”

“That sounds great.” I try to inject a note of enthusiasm even as my heart drops a little bit. I was so hoping for more steady work now.

It doesn’t matter, I remind myself. Anything that can give me a foot in the door to a major, well-respected news magazine is helpful. I haven’t gotten any writing work at all since I graduated. This is a significant step forward.



“Of course I’ll need to see some brilliant work from you for that to happen,” Zan says. “In the meantime, you should get to know what the City Scan style truly is. Talk to some of our other writers. They can help you out with some tips. I don’t know where you’ve worked before, but it’s likely that we run a different show here.”

She doesn’t know where I’ve worked before? So much for that résumé I spent all that time preparing so carefully to make it look like I had experience.

“Most of the staff’s going out for drinks tomorrow evening,” Zan continues. “It’s a regular thing they do and you should join in. Get to know them and how they work. Of course I don’t have time to train you and none of them do either, but they can tell you the basics of what you need to know. If you like, I’ll get the details to you.”

Zan’s eyebrow arcs up. I get the very distinct feeling that this event isn’t optional.

“I’d love to go.” I wait and she doesn’t say anything more as she jots something down. “Does this mean you’re hiring me for an assignment?” It’s probably not the right thing to ask flat out but still. I need to be absolutely sure about what’s happening since Zan hasn’t actually come out and made me an offer.

She exhales sharply. Everything about her seems to have an angle to it, right down to the sharp cut of her hair and the line of her ruby red lips. “I don’t know yet. If I assign you a story, it’ll be on a trial basis only. I’ve got four other writers I’m trying out at the same time, all for different publications.” Zan’s impatient manner shows itself again. “Whoever works out the best will be kept on and will replace my other writer until she’s back. That’s at least a six month period which might possibly be extended. I need to have someone I can rely on completely to fill her shoes. I’ll find out if I have a story for you in the next week or so. We’ll see how it goes. If I give you something, that’s only the very first step. You’ll have to impress me with what you can do.”

“I will, Zan. I’m looking forward to the oppor—”

“Someone will be in touch with you,” she says and disconnects abruptly.

I can't believe it. I swallow some of my untouched coffee. It's cold and I don't even care. I want an extra buzz to match my mood.

I've got a chance.

I float out of the coffee shop. An actual chance at having a real shot at writing a feature for a major magazine. My name would be in City Scan and be seen by millions of people. I could be published, which would finally make me a real writer. I'm still lost in a happy daze when I get back home.

I nearly drop Riley's computer when I find my ex in my living room.

“What the hell, Owen?” Carefully I set her laptop aside and stalk over to him, knocking his feet off of my glass coffee table with a slap of my hand. “You told me you were working. You can't just show up and hang out. You don't live here anymore, remember?”

Owen shrugs as if he doesn't know he's irritating the hell out of me. “You said you needed your laptop back, so I brought it over. Guess your meeting wasn't that important if you went out, huh.”

I clench my fists. I knew he was lying about working. It'd be so satisfying to slap his face. I wouldn't actually do it but I enjoy the thought sometimes.

Now is absolutely one of those times.

I manage to hold back from explaining the lengths I had to go to because of him. I need to stop telling Owen about my life, even when he's the one messing it up.

“Great,” I say through gritted teeth. “Thanks for stopping by. I've got a lot to do, so you need to leave.”

“I think I've got what I came for.” He makes a show out of picking up a sweater that was sitting beside him on the sofa as if that's his reason for coming by. I've never seen it before and

it looks brand new. “I’ll come back if I remember anything else I’ve left behind.”

I try to encourage him to move towards the door faster than he is. “Do it soon if you have to. I’m going to be moving out.”

“Uh huh. Later.” He closes the door behind himself, leaving me seething. Did he even hear me? Owen gets under my skin like no one else can.

I call up my calendar app and set a daily reminder, grinning in satisfaction when I’m done. Now I’ve got a countdown for when I’m moving out. I’ll have to endure Owen’s random visits until then but those days are going to be over very soon. I want so much to get his key back but I’ve asked him before and he won’t give it to me.

I’m going to need to have a party to celebrate him being out of my life forever once it finally, finally happens. I can’t wait to start my glittering new life without him intruding in any part of it.

# Chapter 3

## Elena

My neck hurts from gazing up at the skyscraper to try and see the top of it. It's so tall, it's impossible. I check the address once again only to find that I really am in the right place. I've walked along West 59th before but I never really thought about it as a place to live. Obviously people do live in this neighborhood. Just not people like me.

Other than being absurdly tall, the building doesn't look too different from any of its neighbors. It's not super impressive considering it's so well-known as a luxury building. I couldn't find a single image of what the suites look like on the inside either. It's a little deflating.

Still I make a decision right on the spot. I'm going to change my life completely. Do a total 180. This is going to be my first big step. I can't wait.

I can feel it in my bones. Moving to Central Park South is absolutely going to mark a brand new beginning for me. Everything's going to get better from here on out and my glam life with the amazing new job is already starting.

I'm determined to do everything I possibly can to make my future very, very bright. So bright, it'll be glittering. I'll be the one Zan chooses to join the staff permanently. Then someday I really will be able to live in a place like this because I own it.

Okay, maybe not exactly quite this grand but somewhere pretty nice. I don't have any illusions about what my income's going to be. I'm not going to get to multimillionaire status by becoming a journalist.

I can still dream. What matters is that this is my home right now. I'm putting off entering the most brutal rental climate ever for two more months. I know it's looming. Soon enough I'm going to have to compete with multiple people just to be

roommates with three or four others in a one bedroom apartment if I'm lucky, or a studio if I'm not.

Not today.

Starting today I'll be living in absolute luxury. I'm going to enjoy the hell out of every moment of my new home. For the next two months, I don't have to worry about the future.

I enter the building with my head held high, even though I'm dragging my well-worn suitcase a little awkwardly along behind me. The lobby's empty except for a doorman in his dark navy uniform, speaking in low tones on the phone. He gives me a disparaging look but I know he's been told that I'm moving in today.

I'm sure he can guess who I am since I'm not dressed head to toe in designer labels like anyone else who lives here. I'm also probably going to be at least twenty years younger too. Judging from the man who left the building right before I came in, possibly even forty.

Still I try to act as if I belong right here. Since I'm also trying to juggle carrying two cardboard boxes along with pulling my suitcase along, I'm probably failing completely.

The doorman keeps a close eye on me as I head over to the elevator. As I walk, one of the wonky wheels on my suitcase catches on the edge of a tile and turns the wrong way. My heavy roller bag freezes up and pulls me backwards, causing me to lose my balance slightly.

I give it a hard yank. That normally fixes the problem but I over-correct. The momentum's enough that the top box that I have balanced on the other one slips over before I can catch it. When it hits the floor, the quick half-assed tape job I did falls apart. My possessions tumble out all over the smooth tiled floor with a loud crash and skitter away from me.

Mortified, I dive after my things.

"I can help you with that." The deep male voice coming from behind me is calm and reassuring. I expect it to be the doorman but a quick glance shows me that he's still on the phone. That doesn't stop him one bit from shooting daggers at

me with his eyes for making a mess of his pristine lobby. If looks could kill, he'd be getting arrested for my murder right about now.

My cheeks burning, I turn to collect my things as fast as I possibly can. The other man's already bending down to help me and his expression's amused.

Fuck. As if I wasn't embarrassed enough before, he's got my half-full box of condoms in his hand. He grins as he hands it to me. I grab the box without meeting his eye.

"Thanks," I mumble as my glance falls to it. Crap.

They're. Expired.

Did he notice? When did they start printing the expiry date in such large type? I fight the urge to tell the guy that they didn't have a very long expiry date even when I bought them. It was a spur of the moment thing so I'd have them on hand after Owen and I broke up. Just in case.

Nope. This man really doesn't need to know any of that. Get it together, Elena. My face burns as I scramble to pick everything up. Thankfully he doesn't comment on my other random items that really belong hidden away in the bathroom without being seen by anybody but me. Once they're all safely stored back in the box, I finally look directly at him.

"Thank you," I say as I stand up from my awkward crouch, stopping short when his looks hit me with full force for the first time. Damn, he's gorgeous. His tall, powerful body is more than enough to keep me staring, but I lock in on his face. Charcoal black hair sets off his gorgeous features. His dark eyes meet mine and I force myself to look away.

So extremely handsome.

He nods. "Glad to help."

I turn my back against the continuing glare of the doorman. He obviously need to relax, his lobby's already back to normal with no harm done. The elevator doors have closed in the meantime but they slide open the moment this hot stranger presses the button.

He holds the door open for me as I drag my suitcase with its wheel now firmly stuck in place onto the elevator. Mr. Doorman must think I'm scratching up the floor, even though I'm not. There's nothing metal touching the beautiful floor, I'm making sure of that. The last thing I want to do is cause any damage or trouble for myself, especially after my wild entrance.

Fortunately there's no one else on the elevator. The man gives me another smile as the doors close behind us.

"Let me help you with those," he says, glancing at my armful of boxes. I take in his suit, which is impeccable and obviously very expensive.

"Oh, no. It's fine. I've got them now."

"It's no problem at all." He's got them out of my hands before I can protest anymore. My arms are starting to ache so I'm grateful for the help.

"Thank you again," I say.

His hand hovers over the buttons. "What floor?"

"The penthouse," I tell him.

I'm very aware of how close I am to this man. Color starts to climb back into my cheeks and this time it's absolutely not from being embarrassed.

Well, maybe just a little. Mostly it's from the growing heat between us that I can't ignore. My pulse speeds up as he glances my way. For some reason he's looking at me like I'm as captivating as he is.

As if. I could be projecting my own attraction onto him but I don't think I am. As alluring as he is, there's something else going on.

"It's never easy moving into a new place," he says. "I haven't lived here that long myself."

I swallow. "Right."

He's about to say something else to me when he's interrupted by his phone ringing loudly in the silence. He

balances the boxes against the wall and takes his phone out of his pocket to check it.

“I can take those back if you need to answer that,” I tell him.

He slips his phone back in his pocket easily. “No need. It’s fine.”

I’m racking my brains for something to say that’ll make me sound wonderfully sophisticated and interesting. Like someone put-together and worthy of living in this building. Maybe also worthy of this guy’s attention.

He has a really nice manner about him, and not just because he helped me out when I needed it. I should know that first impressions aren’t always right but what the hell. I’m starting my new life here. I can act differently than I usually do around men, which is awkward and self-conscious.

I’m going to be a new, very confident me from now on. If I start practising now, maybe I can make it last beyond the time when I have to leave this building. How great would that be? I’m not super shy but I always get nervous around people that I want to impress. Like this man. Instant attraction. I’m into him.

I straighten up and hold my hand out. “It’s nice to meet you. I’m Elena Olson.”

“Asher Kingston.” He folds my hand in his large, warm one. My heart jumps. His simple touch is giving me goose bumps. Can he tell what kind of effect he’s having on me? I don’t have a poker face by any stretch. “It’s nice to meet someone else in the building who’s under sixty,” he continues.

“I thought I might be the only one,” I say.

“There’s a few of us around, although we’re in the minority. It’s surprising, since this is a newer building,” Asher says.

I’m casting around for something else to keep the conversation going when the doors slide open. I didn’t realize we were going to the same floor until now.



He starts to walk down the hall without giving me a chance to take my boxes back from him.

I catch up to him. "I should get those from you."

"Not at all. I'll walk you to your door."

"How do you know which one's mine?"

"There are only three units up here, and I've met the couple who lives in the one at the end of the hall. Unless you're moving in with me, that only leaves one you could be going to."

I blush at the idea of having Asher as a roommate. Maybe even accidentally running into him as he comes out of the shower with only a towel wrapped around his waist.

My mind's still in the gutter when he stops in front of the first door we get to. "Here we are."

"Great." I fumble in my purse for the key while he waits, not in the slightest hurry to rid himself of the boxes.

I want to invite him in but even though he's not acting impatient, I'm getting the strong vibe that he's a busy person.

"Where would you like these?" Asher asks.

"You can leave them here. I can get them inside." I wish Asher was wearing a t-shirt instead of a suit so I could get a good look at his arms. "Thanks again for helping me out."

"It's nothing. Let me know if you need anything else." His smile's warm and it's doing things to my insides. I'm drawn to this man in a way I've never felt before. He's entrancing. Never in my life have I wanted to sleep with a guy I've just met. I'm certain I'm not the only woman who would want to get him naked in an elevator. "I'm right across the hall."

I clear my throat, truly hoping my face isn't betraying every single emotion that he's causing to flare up in me. "Great."

"I'll see you around, Elena." He touches my arm briefly before he walks off. My stomach flips. I hope so, I add silently as he walks off.

I drag my suitcase inside and go back for the boxes. Again the top one slips out of my arms. It spills onto the smooth tile of the apartment. I glance around quickly to see if Asher heard. If he did, he doesn't give any sign of it. He's striding down the hallway with confidence and purpose. I step inside but I can't help but peek out again.

Just to see exactly where he's going, in case I might need to thank him again later. I'm halfway inside the doorway because I don't want him to catch me.

He doesn't turn around. He's busy on his phone, talking in low tones. I lean against the door frame to watch him surreptitiously. His confidence makes him even more attractive.

Asher stops in front of the only door I can see. The entire length of this hallway must be his place. Mine isn't half that big. I linger for a moment even after he disappears. I knew this building was fancy but it didn't expect it to be quite like this.

I close the door silently behind me, turning to find myself surrounded by the mess from the box. I shudder at the recent memory. Making a mess isn't exactly how I wanted to kick off the start to my new fabulous life. Not very super-glam of me.

No matter. It's just a minor blip. Full of resolve, I turn around and I can't even believe what's in front of me. This place is truly amazing. It takes me a moment to realize why it's so bright. It's not just the white walls and pale gold paneled flooring. There are actual skylights in here.

I wander around in almost in a daze. If this is an apartment, then what have I been living in all this time? I can't believe it. The view alone is jaw-dropping. I stop to stare out of the floor to ceiling windows. I've never seen Central Park from this angle before in my life. I love the park and to get a glimpse of it from above is like shifting into another world.

It takes some time to find the bedroom. I pass by the kitchen while I'm looking for it and I can't even take in all of the super-shiny, intimidating surfaces. It's so big that's going to have to be something to explore later. It's the kind of

kitchen where you'd make several courses to serve to your twelve guests in the formal dining room.

Maybe Asher can be my first one.

I laugh at myself. Yeah, like I could cook well enough for him. Maybe I could order in something nice and pass it off as my own. As if I could afford ordering in the kind of meal he must be used to. I try to picture eating pizza in the sleek, pristine living room and laugh. That's not going to happen here.

I stop short when I find the bedroom. So this is where the real view is. The huge expanse of blue sky extending far into the distance is all I can take in. Until I get lost in the beautiful carpet of trees spread out among the swathes of other skyscrapers.

The only thing that tears me away is my stomach's insistent growling. This place is so stunningly gorgeous that I don't want to leave, but I've got to find something to eat. I can get back to this view soon enough.

I want to explore this side of the city that I never come to.

# Chapter 4

## Elena

It's been two glorious days of living in luxury and I'm already used to it. It's going to be extremely difficult to leave once my time here is up. This is the lifestyle I want. No question about it.

Striding down the extremely quiet hallway, I'm almost at the elevator when I realize that the man who's already waiting there is Asher. The absolutely hot man who I haven't been able to get out of my mind since we met.

He's concentrating on his phone but he glances up when I join him.

"Hi there, Elena." His velvet-smooth voice could melt chocolate. "Are you getting settled in?"

"Yes," I manage. I'm surprised he remembers my name. It hasn't been long but he's very obviously busy and absorbed in whatever he's doing. "I'm pretty much done."

"What do you think of the building so far?" After tapping a couple more things into his phone, he makes a point of putting it away. When he turns to face me, the force of his good looks hits me head on once again. For a moment I forget what he's asked me.

"It's lovely," I say hastily when I manage to break myself out of my trance. "The view's amazing. How long have you lived here?"

He frowns as if he has to think about it. "Not long at all." His phone beeps loudly and he pulls it out to glance at it. "Damn," he mutters under his breath.

"Everything okay?" I'm not trying to pry but I want to keep the conversation between us going for as long as possible. Asher's so far out of my league I can't even believe I've got the courage to speak to him.

But why not? We're neighbors. He seems friendly enough and he's certainly been nice to me. If he doesn't want to talk about it, he can say so.

"Yes. Fine," he says. "Nothing's wrong, just something I need to take care of that's a bit of a hassle. I know it's very last minute, but are you by any chance free on Friday night?"

"Um." What? Mr. Sex God's asking me out? There's no way, he can't be. I'm still standing in stunned silence when that smile of his that makes my heart pound makes an appearance again. The elevator arrives and I'm glad to have an excuse to not answer him right away.

"Let me clarify," Asher says as the doors close behind us. "I need someone to accompany me to a charity gala that I have to attend. If you could be my date for the evening, it'd really help me out."

"Do you always ask out women that you've just met?" I ask.

He grins at me, his eyes dancing. "Not usually, but I'm really in a bind here. It's an annual event and it's a pretty good time. I'm expected to bring someone no matter what. I don't mean for it to be a read date because that's not what I'm looking for."

My lips tighten. "We'd be together just for appearance's sake?"

"Yes. Think of it as an evening spent together between new neighbors. If you're interested, you'd really be helping me out. I'd be happy to take you out for dinner afterwards as a thank you," Asher says.

We reach the ground floor. The doors open wide to three people waiting to get on. Asher stops in the lobby after we exit, waiting expectantly for my answer.

"So, a non-date date?" I ask.

"Exactly," he says. "No strings, no pressure. Just a nice evening out."

I haven't had any real plans outside of barhopping with Riley since Owen and I broke up. Why would I turn down the chance to spend some time with a gorgeous, obviously successful man?

I gave him my brightest smile. "Sounds like fun. I'm in."

"Great." Asher's more relieved than I expect. "I'll send you the details tonight. Right now I've got to run."

We trade numbers quickly before we go our separate ways. I'm already excited, as if it's actually going to be a real date. I don't care if it isn't for Asher. It's going to be date-like enough for me. I'm going to have a fun night out with a very handsome man and that should help chase out those annoying random thoughts of my ex that tend to pop into my mind at the worst moments.

Besides, even if it starts out as a fake date, there's always the tiny chance that it could become real.

By the time I get back from my shift at the restaurant, I'm super tired. I used to have so much fun at work but every shift is exhausting these days. I open the leftovers I talked the chef into giving me and click the movie-screen sized TV on. I'm curling up in an enormous, soft chair when a text from Asher arrives. It's got all the details for our evening out. After I click the link he sent me, I stare at my phone in disbelief.

For some reason I was picturing some kind of charity auction at a local restaurant. We have those at my restaurant now and then. The more I scroll, the more freaked out I get. It's for Unmasked, one of New York's widely known annual galas. It's an exclusive, invitation-only event.

Definitely ball gown level. I've never been to anything even close to this sort of thing before. Miserably I toss my phone aside. I guess I can pull off the illusion that I belong in this building since Asher asked me to join him, but there's no chance of me fitting in at Unmasked. It's for the Manhattan elite. So very much not my crowd.

I should cancel. I need to do it right now so he can find someone else to take instead. My finger hovers but I can't

quite bring myself to do it. Whether I fit in or not, I want so much to go. This would be a night to remember. Something so outside of my normal life that I have to try and make it work.

Instead of replying to Asher, I tap at Riley's number.

"Yeah," she says, obviously distracted. "I mean, hi."

"I need your help." Once I start to tell Riley what's going on, I get her full attention. She's as floored as I am.

"You have to go," she agrees. "You can't pass up something like this. Imagine the people you could meet. These kinds of things have real A-list celebrities at them. You never know who you could end up schmoozing with."

"I want to, but how can I? What on earth could I even wear? Even if I could find something in time, there's no way I can afford to buy anything at all." The kind of dress I'd need to get is so far beyond my credit card limit, I can't even think about it. "What do I do?"

"I know how to pull it off," Riley says.

I sit up straight. "You do?"

"Violet."

I blink. "You think there's an actual chance she might have a couture dress in my size just lying around?"

"Probably not, but we can always ask. Hang on, I'll get her onto the call."

I try to squash the flicker of hope that's rising up in me. It can't work. Violet's crazy busy with her internship. I never thought the fashion industry would keep her almost as busy as Riley is with law school, but it does.

"Elena! I miss you." Violet's as happy as ever. "What's going on?"

I fill her in and hesitate. "So, Riley thought you might have something I could wear?"

She goes silent. Riley and I are waiting and I know she's holding her breath right along with me.

“You know,” Violet says thoughtfully. “I don’t.”

“Oh,” I say. “Okay. I knew it was a long shot.”

“Hold on,” she says. “I didn’t say that I can’t help you out. I can make you something.”

“I’d love that, but the event’s tomorrow night,” I tell her. “There’s no time.”

Riley laughs. “You’re saying that to Violet? The queen of all-nighters? She can outlast me in the running on no sleep department any time.”

“It’s the perfect project. I’ve decided I’m going to get myself onto one of those designer reality shows,” Violet says. “You know, like Making the Cut, that type of thing. I found out there’s a new one in the works that hasn’t even started recruiting, and I’m going to be on it. I’m dropping everything to work on a brand new collection that’ll be my ticket in. I’ll need to have an full-on evening gown as part of it.”

“Aren’t you crazy busy with your internship?” I hate to think I’m so out of the loop that I don’t know what’s going on with a good friend, but I very well could be. “Last I heard, the guy was non-stop running you ragged.”

“It took over my entire life,” she says. “So now we’ve decided to part ways. I’m going out on my own.”

“Violet, no,” Riley says. “You loved working for him. What happened? When?”

“Yesterday. I did love it for awhile, but not lately. He and I had some significant creative differences and we didn’t see eye to eye on most things. So I’m done. Like I said, I’m going out on my own. I’ll make you something, Elena.”

“Would there really be enough time?” I ask. “It’s got to really be something else.”

“If there’s one thing I’m even better at than designing, it’s working fast as hell. That’s why I know I’ll win any one of these shows. Get your ass over here right now and we’ll go for it. It’ll be a great test for me, getting in some practice for being



on the show. Then I can see how much faster I can get by the time I'll be auditioning."

"I can't pay you for the hours it'll take," I tell her. "I'm living on less than a shoestring right now. More like a thin thread."

"If you can cover the fabric, you don't have to pay me for the time. Just tell everyone whenever someone asks you who designed your hot dress. It'll help to get my name out there. Now come on, there's no time to waste. I'll meet you guys at my favorite fabric store. I've already got something in mind."

I had no idea how much fabric costs. Like, no clue at all. I hold my breath and cross my fingers that my credit card will work. Riley and Violet are doing the same thing.

Approved.

"Yes!" Violet says, delighted. "We're on. Let's get to my place so I can measure you. This is going to be a big project and you two are going to be my assistants."

"I'll help out as much as I can. I've got to study too," Riley says.

"I'll do every single thing that needs doing," I tell her. "Your exams are more important than a dress."

Violet gasps in mock horror. "Don't ever say that again."

"You'll thank me when I'm the one giving you free legal advice," Riley says.

"That's true," Violet says. "I know I'm going to need it. Let's get going."

I have no idea if Violet can pull this off in time. Then she spreads out the designs she drew up in the short time right before we all met at the fabric store.

I stare at her pages. "This is beautiful," I tell her. "Can you measure me quick? I've got to pull a short shift at the restaurant that I couldn't get out of. I'll be back as soon as I can get out of there."

“On it. Don’t be long,” she says as she pulls out her tape. “I need you here if I’m going to get the dress done in time.”

I fly through my shift and convince the manager to let me leave early. I’m out of breath by the time I run back up the stairs to Vi’s apartment.

“Check this out,” Violet says when I burst into the living room. It’s as if she got so absorbed in what she was doing, she didn’t even notice I was gone. When she finally looks up at me, her eyes are bright. “Try it on.”

Riley’s napping on the sofa and Violet pokes at her once I’ve worked my way into the few pieces of fabric she’s stitched together. They don’t look like any kind of a dress, let alone a designer gown.

“Perfect,” Violet says as she examines her work. I glance at Riley, who’s as lost as I am.

“Are we still on track?” Riley asks cautiously.

“Absolutely,” Violet says firmly. “It’s all good. I might change the back a little bit. Maybe the neckline too. Come on, assistant. I need your hands.”

Violet keeps me almost as busy as she is. All of us are keeping each other awake by taking more than one dance break. Riley’s pitching in when she needs a break from studying and it’s so fun doing something crazy with my friends. The hours speed by and before I know it, the sun’s rising.

“I’m so hungry,” Riley announces around a yawn. “I’m going out to get us something to eat.”

“There’s a bakery at the end of the block that you have to go to,” Violet says, deep in the middle of sewing.

I sink down onto the floor, resting my head on a cushion. “I just need five minutes.”

I fall asleep the moment I close my eyes and I have no idea how much time’s passed when Violet’s smiling at me and shaking me awake.

“It’s ready.”

“What?” For a second I think she’s talking about Riley getting back with breakfast.

“Your dress. It’s ready and I need to see how it looks on you.”

I climb into it carefully, still expecting to be scraped by stray pins like I have been every other time I tried it on. Violet eyes me critically, turned me this way and that.

“You’re a designer. Don’t you have a mirror?” I ask. “I’m dying to see it.”

“Not right now,” she says. “It got broken when I moved in. I usually balance on the edge of the tub and lean over to see into the one above the bathroom sink, but you can’t do that in this dress. You’d fall over from the angle you have to bend at to see anything.”

The door opens and Riley comes in. “I’ve got donuts. And these other twisty things, I don’t remember what they’re called but they looked good.”

Her voice trails off as she catches sight of me. “Wow,” she breathes, and starts to examine me like Violet’s doing. “You really pulled it off, Vi.”

“How does it look?” I want to know. “I can’t see myself.”

Riley shakes her head. “You won’t believe it. It’s something else.”

“Yeah?” I’m a little doubtful. I almost never wear white. “Does it suit me?”

“It’s perfect, if I do say so myself.” Violet’s walking around me, leaning and dipping to examine the dress from every possible angle. “Couldn’t be better. I have to photograph you.”

Her photo shoot takes way longer than I expect. My stomach growls as I eye Riley enjoying the donuts. “Don’t worry, I’ll save some for you. These things can’t go anywhere near that dress,” she says, licking her fingers. “I’m sorry for eating in front of you but I’ve got to leave to get to class in about two minutes.”

“Thanks for being here,” I tell her. “I can’t tell you how much I appreciate it.”

Riley gathers her things and tries to hug me, but Violet blocks her. “No touching the model until I’m done with her.”

“Fair enough.” Riley blows me a kiss as she heads out. “I want details the second you get back from your hot date.”

“It’s not a date.” I stifle a yawn. “I’ll tell you everything if I’m awake enough to actually go.”

“You’d better be,” Violet says. “This beautiful dress deserves a fun night out. So do you, El. Okay, I’m done. You can crash here for awhile if you want to, just don’t oversleep so you’ll be late.”

“I just need to close my eyes for a few minutes.” I take the dress off carefully while Violet scrolls through her images and nods with satisfaction. “Then I’ll get going.”

I wake up disoriented. Somehow I fell asleep on the floor again. Violet’s half-draped over the sofa, still out. It’s been hours, not minutes, and I’ve got to get home.

I take a quick look around her place but there’s not a bag that’s big enough I can use to cover up the dress. I’m going to have to chance it being out in the open all the way home.

I agonize my way through the entire subway ride, shielding my dress with my body whenever there’s the slightest danger to it. I keep my eyes trained on everyone who’s brought coffee onto the train, which you’re absolutely not supposed to do. Now I get why that rule exists. By the time I get home I’m frazzled, but the dress is safe.

The moment I slip the dress over my head and go to the mirror, I gape in disbelief. It’s absolutely beautiful. I can’t stop looking at myself, turning this way and that so the light catches the very subtle sparkles in certain drapes of the fabric. It fits me like a dream. It’s one of those perfect pieces that covers all the flaws on your body and highlights everything you want it to. My waist has never looked better.

My alarm shakes me out of my obsession with staring at Vi’s amazing creation. I barely have enough time to get ready.

I'm putting the finishing touches on my makeup that I've re-done twice already when there's a knock at the door. I glance in the mirror as doubt overcomes me. I look better than I ever have, but is it enough? I've never done a really glam makeup look before so I hope I pulled it off.

At least I know how to do my hair properly. I love doing hair so much more than makeup. Riley gets me to do hers whenever I can, and she can afford much better stylists than me. She says she likes the way I do it and the ideas that I come up with.

Tonight I've done a low updo with a side braid. It's subtle but eye-catching once it gets noticed. If I haven't nailed my makeup look, at least I've got my hair style as a distraction. I pick up my clutch and answer the door.

Asher's looking more handsome than I thought possible. He's in a tux and wow, does it ever suit him. I stare at him before I catch myself.

"Elena. You're gorgeous." Heat floods my cheeks from the way he's looking at me. Maybe he didn't think I had it in me to pull a night like this off. I can't blame him because I certainly wasn't sure I could pull it off myself. He leans in and kisses my cheek.

"Would you like to come in?" A moment too late, I realize I don't have a single thing to offer him.

"We should go," he says. "Traffic's heavy and we don't want to be too late."

There's a car waiting when we get downstairs. The driver opens the door for me and I climb in, careful not to catch my dress on anything.

Asher glances at his phone the moment he's seated beside me. "I'm sorry but I have to take this call."

I try not to listen as I gaze out the window at the city rushing by us. He's obsessed with his phone. Maybe this is why he needs a date for this event. I'm assuming he's single but he could very well have a wealthy, high-powered girlfriend who's out of town or something. Maybe that's why he made it

very clear that he doesn't consider this a date. I hope he would've told me if that's the case.

In spite of the traffic, it doesn't take very long before we arrive at the venue. Asher's been on his phone almost for almost the entire drive. I barely take in his apology as we walk up to the red carpet. I was expecting high glam and I've got it in spades.

Asher takes my hand and the bright flash of several cameras clicking right in front of us makes me blink. Did I accidentally photobomb somebody? No. The cameras are pointing at us. More so at Asher, but they're including me too.

It must be a mistake but when I glance at him, he's not bothered by it. He lifts his hand at the photographers before circling his arm around my waist to guide me inside. They don't stop snapping pictures of us even as we're walking away.

"What was that about?" I ask.

Asher shakes his head. "Nothing much. Certain sites like to run my picture sometimes."

I want to ask why but now I think maybe I should know who he is. Is he famous? It would explain him living in the building, and the fact that he's at this event too. Riley texted me while I was getting ready after she found out that the price to get in tonight is thousands of dollars. Each. I nearly passed out when I realized that must mean Asher paid that much for me.

Riley told me that he might have a corporate deal and the money wouldn't have come out of his pocket directly, but who knows? I paste a smile onto my face because that's what everyone else seems to have done. A wave of nerves washes over me. I so do not belong here.

It's as if Asher can read my thoughts. "Don't worry," he says. "It'll be a good night."

He's right. I get past my nerves easily since no one's paying any attention to me. Asher introduces me to so many people I give up on trying to remember all of their names. I

barely get a moment to speak to him since every time we turn around, there's someone else coming up to shake his hand and take his attention. The only time we're left alone is when another performance starts, and we can't talk then either.

"Did you have fun?" Asher asks once the evening's brought to a close. He slips his arm around my waist as we leave. I like it when he does that. I really do wish this was a real date. "This kind of thing isn't everyone's idea of a good time."

"It was great. I had no idea what to expect but I really enjoyed myself."

He turns to look at me. "You did, didn't you?"

"Of course. The dancers were incredible. The band was amazing. I liked everything about tonight. Who wouldn't?" I didn't even mind the speeches, but that was probably because I was checking out everyone around me. Violet wants a full report on all the dresses.

Asher's not looking very impressed. "Didn't you have a good time?" I ask him.

He nods. "I did. Mostly because I was with you. I'm glad that you enjoyed yourself. Now, let's get that dinner if you still want to."

"Absolutely."

The line of cars waiting out front are all black and identical. Somehow Asher knows which one is here for him and he takes me over to it.

"Cyn 6," he tells the driver. I know the name but I've certainly never been there. I worry that I might be overdressed but we pull up and I can see that I'll fit right in here. It's exactly the kind of place you'd go to after you've been to an event like Unmasked.

"Mr. Kingston." The host recognizes Asher immediately and takes us right to a table by the window with a lovely view. A waiter appears the moment we set our menus down. After we order, Asher picks up my hands in a gesture that surprises me.

His eyes catch mine and I falter at the intensity in them. “Thank you again for coming with me, Elena. It really helped me out.”

“Helped you out how?” I ask. “You pretty much knew everyone there. It’s not like you needed me to talk to.”

“Anyone who attends these events solo doesn’t fit in at all. I don’t need that kind of attention when I make high profile public appearances.”

Before I can dig around to find out why he gets so much attention, the waiter returns to fill our glasses with the wine Asher ordered. I get the sense he’s pretty private about certain things and this is one of them. I’m absolutely dying to ask him what he does for a living but something tells me he doesn’t want to talk about it.

“Besides, there’s no one there I wanted to talk to more than you,” Asher continues once the waiter’s gone. “Tell me more about yourself.”

Before I can come up with something interesting to say, another waiter arrives with our food. That was so incredibly fast I can’t believe it. Asher looks like he expected nothing less, as if this is the kind of service he’s used to. It probably is. I guess I should stop being surprised by anything and really embrace this world.

Because as much as I’d love to believe that this is actually my new life, I have to remember that it’s all just temporary. I really am like Cinderella tonight. This is one extra special evening that’s nowhere close to normal for me.

I’m going to enjoy my time in this lifestyle as much as I possibly can. I’m not even going to talk about anything real tonight.

I keep it light and Asher does the same thing. He’s not asking me anything deep about myself. Neither one of us brings up work at all, so I don’t have to try and dodge the fact that I’m more likely to be part of the staff in a restaurant like Cyn 6 rather than being able to eat here. We completely avoid



chatting about the usual things like where are you originally from, what about your family, all of the boring first date stuff.

Instead we talk about the event, the food, what plans we have for the weekend. I have to scramble with that one. Other than pulling a couple of shifts at the restaurant, I have no plans at all. Glamorous or otherwise. I need to change that and get more of a life so I have something to talk about. Asher doesn't seem to notice or care that I don't have anything to do. Everything flows so easily between us, it's the best non-date date I've had.

Asher takes my hand when it's time to leave. I'm not imagining it. There's chemistry between us and it's not just all on my side. His brown eyes catch mine.

“So. Back home?”

# Chapter 5

## Asher

I spend the entire drive back trying to talk myself out of sleeping with Elena. It was hard to pay attention to anyone else but her. She was the most beautiful woman at that gala and I was far from the only one to notice.

The moment we get upstairs, I know I can't leave her.

She pauses we reach her place. "Would you like to come in?"

Wrapping my arms around her, I stroke her cheek. "Yes."

If she hadn't invited me inside, I would've brought her back to my place. No question about it.

The door closes behind us and I can't wait any longer. Leaning in close, I take possession of her mouth. Our kiss deepens as she presses her body against me. I let my fingers trace lower down her back as our tongues collide.

This isn't the way I was planning for the night to end. Far from it. I figured we'd have a pleasant evening out and that's it. The deep attraction that sparked up over the few hours we spent together became something I couldn't fight off any longer.

Getting to know Elena made her irresistible. Hearing her laugh and watching her eyes sparkle when she got excited about something was too much. Not to mention how beautiful she is, inside and out. I'm enchanted with her.

I slide my hands up her sides. She inches in closer, her breasts pressing against my chest.

This is the last thing I should be doing. It's not that I don't want her. Halfway through dinner, I gave up trying to resist how charming she is. Now I'm giving in to what I want, even though I'm well aware that isn't a good idea.

Hell, it's flat-out wrong. I get the sense that even though Elena's the one who invited me to her place, she's not one to have a lot of casual one night stands. That's all I can offer, no matter how much I'd like to get to know her even better. I'm simply not available for anything more than casual.

Slipping my fingers over her arms, I move them to her breasts. She starts to unbutton my shirt, her breath getting ragged as I circle my thumbs over her nipples. They tighten under the fabric of her dress.

Even if this can't go any further, I'm fine with having just this much time with Elena. Or at least that's what I want to believe.

Still all that matters is this moment, because it's all we have. I try to lose myself in kissing her and it almost works. I shove aside that voice that insists it doesn't have to be just one time.

I can barely breathe but I don't want to stop kissing her. Elena's the one who pulls back, smiling at me as she gasps in a mouthful of air.

I laugh as I do the same thing. "Come back here, beautiful." I need her to be in my arms. She rests her head on my shoulder, her breathing not calming down any more than mine is. I'm aching with need for her.

She tilts her head. "The bedroom's that way." I lift her up and she winds her legs around my waist, her heat enveloping my throbbing cock.

The moment I set Elena down I raise her dress over her head, not stopping until I've got her completely naked. I shrug my shirt off and nip at her ear while she works my pants open. I can't even be bothered to take her over to the bed before I'm kissing my way down her neck, stopping at her breasts so I can suck one nipple after the other between my teeth.

She shudders as I slide my fingers between her legs.

I kneel down and ease her panties off. She clutches at the wall to keep her balance as my tongue flicks against her clit. "Asher," she gasps out.

Elena's so wet and ready. I want to spend hours getting to know exactly what she likes but I need to make her come. I devour her with the deep hunger that overtakes me. She tastes fantastic. I can't get enough. Her sweet moans make my cock pulse hard. I have to have her.

Slipping a finger inside of her, I add just a touch more pressure with my tongue. She moans and lets go, flooding me with even sweeter juices than before.

“Asher!”

The way she cries out my name is fraying my control. I still don't stop what I'm doing until she rides the wave out until the very end.

Elena leans against the wall as I stand up, dropping her hands onto my chest. “That was something else.”

I grin but I don't reply. I'm too busy walking her across the room while kissing her. I don't release her lips even as I lift her up again, not until I've set her down on the bed and I realize that my pants are across the room along with my condoms. I don't want to leave her, not even for the few seconds it'll take to get there and back.

Elena knows what I'm thinking. “There's some in the drawer.”

I find the box and almost tear it apart. I'm ready for her in seconds, unable to take my eyes off of hers. She wants me as much as I want her.

“I need you,” she says. Hearing her say that is almost more than I can take.

I slide into her, my aching cock opening her up. She feels incredible as I pump deep.

When she says my name in her sexy voice that's filled with desire, her words inflame me. I kiss her fiercely, everywhere I can reach. Her skin almost burns my lips.

“Don't. Stop.” Elena groans the words out.

She raises her hips to meet every my stroke as I thrust into her. I'm on the verge of exploding but she gets there first. Her

fingernails dig into my back as her body clenches my cock tightly. She's still coming when I grab her hips and lift them up, driving deep as I stop resisting and drop over the edge.

She pulls me down on top of her. We kiss again.

# Chapter 6

## Elena

“You got the job?” Riley’s voice comes out in a high-pitched squeal of excitement.

“I sure did.” Elation washes over me because I still can’t believe it. I keep looking at Zan’s text even though I’ve memorized it. *I’ll take you on a trial basis.* It’s not much, but it’s everything to me.

“What’s your first assignment?”

“Well, that’s the thing.” Some uncertainty creeps in. “I don’t have one yet.”

“She hired you, though,” Riley says. “For sure?”

All the forms that they sent over to me to fill out prove it. “Yes, definitely.”

“So the assignment’s going to come soon, right?”

Riley’s my biggest supporter but I might have a slight history of getting ahead of myself, so I can’t be offended at the doubt that she’s trying so hard to keep out of her voice. I clear my throat. “The editor said she’ll be in touch.”

“That’s good, isn’t it? That’s how it works?”

“I don’t know,” I admit. “I’ve never worked for a big magazine publisher before. I guess it is. She said the bigger assignments go to the writers who have worked there the longest. I expected that so I have to wait and see what comes up for me.”

“Well, that sucks if you can’t start writing right away, but I’m still so happy for you. This is amazing. It’s the beginning of your brand new career. Soon I’ll be reading your name in the New York Times, El.”

I let myself visualize it for a moment. “That’d be something else. I can’t wait.”

“So.” Riley hesitates. “What are you going to do for money in the meantime?”

“I’ll have to keep waitressing for sure, but that won’t be enough. People still aren’t going out to eat like they used to before the pandemic.” The question of money’s been hard to avoid. I told my manager that I need more shifts and he told me everyone else wants the same thing as he’s spreading the hours there are around between all of us. I don’t think that’ll change anytime soon.

If it wasn’t for the money, I wouldn’t mind having a lot fewer hours. My coworkers are great, but the job’s kind of getting to me. I had two guys grab my ass during my last shift while I was balancing hot plates on my arms. Moments like that make me want to quit on the spot and I can’t wait for the day that I can.

“Hey!” Riley exclaims. “I’ve got it.”

I sit up straight. “What? Do you know of some more writing work I could pick up too?”

“Kind of. You should start blogging.”

“Blogging?” My lips curl up. “Do people still do that?”

“Yes,” she said, sounding a little hurt. “Of course. You know I still do, right? I thought you read my blog.”

“Of course I do,” I say hastily. Damn it. I do whenever I remember to. “I thought you weren’t posting very much since law school because you didn’t have time anymore. So I haven’t checked it lately.”

“I don’t spend as much time on it as I used to,” she admits. “I still do post whenever I can. I’m making reels instead of writing since they’re faster to do, you know? I still do some actual writing occasionally. The point is, you could be too. I can get you set up.”

“I know that blogs are still a thing, but it’s a little different for me. You’ve had yours forever. You’ve got followers, ads,

everything all in place. There are so many people like you that have been doing it for so long. I let mine lapse completely so I'd be starting from scratch at a time when everyone's all about video." I think for a moment. "I'm not even sure what I could write about. I don't know how you do it."

"I can help you get set up," Riley insists. "It's not hard and I think there's still room for new blogs to come out even now. I mean, a lot of people still like to read instead of just watch videos all the time, and there's tons more who like to do both."

She gets up and goes over to the living room window to stare out of it again. "How can you not be inspired when you live here? Besides, it can be some writing that you can do while you're waiting for your assignments to come in. I think it's worth a shot. It can take some of the pressure off once you start making money from it. I don't know why you didn't keep yours going this whole time. You really should get it back up and running. I had a look and you haven't touched your old blog in ages."

I join Riley at the window. I can't get enough of the view here either. "That's because no one wanted to read the kind of stories that I was writing about. Everyone gets their in-depth news from major outlets and magazines. That's why I really want to work for someone else instead of doing it on my own. People didn't pay any attention to my tiny little blog. I don't just want to write for myself. I want people to read my stories."

"I know, and they will soon. This time, maybe blog less about real news and more about gossip or something. Save the real news for your new job. Making money's the key right now. You need readers fast," Riley says.

"I know. I guess I can get it going again. Can't hurt."

"Yeah, and I can help you get it more modern-looking. We'll get some ads going because you don't even have any." Riley goes back to the sofa and flops down. "Anyway this is a huge deal, you getting a job with City Scan. It's one of the ones you really wanted to work at, isn't it?"



“One of my top five,” I say. As much as I’m resisting the idea of trying a blog again, thinking about my new job gives me a warm glow.

“So let’s go out. There’s nothing wrong with hitting a bar early on a weeknight when we’ve got something like this to celebrate,” she says.

“I wish I could, but I can’t tonight. How about on the weekend?”

“What are you up to tonight?” Riley asks. “Another hot date with your hot neighbor?”

“If only.” Asher’s texted me a couple of times but he hasn’t suggested getting together again. “I’ve got to meet up for drinks with some of the other writers at City Scan. My boss wants me to meet them in person even though I’m not going to be working in the office.”

“Really? Why?”

“She wants me to talk to them and find out how everything works at City Scan and how to approach assignments. Stuff like that. Zan didn’t come out and say it but I get the strong impression that it’s mandatory that I go. She wants me to get to know their style and everything. As if I don’t know it already.” I’ve been reading City Scan since it started up. I don’t think there’s anything I need to learn that I don’t know already.

“Then why doesn’t she want you to work in the office with them?”

I laugh. “No idea. She barely gave me her attention during the interview and I imagine the writers will be the same. I’ve got to go anyway.” I roll my eyes. “I want to make a good impression and show that I’m a team player.”

“Yikes. Good luck. I guess I really should go home and study instead of going out.” Riley sounds dejected. “Have some fun for me, okay?”

“I will. Don’t worry, we’ll celebrate really soon,” I tell her as we hug goodbye.

I head inside the unfamiliar bar. It's one of several that aren't far from the office that I haven't even set foot in yet.

It's really cool, definitely upscale but it's got an artist's loft vibe about it. The clear lights looped over metal rods above the bar cast a subtle sheen on its black glass surface. It's miles different from the pubs I hang out at. I wonder fleetingly if drinks are going to be on the company because I can only afford a grand total of one in a place like this. I almost choked when I checked out the menu on my way here. The cheapest drink is equal to the price of about five at the local places Riley and I go to whenever we can.

Way too late I realize I should've asked my new boss how to find the group. I want to ask the host in case they're regulars here but he's busy bantering back-and-forth with large group of men in suits that arrived just ahead of me.

I'm going to wait until he's free. There's no way I'm staying here if I can't connect with my new coworkers. I'm getting a little impatient when someone pops out of the crowd, sweeping up to me in a cloud of perfume and perfect hair and stilettos. "Elena. There you are," she exclaims.

Thankfully I recognize her from our meeting. "Hello, Zan." I raise my voice so she can hear me. "I didn't know you'd be coming tonight."

"Come on," she grabs hold of my arm. "Everyone's over here." She drags me to the opposite side of the room. Everyone's just gotten off work and the place is so crowded I can barely hear what Zan's saying to me over her shoulder. I hope it's not anything I need to know because her words are getting lost among the loud voices, raucous laughter and music that's playing in the background.

She stops to deposit me with a group of women just as beautiful and stylish as she is. I'm happy that I wore my one dress that I thought would be suitable. I nailed it, as much as I could without buying something new. I'm not wearing any labels like the others but I think I fit in as much as I need to.

"This is the new one. Let her know what's what." Zan walks off without introducing me to anyone.

I try to keep my balance on the heels I'm not very used to wearing as a large man bumps into me.

"We're drinking Brooklyns," one of them says to me as she flags down a busy waiter. "Are you in?"

"Absolutely," I say. I've never had one before but why not. Unless I see a corporate credit card coming out, this has to be my one drink for the night. I'm crossing my fingers hard that no one will notice.

"So you're the newbie." The sleek woman in the sheer cut out top with the really cool trouser pants says to me. "Lanna, right?"

"Elena." I give her a cool smile. "Elena Olson."

"I'm Peyton. You're new to City Scan, or new to journalism in general?" All of them are exactly the kind of upscale Manhattan women who'd normally intimidate me. All blonde except for one with long waves of dark hair cascading down her back. They're all so incredibly put together. I try to adjust my hair discreetly.

"Both," I tell her. "I studied at NYU and this is my first real writing job."

The dark-haired one frowns at me. "Then it's even more surprising that you landed the feature that you did. I also don't envy you. When I first started, Zan gave me the easy, boring ones. Here you are jumping right into the fire."

I frown. "I don't think that's right. I haven't gotten an assignment yet. Zan only just hired me."

One of the others glances at Peyton. "I thought it was you that got the big scoop. Am I wrong?"

Peyton's eyes narrow as she turns to examine more closely. "Zan hasn't mentioned anything to me. You got the new feature? How's that even possible?"

The casual vibe's taking a different turn and I don't know what I've walked into. "If I do have an assignment, I have no idea what it is yet. What's the feature on? I can't believe it would go to me."

They all glance between each other as if they're deciding how much to let me in on. "I think it's best if Zan tells you," one of the blondes says finally, lowering her voice. "If you don't know already, she'll kill us if she catches on that you found out before she told you."

They all laugh but there's a thread of nervousness underneath it as if it's true. Peyton changes the subject before I can ask what's going on or what Zan's really like. I'm intrigued. These women seem pretty unflappable except when it comes to their boss. Our boss, I remind myself.

I expect to get some lowball easy assignments at first. Even though I'm not looking forward to that kind of thing, I know I have to start at the bottom anywhere I work. Zan made a point of reminding me several times I have to prove myself to her. I can't just walk in and grab the top story from anyone else who's been here much longer than me and has more experience.

As much as I'd like to.

I'm about to try to press them for some hints like a good reporter would when an arm circles around my neck and shoulders from behind me. It's Zan, smoothly handing me a drink as she squeezes in beside me. I accept it gratefully, especially since the waiter that took our order has gone missing. I'm kind of enjoying myself, but a drink's definitely going to help. I almost choke on the unexpected sweetness of the liquor.

"You, Elena," Zan points her finger in my face. "Are the star of the night."

She must be joking. "I am?"

"I can't believe what you're going to do for this magazine," she continues.

I clear my throat uncomfortably. "Me?" Of course my voice comes out in a high-pitched squeak but either she doesn't notice or care.

"Yes, you. You're absolutely the woman of the hour. You're going to get the scoop of the year by interviewing the

CEO of Vivojen.”

“Who’s that?” I blurt out before I can stop myself. I probably should’ve pretended that I know what she’s talking about, because now everyone’s looking at me as if I’m a total idiot. Am I? I make a point of keeping up on all major news and current events. Did I screw up by missing something important? I rack my brain as Peyton’s eyebrows shoot up.

“Don’t play coy,” Zan chides me with a knowing smirk. “I know that you know the King personally. And since you know him, you can get to his co-CEOs too, although he’s the one we really want to be featured. I saw that photo of you with him. I couldn’t believe it when I did.”

The brunette’s staring at me wide-eyed. “Are you the one who’s dating Ash?”

What? They’re all waiting for me to say something when it clicks. Ash. Asher. All the photographers at the gala. “Asher Kingston? Is that who you mean?”

“Yes, of course,” Zan says impatiently. “You’re going to interview him and his friends too. They run the hottest company in the city right now. We’ve been trying to get an interview with them for months and months. They won’t speak to anyone. It’ll be a huge scoop for City Scan when you write about him and his very secretive company.”

“Are you actually seeing him? For real?” The brunette asks me again.

I open my mouth and close it. I can’t say we’re dating because it was one night out, even though Asher did mention getting together again. Whatever that means. I don’t want my new coworkers or boss to think I’m lying to them, but I have no idea how to label Asher and I. Or if there even is a him and I. “He took me to Unmasked, yes. We’re neighbors.”

“Neighbors?” The other writers speak up at the same time. They’re looking me over with renewed, pointed interest. “You live in Central Park South?” I’m about to explain how when the looks of respect and wonder tell me to stop.

“Yes, I do.” New life, Elena, I remind myself. My past and future don’t matter. I do live there. Absolutely no one needs to know that I’m housesitting. “I’m in the new building,” I add.

“With your parents?” Peyton asks skeptically. Her eyes are narrowed, as if she can already tell that I’m holding the whole truth back.

“No,” I say airily, taking a slow sip of my drink while they all hang on my words. “Just me.”

It was the exact right thing for me to day. The other writers looking at me with admiration now. Even Zan’s trying her best not to look impressed. Clearly you have to be at a certain level to work at City Scan and somehow they picked me. It looks like my new address is going to go a long way to help me out with fitting in here.

“Are you related to someone?” The frosty voice belongs to one of the other women who hasn’t said a word to me before now. “Surely you can’t afford to live there on your own.” She shoots me a look to say there’s no way she believes that I could. “Even if you can, how could you possibly get into the same building as Asher Kingston? The waiting list is long. You know the right people or have the right relatives to get in there.”

“No,” I say politely. “No relatives.” She waits for me to continue but instead I smile and take a longer sip of my Brooklyn, which I’m starting enjoy very much. It’s bugging her that I’m dodging her questions but she can’t continue because Zan polishes off her own drink that was full a moment ago and grips my shoulders, physically turning me to face her.

“It doesn’t matter how you got there or whether or not you’re seeing Asher. You know him. You live by him. We can score this interview. Normally this would go to a very experienced journalist but since you have a way in, I can give it to you.” She appraises me again and without thinking I straighten up. “You can do it, right?”

“Of course,” I say automatically, sliding right into employee-who-needs-to-keep-her-job mode.

“Excellent,” Zan beams. “We’ll talk more about it but you’d do well to get started right away. Do your very best for me, girl, and I’ll do right by you.”

Someone calls out her name and Zan turns away, heading off to join another group of people. The snobby one who questioned my living arrangement goes with her.

The others are regarding me with interest. “Did you seriously go out with Ash? I saw the pictures from Unmasked too. That was you?”

“Asher’s really not the kind of guy to be coupled up. Are you his secret girlfriend?” The other one asks.

“No, I’m not,” I answer honestly. “We only met recently.”

“If you could bag him, you’d be set for life. You wouldn’t need to work at City Scan, that’s for sure,” the other one says wistfully.

“It’s one hell of a way to start your career off,” the other one adds. “I had to prove myself for a long time before Zan trusted me with any great stories.”

Peyton rolls her eyes. “Unless you really don’t need the money, you’ll have to get in good with Zan if you really do want get hired on with City Scan. If you can pull off an interview with Asher Kingston, that’s the way to do it. If you can manage to swing a great interview *and* write a killer story, she’ll help you out in your career. Don’t screw it up. Then there’ll be hell to pay.”

“Oh, yeah,” the others all agree in unison. “Now that you’ve got the assignment, I don’t know what Zan would do if you messed it up,” one adds with a shake of her head.

“Don’t find out,” Peyton warns me. “Really. Do it right or Zan can make sure you never work in this industry again.”

I grin but no one else does. “Are you serious?” I ask Peyton.

“Absolutely. I’ve seen it happen before,” she says. “Zan’s worked for half the magazines in this city and she knows practically everyone who’s anyone in publishing.”

I sip at my drink while the subject changes into someone's date last night. I'm glad I'm no longer the focus of their scrutiny anymore. I figured that Asher was some kind of a big deal after our night out but I don't know anything about his work. I got so caught up in the idea of being with a nice guy who's into me, I never even thought to Google him. I didn't care about anything else.

At least I like to think that he might be into me. Who knows. Riley always says there's no point to assume one date means another one until you're actually on it and I'm trying so hard to keep that in mind.

Would Asher even agree to do an interview with me?

You can't be involved with the subject of an interview in any way. As much as I want to go out with Asher again, I really want this job to work out.

There's no way I can pass up this chance. My career could be off to an incredible start. Asher seems like a nice guy. Maybe he'll agree, even though we didn't talk about much more than surface stuff when we went out. He never even mentioned his job like a regular guy would. Interviewing him could be a real challenge.

For now I can't wait to research him and find out why my boss is so excited. While the others are busy talking to each other, I get my phone out as discreetly as I can. The moment I enter Asher's name, my eyes widen at what pops up.



# Chapter 7

## Elena

I stare at my laptop's screen. I have no idea what to write on my blog. Way back when I started it, I wrote random everyday things mixed in with news stories I investigated. That didn't attract a lot of readers. When someone wants in-depth news, they go to a real news site or online magazine. Not a blog that no one's heard of.

My only choice is to go with what Riley suggested and not focus on news. Now that I'm living in Central Park South, my life's already getting more interesting. I've got my new neighborhood to talk about. That makes it a lot easier. Everything about my apartment is great. All I have to do is show the view off and that alone should get me tons of clicks.

Luckily it's sunny out and the pretty blue sky's quite clear. Roaming around the apartment, I take photos from all the windows at every possible angle. I get a few really good ones and post the best three.

Feeling good south of the Park

Done. Now I can get back to obsessing about what I learned about Asher. Once I got home from the bar, I dove fully down the rabbit hole and ended up spending hours clicking through his life. Just his professional life. I get why Zan's salivating so hard over the chance to get a deeper, human interest angle on him.

Every single article out there is all about his company and even then, the details are fairly minimal. The focus is always on how Vivojen was able to attract some major investors. Biotech's considered risky at best and on top of that, there aren't a lot of details about what the company's all about. In spite of all the secrecy, Asher's become the new soaring star of the business world. There's definitely a story behind it all. I've got to be the one to break it.

Not that Asher's company isn't fascinating enough on its own. Everything I've read says that Vivojen's on track to become one of the biggest game-changers the medical field has ever seen. There's a lot of speculation but no one knows how he got Vivojen to the level it's at as fast as he did. Everyone wants to know more about who the man behind it all is. Myself included.

I found only two profiles written up about Asher, the new King of the business world. Reading between the lines, I can tell the writers tried to dig into his personal life. From Asher's generic answers, he was pretty skilled at dodging most of their questions. His tactic is to let something very vaguely personal slip out, then he immediately redirects back into talking about his company. He still keeps the conversation very superficial. He'll be a tricky one to interview. I wonder why he does like that?

I scan through one of my open tabs for what must be the tenth time. I enjoy a challenge, but the situation I'm in here is something they didn't exactly cover in journalism school. We all learn that you're supposed to keep yourself out of the way of the subject and never get personally involved. Objectivity is the key.

I always figured that would be easy-peasy. Who'd even want to get involved with the subject of a story? Of course I never thought I'd be in the position of being assigned to interview someone I've already gone out with. I expected to be pitching my own ideas for stories to the editor.

Having slept with Asher already makes the whole thing even more complicated.

I check out Page Six again and there we are. It's a candid shot which I didn't even know got taken. I know they only snapped him because he's hot and I got included because I was with him. There are a few other images of Asher by himself or with me cropped out. There's nothing including my name or who I am.

I found some older pictures of Asher out at other events and every single time, he's with a different woman. According

to the captions, they're also high-profile and highly successful in their fields.

Standing up, I do a half-assed yoga stretch. I have no idea how to ask Asher for an interview now. It's weird. We're not exactly seeing each other but we did go out to a high-profile event and we slept together, so I can't say there's nothing between us. I don't know how to reconcile that with having to do an objective interview with him.

I pace around in front of the living room windows. This is way more complicated than it should be. Maybe I should tell Zan that I can't write this article because I'm too close to the subject.

As if that wouldn't be committing career suicide.

After listening to all the stories that Peyton told me once she was certain that Zan had left the bar and there was absolutely no chance of her overhearing, I know for sure that my new boss isn't one to take no for an answer. Not from anyone and especially not a brand-new hire.

I snort when I think of trying to turn down this assignment as a newbie who's basically on the writing world's equivalent of probation. I'd be let go so fast and get bad-mouthed to any possible future employers. Like Peyton kept telling me, Zan didn't get to where she is by playing softball.

I rub my eyes and take a couple more photos to post later. I can't get out of this. Maybe it doesn't matter. It's not like Asher jumped to ask me out again. He did make it crystal clear that he's not interested in dating. The reality is that we barely know each other. If I want to be an investigative journalist, there's no way I can turn down my first assignment with any publication at all, especially one like City Scan.

Maybe once my story runs Asher will be so impressed that he'll ask me out again. Either way, I've got to do it. I'll head over to his place and see how it goes. If nothing else, I could ask him if I could start interviewing his co-CEOs. Zan made it clear that although Asher's the ideal, any one of them that could be convinced to open up would be good. All three of

them would be perfection. So if I start with one of Asher's colleagues, I could possibly see what he thinks after that.

Yes. That's it. Before I lose my nerve, I give my hair and makeup a quick check. There's no time like the present and I don't want to lose my resolve. I'm doing this right now.

It's not the very best idea to just drop in on Asher at his home, but what the hell. Part of my new life is to be bold and daring. The worst he can do is to tell me to get lost because he's busy.

I'm getting more and more into doing this. If he doesn't want to see me at all, then I'll know where I stand with him in every way. If he doesn't want to go out again, I can definitely move forward and just ask him about doing an interview. Honestly that'll be really disappointing but what the hell. I'm not going to waste my time wondering whether a guy's into me anymore like I've always done in the past.

I want to know what's up and I want to know it now.

New life, I repeat to myself as I walk down the hall. I'm almost shaking from nerves and excitement. Taking my destiny into my own hands is thrilling. I tap quietly at the door just in case Asher's napping or something, although he doesn't strike me as the kind of guy who takes naps. He's got a vibe that shows he's always on the go.

It's going to take everything in me to match his energy to make this a successful interview. Asher's going to be a very tricky subject to talk to. I'm going to need to use all of my skills to get him to open up to me.

Normally I'd shy away from even consider interviewing someone as high-powered as him, but that was the old me. The new me's going to dive right in no matter how nervous I am. I can do this.

At the sound of footsteps coming towards the door, I throw my shoulders back. I'm a professional journalist and I'm ready for anything.

The door opens and my jaw actually falls open.

It's not Asher who's standing in front of me. I'm frozen from shock as I stare into the familiar face of someone I never thought I'd see again.

"Hello," the man says. "Can I help you?"

"Um. Sorry, wrong apartment." I turn on my heel and stride down the hall as fast as I can before he can say another word.

Holy fuck. That was Logan Blair.

The name ricochets around in my mind as I close the door behind me and sink back against it. I haven't laid eyes on Logan since high school graduation. What the hell is he doing in this building?

Let alone in Asher's apartment.

I start to pace around the enormous living room. The light's catching the buildings in a spectacular way and even that isn't enough to distract me.

My old enemy from back in high school. I probably shouldn't be bothered by him now, but it wasn't that long ago. Maybe it isn't too weird that I'm still upset about it. He was the entire reason I had a terrible couple of years. It was all his fault and I never forgave him.

I thought that guy was out of my life for good. Riley's my only high school friend that I haven't drifted away from. All of us used to meet for drinks nearly every week but soon enough, that went down to only once a month. Now I can't even remember the last time we all got together.

There's no way Logan could possibly be friends with Asher.

If they are, I don't know what that says about Asher. The kind of friends a man keeps says a lot about him. Then again, he didn't go to our school. He wouldn't know what Logan was like then.

I make a decision. None of this matters. Asher and I are neighbors. Nothing more. As much as that makes my heart sink, it's got to be for the best. I wanted something to happen

with Asher, but he's way out of my league anyway. No wonder he hasn't asked me out yet. There's no way he's interested.

I'm going to interview him and that'll be that. We can say hello when we pass each other in the hallway. That's it. I'll text him later to ask about setting up a formal meeting.

In the meantime, I don't know what to do with myself. I was secretly hoping that dropping by Asher's place would turn into an afternoon of hot sex after a great interview. Now I don't have either option. My shift doesn't start until tonight. I can't sit still long enough to curl up with a book for a couple of hours.

I text Riley but no response. So I go back to my computer. I need to add a lot more to my blog if I'm going to get serious about it.

I'm struck with an idea that's so good, it makes me grin. I can talk about what's happened with Asher, since he's the only possible love interest I have. Had. Whatever.

I'm supposed to be writing about my new life and Asher's part of it. Just for fun, I can poll my readers so they can tell me what to do about my situation with him. That should get some engagement happening..

# Chapter 8

## Logan

I close the door behind me and head back to the dining room table that's our office today. That was strange, but it's not being interrupted by someone knocking on the wrong door that's distracting me. My head hasn't been in the game all day. I've got something big to propose. I know I won't be able to concentrate until I get it off my chest.

Folding my hands behind my head as if this is any other day and not about to turn into something that could be life-changing, I lean back in my chair and survey Asher's dining room. Sometimes I miss the buzz of the office, but this is a pretty good alternative.

I never thought I'd get into the whole work from home thing, but it's growing on me. Especially when it's not my home I'm working at. It's less of a commute to get here, although it still takes more time than I'd like. I could do without that drive. Never thought I'd miss taking the subway, but here we are.

Not that it matters. Nothing matters except my friend's reaction to what I want to say to him.

"I need to move in with you," I tell Asher.

"What?" He glances up at me with a frown. "Are you serious?"

"I sure am." I know I can sell this to him. I can sell anyone on anything, and that's the reason Asher and I are business partners. "It's a crucial time and you know we need to be in constant contact. I'm tired of the fucking commute it takes to get here, but that's not all. My condo just sold and I haven't found a new one yet."

"How'd you manage that? You had a line on a couple of great places. Didn't you say something about closing on one of

them?” Asher asks.

“I was about to, then it got sold out from under me. In the end, neither place was what I really wanted. I haven’t had much time to look around since then and what I have seen hasn’t been worth it. If I don’t move in with you, I’ll end up in a hotel. You’ve got the space, Ash. So what do you say?”

He raises an eyebrow. “You really want to live here?”

I can’t quite meet his gaze. “Yeah, why not?” Everything I told him is a factor in my thinking, but there’s one more reason that I can’t admit to him. “I’ll put my furniture into storage so it’ll just be me and some clothes taking over one of your spare bedrooms. Frankly, I don’t see much changing.” I stifle a yawn. “I’m here so often, I might as well make it official.” I didn’t sleep much last night, what with my mind racing around and deciding whether or not I should float this crazy plan to him.

Asher folds his hands together as he considers my idea. “It’s true, you’re already here pretty much all the time. It makes sense. Sure, go for it.”

“Great. I’ll get it done on the weekend,” I say.

Asher nods, unconcerned as he turns back to the work he’s absorbed in. I figured he’d likely be okay with it, although my palms are still sweaty. He and I have been friends for longer than we’ve been business partners and we’ve always gotten along extremely well, better than most college roommates. Living together will go smoothly.

Not to mention that Asher’s place has a lot more space than our college dorm did. Hell, this penthouse is bigger than the house we all rented together after we graduated. That was when we really got our first company up and running. It was all of three of us being together all the time that made the huge difference and got us on the right track to become so successful so fast. I figure that must be what Asher’s thinking too.

It’ll be so much easier to bounce ideas off each other and run with the good ones immediately when I’m here all the



time, and that makes all the difference. It leads to some long nights as well, which is how I like to work. We're at that big growth spurt stage again right now. Vivojen's about to take a major leap forward and it's a crucial time.

Now all we need is to have Julian living here too. I don't know what Asher'll think about both of us invading his space, but he might not care too much either. I'm about to bring up it before he gets too into what he's doing when the door opens.

Perfect timing. "Hey, JJ." I stand up and clap him on the back the moment he enters the living room. He looks a little surprised at my overly-enthusiastic greeting.

Julian deposits his laptop on the large table as he eyes me. "What's going on, Logan?"

"How'd you like to move in here with Asher and I?"

He rubs his chin. "You live here? Since when?"

"Two days from now. So it makes sense for you to move in too, doesn't it. Then we can all be together and work like we did back in college."

Julian's eyes light up. "Sounds good."

I knew he wouldn't argue about it. Julian's all about work. We all are, of course. You have to be when you're operating at this level. We wouldn't spend most of our lives on this kind of venture if we weren't completely, wholly committed to the outcome we're aiming to achieve. Julian has a special kind of passion for it. We're all determined to succeed and he's even more motivated than the rest of us. Makes sense, since what we do is a lot more personal for him.

Asher's been trying to ignore us but now he stands up, casting his eagle eye towards me. "What's this now? Logan, are you trying to become a hotel manager and you've decided to practice with my penthouse?"

"Not exactly, but it's always good to have a backup career. Don't you think?"

He nods, deadpan. "Good plan. Being a waiter is my backup."

“What about you, Julian?” I ask him. “What’s your next career?”

Asher laughs when Julian doesn’t respond. He didn’t even hear me since he’s already engrossed in some printouts. I’m actually glad he didn’t hear my joke. JJ’s way too invested in what we’re doing to joke about it. It’s not funny. What we’re doing is very serious work and it’s incredibly personal to him.

However I’ve always thought that a joke can help the mood and if you can’t enjoy your work, that’s no good. Just maybe not about this particular subject.

“You mind?” I ask Asher since Julian’s lost in the world of science once again.

“Do I mind that you’re inviting everyone under the sun to live in my home?” He shrugs. “Yes, but I know it makes practical sense.”

He gives me a pointed look. “Just for now. You can stay as long as you need to, but once everything’s in place for our launch, I’d like to have my place all to myself again. If not sooner.”

“You got it.” There’s an urgency to our work these days that we didn’t expect to have. The whole medical landscape is different since the pandemic. Different rules. Different objectives. And more importantly, far different timelines for making changes happen. We’re very lucky that we started our company before the world went to hell. There’s a lot more pressure to produce results that we didn’t have to work under in the Before Times.

So work’s tight and tense these days, and it doesn’t hurt to spend extra time with my two best friends. It’s been way too long since we’ve done anything social together, and it’s making me a little crazy.

Asher doesn’t need to know about my other reason for wanting all of us to be together. Not that I’d ever admit it to him anyway.

I’m in the middle of reviewing a spreadsheet when something that’s been tugging at the back of my mind comes

to the forefront in a rush. I know who was at the door earlier. Elena Olson, who I knew back in high school.

I haven't given that time of life a single thought in quite awhile. The moment it was over, I was done with it.

I was so into going to college, I couldn't wait for it to start. All I wanted to do was get my life going and college was the way to do it. I was sure of it, and I was right. Here I am, one of the cofounders of the hottest new companies in Manhattan. Between Asher and Julian and I, we've accomplished amazing things and if we keep going, the future's looking very bright.

# Chapter 9

## Elena

I can't believe they only have three elevators in a 70 story building. Who's idea was that? There's got to be hundreds of people living here. I thought a modern building like this one would be all about the fast-paced lifestyle for people who are always on the go.

Not this one. I'm trying to get used to the way time slows down once you step inside, even though it's right in the heart of Manhattan. I watch as one elevator arrives and slowly, slowly a couple of people get out. They barely nod at me when I give them a smile. I get the distinct feeling I'm not going to be accepted here any time soon.

I was the only one waiting but as I enter, someone else crosses the lobby purposefully to join me. I hold the door. When I see who's joined me, I regret it.

It's Logan. He's visibly startled when he notices me too.

"Elena," he says. "You took off so quickly when you showed up at the door the other day, I didn't recognize you for a minute. It's been a long time."

"It sure has," I say frostily. I wait for him to continue but he doesn't. The silence between us gets awkward fast.

"Do you like living here?" Logan asks me suddenly.

I toss my hair over my shoulder as if he isn't bothering me at all, even though he gets under my skin like no one else. "Yes, it's lovely."

I don't know what to say and he doesn't utter another word to me. By the time we reach the top floor, I'm beyond uncomfortable. When Logan holds the door open for me in a gentlemanly move, he catches me completely off guard. I didn't think he had it in him.

Of course it means I have to walk right by him and the moment I do, I get close enough to inhale his subtle gingery scent. I hate to admit it but he smells very nice. It's already challenging to have to try and ignore the fact that he's also gotten even better looking since school. I didn't think that was possible.

Not that he wasn't already kind of appealing in his own way back then. Lots of girls had crushes on him. He was one of those boyishly good-looking, popular guys. That's what gave him the power to screw up my last two years. He couldn't have pulled it off otherwise.

The strong memories send me back to resenting his attractiveness, even though I can still admit to myself that he's a handsome guy.

"See you around, Elena," he calls to me as I stop at my place while he continues on down the hallway. I go in and close the door firmly behind me.

I hate that Logan's back in my life, and that I can't get him off my mind. Two chance encounters and he's already inserted himself into my thoughts even when he's not around. I pace around and click on the TV on, and then ignore it completely.

Instead I go to my laptop. Blogging time.

So readers, my old high school enemy might be living right across from me. I don't know how this happened. Or what to do about it. Any thoughts?

I'm going to see what comments I get before I post my next question. Because I've got a much more important dilemma. Asher texted me a couple of times tonight. I haven't replied yet. I have no idea what to say to him.

I reread them once again. He wants to go out with me on the weekend. I have to work, but I can't bring myself to turn him down. I could suggest a different time. If we do get together, I can ask him what's going on with Logan. I'll have to figure out what to do about interviewing him too because I still haven't asked him yet. I really can't put it off any longer.

Screw it. I don't care as much about the Logan situation as I do about Asher. I'm going to ask my readers now. My follower count goes up every day. I got a big boost when Riley

mentioned me in her reels and the number's been rising steadily ever since.

Writing out even just the bare minimum of details about what my readers would need to know about the situation is really helping me. It's good to get it out and hopefully get some objective opinions back. I can't wait to see what they'll come up.

Shutting my laptop down, I go over to the window and take my daily photo of the city as the sun's setting. It's become a habit, like a ritual before I go to work. These are the images I always get the most comments on. I get a really breathtaking shot tonight and upload it quickly.

Today's view from my beautiful home. Can't get enough.

# Chapter 10

## Elena

Seriously? I can't get into my apartment. I just spent my most of my afternoon serving food and all I've been wanting for the past two hours is to get home and crash out for awhile.

Impatiently I turn the key again. My last two places were fully digital and had keypads to use so I'm not used to this but still. It's just a lock. It shouldn't be this hard to get it open. I jiggle it one more time, trying to be firm but careful. I'm afraid to force it too hard in case it breaks.

Nothing happens. I pull the key out and examine it. It's kind of a cool key, sleek and almost elegant. The last time I had to use an apartment lock, the key was really light and thin. It would've been more likely to break than this one. I remember reading something once about locks getting screwed up if you mess around with them too much and I don't even know what I'd do if that happened to me.

I try again, twisting the key with as much control as I can manage without pushing too hard. No luck. It's not budging and I'm still afraid to force it any more than I already have.

"Fuck," I mutter. I need to get inside now. I've got a meeting with Zan and I don't know what she wants to talk about. As usual her message was extremely brief and didn't tell me much of anything. I need a good quiet spot to speak with her. She wasn't at all impressed with our coffee shop interview and she made sure I knew it.

That was the one time that she wasn't too brief in one of her messages. I've got to be as professional as I can for her going forward. No coffee shop meetings and being stuck out in the hall won't do either.

I'm trying again when someone comes up behind me. I glance up, hoping it's Asher. My shoulders drop at the sight of

Logan. That's just great. He's the last person I want to see right now.

He's grinning as he approaches. "Need help, Lannie?"

I cringe at my old nickname. I never liked it and it really grates on me. No one calls me that anymore, except apparently Logan. Him dropping back into my life just gets better and better.

I bristle even though his tone's more teasing than mean. We're not friends. I don't want to be teased by him. I had enough of that in school.

"No," I tell him defiantly. "I'm doing just fine."

"Great," he says. "So why are you standing out here instead of going inside?"

I straighten up. "I was checking my phone."

I push the key back into the lock as if it's the easiest thing in the world, which of course it should be. Just my luck that isn't working for me. I turn it with more energy than I mean to and once again, it sticks.

"I think you need some help there. I'll give it a try."

Logan takes the key from my hand, his fingers brushing over mine. The sudden contact is unexpected and to my horror, I don't mind it.

What the hell? This is Logan. The boy who made high school torture for me. It doesn't matter how attractive he is.

I give my head a tiny shake. What the hell am I thinking?

This. Is. Logan.

Nothing's changed. I can't stand him. Just because he's objectively gorgeous and anyone would think so doesn't mean a thing. So he bumped my hand. Big deal. I don't care. I'm interested in Asher. It doesn't matter that Logan's pretty much equal with Asher as far as looks go. Asher's got that mouthwatering, classically handsome look. Logan's lean and lithe. Kind of graceful in a slouchy way. His ash blond hair's a little longer than it used to be and it suits him really well.



I catch Logan glancing at me as if he can read my thoughts. He's got a smug grin on his face.

"There you go," he says.

"What?" I ask him as he turns the handle and opens the door.

He hands me the key back. "You're welcome. I'd suggest you fix the lock because it's only going to stick again. It's not uncommon with this type of door. Our place has the same thing going on. It's an easy fix. I can help you out. All it takes is some lubricant."

He draws out his last word in a sexual way that takes me aback. His smirk's very suggestive. I don't like the way that starts a fire deep in me. *No*, I tell my body firmly. I'm into Asher, not Logan. He might be handsome but he sucks.

"No thank you, I'm good. I can figure it out myself," I say as icily as I can, trying to ignore the low pulse that's throbbing in my body.

He laughs at me and for some reason it doesn't piss me off instantly. "Just like you figured out the lock now?"

"I didn't want to force it. I was worried about breaking the key," I tell him primly. "And what do you mean, 'our place'?" I ask him before I can help myself. "That's where Asher lives. What are you, roommates?" I say sarcastically.

Not that I care, but it would be more than a little strange if Asher had a roommate. He's a CEO. Clearly his finances are in order. On top of that, this certainly isn't the kind of building that you move into with a roommate.

Logan shakes his head as if I'm dumb. "Yes, we're roommates."

"You live together?" I blurt out. I can't get my head around strong, confident Asher having a roommate. Especially Logan. I can't imagine why he'd be living with Asher. Asher's a well-known, successful man about town. It makes zero sense.

"Yes, Lannie. That's generally what being roommates mean." His eyebrows rise. "Didn't you do well in school? I

thought you were a total nerd back then. What happened?”

I bristle at the mention of school. I was slightly starting to warm up to Logan since he got my place unlocked but now the memories of what he did to me then come rushing right back. I don't think I can ever forgive him.

I go for a petty response. I'm not proud, but why not. “I would've thought you'd be doing better yourself by now, Logan,” I say. “Do you have to live with Asher because you're out of work? You fell on hard times so he's being a good friend? Taking you in so you're not on the street, is that it?”

Logan snorts even as a grin tugs at the corners of his mouth. “Yeah, no. Asher and I run a company together, along with another one of our friends. You could say that we're all doing pretty well for ourselves. Since you're so interested, I'm not living with Asher because I have to. I decided to get the sale of my last place underway while the market's still white hot. Do you follow the real estate market, Elena? If you do, you know exactly what I mean.”

“Not lately,” I reply loftily. I don't know the first thing about real estate or any kind of market but I'm not going to let Logan know that. I hate to think about it but the reality is that if I stay in New York, I'll almost certainly be renting forever. Buying something here is so far out of my reach that I don't even let myself imagine it. If I stay in Manhattan, I'll become a forever renter.

As long as I have a great place, I'm cool with it. It's the price I have to pay if I want to become a journalist. Once I make a name for myself, things might be different. As much as I want to dream about those days, I know that they're pretty far in the future. Which reminds me of what I'm supposed to be doing right now.

“I have to get going, I've got a meeting.” I try to sound important but Logan isn't buying it. His grin widens. So rude. I mean, I do have a meeting. It's not fake. Maybe it's not on the level of the kinds of meetings he has, but it's something I need to do.

“Then you’d better get to it,” Logan says. He pushes the door open wider for me. I’m so shocked all I do is walk through. It’s as if he knows that politeness in a man is a weakness of mine.

Not that it matters. This is still Logan.

“Later, Olson.” Logan starts to close the door behind me before I have even a chance to do it myself.

“Bye,” I say automatically. I sure as hell hope I don’t see him around. I want to see Asher. I check the time quickly. Yikes. I’ve got about two minutes until my meeting. I position my laptop so that the huge bookshelf filled with books will be my background for this call. I want Zan to see that I’m all about the written word.

While I wait for her to open our meeting, I check in on my blog. Yes. My follower count is up again. The comments are still evenly split on the question of whether I should date Asher or ask him for an interview.

It’s not like I don’t know what I need to do. I need to get the interview. There’s no question. It’s just nice to get a few unbiased opinions on my options.

Quickly I go to Vivojen’s website. I scroll to the list of the directors and there it is. Logan’s name. He really is one of the CEOs of Asher’s company. I don’t know how it didn’t click before, but his first name and his last are both pretty common.

“Elena.” Zan’s voice coming from my laptop startles me. “I’ve been waiting.”

“I’m sorry.” Hastily I close my browser. She can’t have been waiting more than a few seconds. That’s literally all the time I spent checking out the page. She’s also five minutes late herself. “I don’t know why my Zoom didn’t override what I was doing, it usually does.”

“No, no.” Zan’s impatient. “Not waiting for this meeting. I wouldn’t ever do that,” she says, her tone warning.

“Of course not. I’d never want to keep you waiting in the first place. I respect your time,” I say.

She ignores me, continuing on as if I haven't even spoken. "What I mean is that I've been waiting for an update on your story. How's it progressing?"

"It's going very well." I try to hide my confusion by being overly enthusiastic. The deadline isn't for another few weeks. Why does she need an update so soon? "It's going to be great."

"Sure," she says. "But have you done the interview?"

"Not yet," I admit.

Her voice goes edgy. "You need to get on that, Elena. There's much more than meets the eye to Asher and the others, and we need to show it. As you know, it'll be a hell of a scoop for City Scan. So I need you to tell me. What's the hold up?"

I swallow hard, extremely uncomfortable. What can I tell her? It's one thing to write a story about Asher's company and his rise to success at such a young age like everyone else has already done over and over again. It's a whole other deal to get the real story behind all of it. "Asher's been very busy, but I'm definitely working on it. I don't know him very well so I need to lay some groundwork first." It's the truth. I don't need to mention anything else.

But Zan's too sharp. "You haven't started some sort of romantic relationship with him, have you? You can't compromise your integrity and ability to write this story. I expected you to be one of the many women that Kingston takes out when he knows he's going to be photographed, not to turn into some sort of girlfriend. That's not what you are, is it? If that's the case, then I'll need you to hand off the story to Peyton. It's got to be written by someone who can be completely objective."

My stomach drops. "Oh no," I say quickly. "I'm not his girlfriend. Not at all. We went out to the benefit and that's it."

Technically that's true. There's no need to mention our potential weekend date. I can't risk letting Zan think I'd jeopardize my one shot at writing for City Scan.

"That's good," Zan says. "You'd also do well to interview the other CEOs to get more background information, not just

Kingston. Talk to his partners too. He's the big boss and the most public face of all three partners, but they all formed Vivojen together. The others can give you great insight into him and they never do interviews at all. If you can't get him to agree at first, then use him as a connection to get to one or both of the others. Once you gain their trust, Kingston will likely be more open to talking to you afterwards. The biotech angle isn't what we want the main focus of the piece to be, so minimize your time with the scientist and target the other one. Logan Blair."

I try not to cringe visibly. How can I possibly interview Logan?

"Absolutely. I'll certainly follow up on pursuing the others," I tell her. Not Logan, I add silently. Never Logan.

"I'm going to need to see a first draft from you soon. Since this is your first article for us and it's a feature, I want to make sure you're on the right track. Peyton's told me she hasn't seen anything from you either. Get something to her that she and I can look over. I shouldn't have to remind you that this is an important story. We're putting a lot of trust in you, Elena. I'm taking a big risk by giving you this story and it's my name on the line if you can't pull this off. You're brand new and I really shouldn't have taken this big of a chance, but I have a good feeling about you." Her eyes narrow. "Don't let me down."

"I won't," I tell her. No matter what it takes, I know I can't.

Snapping my laptop shut, I stride to the door. I'm going to get an interview with Asher. If he's not home, I'll endure doing one with Logan. Either way, I'll get something to keep Zan happy.

# Chapter 11

## Elena

The door opens up but it's not Asher who answers. Thankfully it's not Logan either. The tall man's clear brown eyes meet mine and he waits expectantly without saying a word.

"I'm looking for Asher, is he around?" I thrust out my hand. "I'm Elena. I live down the hall."

He shakes my hand formally without a word.

"And you are?" I try.

"Right." He blinks as if he's trying to pull himself into the reality of the here and now and only just realizing what he should be doing. "Julian Jensen. Nice to meet you. Asher's still at the office."

I steel myself. "What about Logan?"

"He was here for a few minutes to pick something up but he's already gone out again. I don't know where."

"Oh, right. Sorry to have bothered you." I'm about to turn and leave when Julian speaks up again. "Asher should be home pretty soon. I don't know when exactly, but if you want to wait for him you can."

I pause for only a moment. "Sure." Why not? I can have a look around and get a sense of what Asher's lifestyle is like. That'll be a great start.

Julian ushers me into the living room and I stop short. I thought that the apartment I'm staying in is impressive. Asher's place blows it right out of the water. It's so huge, it's almost intimidating. The living room alone is at least twice the size of mine, maybe even more. I can only imagine what the rest of the penthouse looks like. Maybe I can convince Julian to give me a tour.

“Would you like something to drink while you’re waiting?” Julian offers after gesturing towards the massive sofa. I sink into it as if it’s made of clouds.

He still has a very distracted and busy air about him as if I’ve caught him in the middle of something important. “I don’t want to interrupt you.”

He pushes his hand through his short brown hair. “You’re not. I was about to take a break.” The steel band of his watch glints as he checks it and the blue face of it catches my attention. It’s a Rolex, and a gorgeous one at that. “Actually I meant to take a break about an hour ago. It’s about time that I do. I’m told I need to take breaks more often. You’re welcome to stay as long as you like but I really don’t know when Asher said he’d be home.”

Home? “Do you live here too? That’s a lot of roommates,” I blurt out.

Julian blinks at me. I get the strong sense that his preoccupied manner isn’t unusual for him. His clothes look expensive but a little unkempt. He’s clearly busy but at the same time he’s perfectly happy to stop what he’s doing to entertain a total stranger who just showed up on his doorstep. Intriguing.

“I do, but it’s only a temporary situation. We’re not really roommates. Not long-term anyway.” He frowns as if he’s trying to stay focused, or even just trying to remember what we’re talking about. He’s got to be the most distracted man I’ve ever encountered.

“Logan’s here because he’s in-between places,” Julian continues. “He sold his condo and didn’t find anything in time. Or he did, and decided against it. I can’t remember.”

He pauses for a long time. “What about yourself?” I prompt. “What brings you to live at Asher’s place?”

“Oh, me. Right. Yes. I’m having some work done on my place, some major renovations and a lot of painting. I can’t tolerate the fumes. I was going to find somewhere close to the office to stay. Then Logan decided it’d be a good idea for all

of us to be living together. He was right, it helps a lot. Saves a lot of time, which is really the key to everything, you know?”

He gazes at me expectantly, waiting for me to answer. “Time’s the only thing we have that can’t be replaced,” I offer.

Julian nods with satisfaction, as if I’ve said something profound. I wish I could’ve come up with the exact quote I once heard, it would’ve sounded even better. One of my professors used to say it whenever someone tried to talk their way out of being late on an assignment.

“Exactly. You get it. It’s nice to be able to work in close proximity to each other and discuss things immediately when we need to. It’s a crucial time in our trajectory. We need more face-to-face time than usual,” he says.

“I was reading up about Vivojen Tech,” I tell him. “It’s fascinating stuff that you’re working on.”

Julian brightens up. “It really is. We’re making great strides forward. Everything we’ve been doing for years now is going to come to a head and take the world by storm.”

“So what’s the critical time that you’re in now? Nothing I read really goes into any detail beyond how your company started up and moved so fast.” I’m asking out of interest but an idea starts to sprout in me. I can interview Julian. He’s right here and obviously a lot more interested in talking about his company than anything else. That way I wouldn’t have a conflict of interest with Asher, and I don’t have to endure trying to interview Logan.

Total win.

Julian leans forward, resting his elbows onto his knees. His eyes gleam with excitement. It’s like a switch has flipped in him, he’s instantly so enthusiastic. The total opposite of the quiet guy who answered the door.

“We’re coming up to a few major turning points,” he says. “We’ve created a new kind of medication and it’s going to be ready to submit for FDA approval faster than we’d originally anticipated, which is fantastic. The sooner we can launch it,



the sooner we can start saving lives. We're going to change cancer treatment forever. Biotech's the way of the future."

"I don't actually know what biotech is," I admit. I read—or tried to read—an article in a scientific journal about what they're doing and it was so technical I couldn't understand any of it. All of the other stories that get published about Vivojen are about its financial success and its business potential with only a brief, passing mention of what they're actually doing. This is the first chance I have to really learn about what they're working on.

"Are you a wine drinker?"

"Sometimes," I say, caught off guard.

"Then biotech's already part of your life," Julian says. "It's used in wine making, and it's going to affect its future too."

"Really?" I ask with more interest. "I've never given any thought to how wine's made. I just drink it."

"It's possible that in the near future, wine won't be able to cause hangovers anymore. Biotech's a growing field and it's becoming more and more a part of daily life. However our research and work is in the medical field. We've developed a potential cure for a certain rare type of blood cancer."

"A cure?" He has to be exaggerating, although he doesn't strike me as the kind of man to do that.

"Our results are unprecedented," Julian says. "Once we launch our first drug, our future aim will be to see how it can be modified for use in other types of blood diseases too. Ultimately, we want to be able to cure or prevent different kinds of cancer." Clearly this is Julian's area of interest because he's getting positively animated. "We intend to revolutionize cancer treatment and health care as a whole, because our methods can be used in all kinds of other research."

"That's huge. How come there isn't more buzz about it?" I ask him.

"We have to keep our work relatively secret. There are a few reasons. A big one is that no good will come from getting

people's hopes up before it's available to the general public. Another is that the more attention we attract at this stage, the more likely it is that our work could get stolen."

"Does that actually happen?"

"Unfortunately yes. Any question of that kind of risk would affect our investors. Funding is key for us to be able to get our drug into the hands of people who need it much sooner than we expected."

He says this almost as an afterthought, but it sounds like a big deal to me. "So you have to be cautious for your investors?" I'm out of my depth as far as anything medical or scientific goes but from what I've learned in my research so far, funding's the absolute key to everything in their industry.

"Yes. Funding's essential." He gestures vaguely. "It's not my area of expertise. Logan takes care of that side of things. I don't really follow how he does it but he gets what we need. I'm on the research side myself."

Julian runs his hand through his hair. "Actually if you'll excuse me, I need to make a note of something. I'll be back in a minute."

I wait patiently but when it's clear he's going to take awhile, I stand up and walk around the room. I take a closer look at the bookshelves, the furniture and the art on the walls. It's all very high-end. I admire the built-in bookshelves covering most of the walls. That's my dream. My place has a few but not even close to as many as this living room can hold.

I wonder if any of the bedrooms have some too. Somehow I quell my desire to walk down the hallway that Julian disappeared into and check for myself. When I came in, I noticed that all of the doors are closed. I'd have to open one to peer inside and that'd really cross the line into snooping.

I'm back to sitting down when Julian returns with a notepad in hand.

"This might help you understand what we're doing. Back when I was teaching, I always found that sketching out ideas was quite helpful to my students."

He's right. After five minutes, I understand what he's talking about so much better. The basic science that I took in school is even a little helpful here. "That's so interesting. Are you really going to be able to cure cancer?"

"That's one of our goals. It's one that we make a point of keeping secret. It's such a broad claim to make that it would be met with an extreme amount of skepticism, and quite rightly so. We need to progress without that kind of scrutiny and criticism so we avoid letting big claims be made by anyone. If they did, it could affect our ability to attract the investors that we need in order to keep going."

He rubs at his forehead. "It's tragic that scientific research can depend so heavily on the financial whims of other people, don't you think? Once we've got government approval, I'd invite anyone to examine our product from every possible angle. Just not yet. Timing is key. Speculation can only distract and do damage at this point. As I mentioned the faster we launch, the better. It's critical that patients who need the medication will have it available as soon as possible."

"That's so fascinating, Julian. You must be proud."

"Yes." His face changes in a way I don't expect and he doesn't continue.

"So Vivojen belongs to all three of you?" I ask.

"That's right. Asher and Logan and I started it together." He lapses into silence once again. Julian's only animated and interested when he's talking about the science side of things, but I've got to press him.

"How did you all meet?" I prompt him.

"Back in college," he says. "Logan and I were roommates and Asher wound up next door to us. We all clicked as friends. Eventually we decided to leave the dorm and rent a house together. Once I decided what specialty I was going to pursue after I graduated, Asher had the idea of him and Logan and I all working together. So they do the business side and I run the research side. We all work extremely well together. I couldn't ask for better partners."

“So what about your life outside of work,” I ask him. “It seems like you’re quite busy.”

His brow creases. “What do you mean?”

“Oh, you know. What do you guys do for fun? What are your hobbies? Any girlfriends?” I can’t help but toss in the last question. I want to know if Asher’s seeing anybody else. I don’t want to get tied up with a player. I had enough of that crap with my ex. Never again.

“I’m very focused on my work. I have various teams to advise and oversee. When I’m not in the lab, I’m doing research and analysis. There’s really no time for anything else. My work is my passion. There’s nothing else I’d rather do.”

“That must make it hard to have a relationship,” I say.

“It does.” Julian’s suddenly direct, meeting my eyes in a way that catches me completely off guard. I expected him to dismiss the idea entirely. “It’s the reason I’m divorced.”

“You were married?” I realize too late that I sound way too shocked. Julian’s obviously a nice guy. He took time out of his day to talk to me, a total stranger. There’s no doubt that he’s very attractive. I never got the appeal of a science guy until now.

Before I can backtrack, he smiles wistfully. “I was. Very briefly. It was right after I finished my first degree and it didn’t last long at all. Turns out that she didn’t quite believe that I was serious when I said my work takes up most of my time. I think she expected me to change after we walked down the aisle, but I can’t change who I am. Or my reasons for what I do. No romantic relationship can come first for me. Definitely not before we launch and probably not even then. Things will only get more interesting from there on out.”

“That makes sense.” Although I don’t quite get it. I can’t see being so devoted to anything that I wouldn’t want a companion by my side too. Then again, Julian’s passion for what he does is really next level. I love writing and there’s nothing I want more than to be a journalist, but I don’t think I have the same level of commitment that Julian does.

Of course my work's also a lot less consuming than his is. From what I can gather from all of his explanations, everything is so connected and there's no real end point when you're involved in such high-level research that you come up with world-changing innovations. Once I've written an article, it's done and I can move onto the next thing. I'm also done when I decide I am, when I've explained everything that I need to explain. I like having an end point. I'm not sure I could immerse myself in something as ongoing and endless as Julian is.

His work also clearly takes a lot of concentration. He's gazing at his pad before he starts sketching something else out which I wouldn't have the hope of understanding. Yet by the time he's done explaining, I do. "You must've been a great teacher. Do you still do it?"

"No." His eyes get a faraway look that's almost regretful. "I miss teaching, but it's simply not possible. Vivojen is my life's work. It's essential. There's no room for anything else."

# Chapter 12

## Logan

After a brief search I find Julian in one of the spare bedrooms that Asher's given him to use as his own office. He's intent on what he's doing, completely focussed as usual. I bet he's been working like this for hours without stopping. It's time he took a break. I have something very specific in mind to capture his interest.

Stepping up behind him, I set my hands on his shoulders. He doesn't stop staring at his screen, doesn't even pause. Hell, he doesn't so much as acknowledge my existence until I start to rub my thumbs into his tense muscles.

"What're you doing?" I ask him as I press firmly into his shoulder blades.

"I'm reviewing some new data," Julian says.

"Yeah, no. That's not what I meant. I'm calling you out for sitting hunched over the computer for so long. We talked about this. You need to take regular breaks. You know it's the healthy thing to do.

JJ's about to argue, but he knows that he can't make a case for himself. I'm using his own words against him. He's all about good health practices but his concern is always for other people, never himself.

If he didn't have Asher and I looking out for him, he wouldn't be in good shape. He's way too intent on work lately, even more so than usual. I can't blame him, but none of that will work out if he's in no condition to lead his teams. I'm not going to let him destroy his own health for anything.

"You're right," he says. "It's time."

I'm astonished that he's agreeing with me so quickly. We always go back-and-forth for a few minutes while JJ insists he

has just one more thing he needs to do before he stops. I don't fall for that anymore. His 'one more thing' can take hours.

Now JJ knows I won't stop until I get what I want, no matter what excuse he tries to make. He doesn't argue anymore. Not too much, anyway. He has no chance of winning tonight. It's way too late to still be working.

"You need to rest your eyes," I add for emphasis. "Did you even eat recently? Or at all?"

"I ate this morning," Julian says, as if that's a reasonable case he can make.

"Yeah, it's after eleven," I counter. "At night."

"Okay. I'll break for dinner then get back to it. Do you want to order in?"

I'm way ahead of him. "I already have and the food's been delivered. Ready and waiting."

"Great," he says, thrown off. Usually I have to talk him into stopping while we're waiting for dinner but not this time. I've wised up to that tactic of his too.

We head into the living room where I've already got everything set up. Plates and pizza boxes are spread out over Asher's insanely large coffee table. Normally I'd click the TV on, but not tonight. Tonight's going to be different.

"How's everything progressing? Timeline still on track?" I ask him as we start to eat. Julian's already looking more relaxed than he was. I know he's driven, but burnout's a real thing. I've been there myself and I make a point of taking it a little easier than I used to. I'm going to make sure my friend does the same.

It's not easy to stop when you're into what you're doing. I get that. Asher's the same way. One of the things that we all have in common is that we're all pretty single-minded and driven.

Julian's a whole other kind of breed. He's passionate about this project in a way that goes beyond how invested the rest of us are.

“It’s not bad.” He tells me briefly about what he’s working on. It only takes a moment before I pick up on what he’s not saying. JJ’s not going to stop for the night, he’s just taking a break for now and then he intends to get back to it.

That’s no good. I’m enjoying talking to him, especially when I get him away from the topic of work. I’m into my work too but there’s only so much you can focus on it before anyone would need a break.

“Let’s have a couple beers,” I suggest. I know Julian doesn’t like to go back to work after drinking. I cut him off before he can object. “Come on. You’ve been working for what, twelve hours? Fourteen? It’s time to stop and kick back. You know that as well as I do.”

He rubs at his eyes and blinks at me. “Okay.”

That’s how I know he must be pretty tired because he’d usually put up more of a fight at this point.

“Great. I’ll get them.”

I head to the kitchen before JJ can change his mind. Asher’s got one hell of a nice place, even better than I realized before I moved in. I’m going to have to up my own game for finding my next one. I’ve already decided I’m not going to settle for anything less than this.

At the same time, I’m not sure how much I care either. This is a great penthouse and the location can’t be beat, but most of what makes it great for me is being constantly in contact with my two best friends.

In spite of what I told Asher, being in between places isn’t the main reason I wanted to crash here.

All I can think about lately is something that happened back when we were all in college.

Julian and I used to have a lot of fun when we were roommates. He’s always been very studious but back then he knew how to have a great time. All he needed was someone to bring it out of him and I was very good at that. He gives his all in everything he does and that includes letting loose. Or he used to.



Now it's time to bring that out of him again.

I grab a couple of beers. Then I make it four. This night needs a good kickoff.

There's something that happened between Julian and I that Asher doesn't know about. One unforgettable night back in college. Just one, but it changed everything. Lately I can't get it off my mind.

I can't take much more of the distraction. Tonight's the night I'm planning for it to happen again.

JJ's staring out the window when I get back, lost in thought. Of course he is. We sit and drink in silence while I try and decide what to say. It's nice just hanging out not doing anything. I shouldn't disrupt it.

I can't help myself. "Do you remember," I begin. "Back when we first met." I stop short and swallow hard. Unexpected nerves come out of nowhere and threaten to overwhelm me.

As much as I want to, maybe this isn't something I can talk about. Action's always better anyway.

I busy myself with opening another beer. I'm about to offer one to Julian when I notice that he's only about half through his first one. I'm a lot more wired up than I should be. I take a long drink and try to mentally slap myself into shape. Get it together, Blair.

"Sure. What about it?" Julian asks me. "Something in particular on your mind?"

"Oh, you know. I was just thinking of things. Nothing really, just in general," I falter.

Julian fixes me with his intense gaze. Not surprising, since I sound like an idiot. I blink and look away. He's too sharp to let it go. Since he walks around so often with his head in the clouds, his thoughts completely filled with whatever project he is working on, it's easy to forget that JJ knows me just as well as I know him. He notices a lot more than he lets on. I shouldn't have said a word.

I clench my beer bottle tightly, trying to come up with some way to change the subject and failing miserably. Which is pretty disconcerting since I'm never at a loss for words. I can always find something to talk about with absolutely anyone.

"Not nothing," Julian says. For a second I wonder if he can somehow read my mind or guess what I'm remembering. No. Not possible. It was one time in all of our years together at college. I could be thinking about anything. There's no way he can guess. It probably meant nothing to him. He likely never so much as gave it a second thought, or even forgot about it after it happened. The total opposite of me.

He takes a thoughtful sip of his beer before setting the bottle back on the coffee table. Stretching his arms wide, he folds them back behind his head as he leans back against the sofa. I can't resist checking him out, what with his broad chest on display like it is now.

No doubt about it. JJ's one handsome man with a killer body. It was obviously a mistake to move in with him. There's a real danger that he might catch me checking him out one of these times.

I still try to play it cool. I'm waiting for him to say something while I keep drinking. I'm halfway through the bottle by the time he does.

"What's on your mind, Logan?"

I draw a blank as his direct question makes me start to sweat. Racking my brain frantically, I try to think of something I can talk about. Anything. My mind won't cooperate. It's like one of those nightmares where you're in an exam and you can't remember anything you were sure you knew five minutes before. Except this is real. I can't come up with a single thing about college beyond what's been burning into my thoughts every night and every day, ever since we moved in together.

I shrug. "Nothing much. Just thinking about how far we've come since college."

“True,” JJ agrees. “We’re exactly where we aimed to be. This is it. Everything comes down to what we’re going to pull off in the next few weeks. It’s make or break time.”

“Exactly. That’s what I’m talking about,” I say. It’s not, but who cares. I don’t know what I was thinking. Except that with Asher out for the night, I wanted to be alone with Julian. I thought tonight would go a lot more smoothly than this.

I must’ve been crazy to think that something would happen like it did that time in college when JJ and I both got super drunk. I’ve never been that wasted before or since. Same with Julian.

I don’t know what was different about that particular night but we started early and didn’t stop. It was right in the middle of exams. We both looked up at each other in the middle of studying.

“We have to get out of here,” I told him.

“Bar’s open,” he said. “We should go.”

So we did. Yeah, we certainly did. It was hours later that we staggered back to our dorm room and collapsed together.

That’s when things happened that I never expected. Things that I had only thought about up until then.

I’ve tried so hard to put that night out of my mind. It’s just a memory I should leave behind. Neither one of us said a word about it afterwards. It was as if it never happened. As if that one time didn’t completely shift my world.

It’s not that I hadn’t thought about guys in that way before. I absolutely had.

The fact that it was with Julian made all the difference.

Lately that night’s been on my mind so much that I can hardly stand it. Obviously I have no idea how to go about making something happen again. I might’ve had some attraction to other random guys now and then, but not enough to make anything happen.

I want Julian so much I’m tongue-tied.

I did try to join the gay club scene to get this craziness out of my system. I could never let myself pick anyone up. I couldn't take that final step. All I could think about was Julian, and that I wanted much more than just sex as far as he's concerned.

Which is pretty terrifying, since I can't even begin to figure out how to have a relationship with a guy. That was fine when it was enough just to have crushes on guys back in high school. It was safe enough since I knew I'd never act on them. I always figured it was a weird phase that I'd get over anyway.

As much as there's some mainstream acceptance of same sex relationships, that sure as hell didn't extend as far as my high school. Being gay made you a target. Luckily I wasn't just attracted to guys.

It's been easier to stay on my own outside of a few hookups. I don't feel like I can open up to a woman about who I really am.

When I met Julian, every feeling I was in the habit of ignoring came back and only grew over time as I got to know him. The longer we lived together, the more I was attracted to him. It was even worse because it went way beyond physical. His mind, who he is. I can't resist anything about him.

My brilliant idea to end this torture of wanting someone I can't have was to live with him again, thinking I'd get sick of him. That's backfiring hard. I'm more into him than ever. Now that I'm in the middle of it, I don't know what I was thinking. Probably that it was all I could come up with and I had to change something.

On top of that, Elena dropping back into my life has thrown me completely off my game. I had a crush on her in school and now I know that hasn't gone away either.

I'm torn between wanting her and him.

JJ's gazing at me in that appraising way he gets when he's hell-bent on working out a problem. I shift around, uncomfortable with the idea of him being able to perceive my

turbulent thoughts. No matter what problem he sets his mind to, his powers of analysis are unmatched by anyone.

Clearing my throat, I knock back the rest of my beer. “Do you want another one?” I ask him, glancing around and realizing that we’re surrounded by empties and that’s mostly because of me.

“No.” His voice drops. I glance over at JJ to see what’s up. His eyes lock with mine. For a moment I wonder if he really can read my mind. That’s the very last thing I need.

I swallow hard. “What then? More pizza?” I offer him a slice and he lets his fingers graze over mine as he takes it from me. Jesus Christ. I can’t let on how much that affected me. I make a concentrated effort to relax, only to end up moving around awkwardly once again.

The atmosphere’s changed. It’s getting thick with something I can’t quite identify. Definitely tension on my part. What else? I’m not sure. I like to think I know what Julian’s thinking most of the time. That’s not happening now.

I got myself into this strange situation and now I have no idea how to get out of it. I don’t know what to say to JJ. Being tongue-tied is far from my natural state.

I could walk away. Mumble something about having to make a call. Which wouldn’t work since it’s getting close to midnight. I try to focus my thoughts. If Asher gets back soon, he’ll be my ticket out of this situation. He can break the tension between us. If he makes it back at all, he’ll be back pretty late.

I can’t make a move. Somehow it seems like it’d be worse if I left now for some reason. As if things would end up being even more uneasy between us. That’s the last thing I want.

I think that’s why I’m frozen. I want Julian. I want everything from him. I can’t just hit on him like I planned. I wouldn’t ever do anything that could damage our friendship. I can’t lose that. Not to mention that if I made a move on him and he turned me down, that alone would destroy our working relationship. I can’t risk messing everything up. No way.

“I’m going to get another beer. I’ll bring you one too,” I say. That’s the only way I can extract myself. I’m about to stand up when to my surprise, JJ stops me by gripping my arm.

“What’s wrong, Logan? You’re awfully tense all of a sudden.”

I try to make sure my voice is steady before I speak. His hand on my arm is causing a reaction in me that I’d very much prefer that he doesn’t notice. I might as well be a teenager again. Getting turned on by a simple, casual touch. Ridiculous.

“Nothing. Nothing that another beer won’t cure.” If only that was true. My attempt at being light sounds fake as hell even to my ears.

“Looks like you’re the tense one these days, not me,” JJ says. He hasn’t moved his hand off me. I don’t pull away either.

“Not really,” I say, my voice cracking and betraying me.

“I think you are.” JJ’s voice is still lower than normal. He slides his hand up my arm and my jeans get tighter. “Seems like you’re the one who could really use a massage.”

I blink hard as he slides his hands to my shoulders. Tense is one word for it. My entire body locks up as JJ presses his thumbs into my muscles.

I try to distract myself from what his hands are doing to me by analyzing JJ’s technique. Good massage overall. Firm and not too rough. Massage therapist could be JJ’s fall-back career if he needs one. I try to come up with a joke about that. I can’t speak.

At least I’m turned away from him so he can’t see what his strong hands are doing to me. The last thing I need is for him to get a glimpse of my growing erection.

It’s getting harder to keep up my attempts at distancing myself from what’s going on. JJ squeezes my arms and then changes course abruptly. His fingers trail over to my back,

moving lower down. Every one of his touches sends bursts of electricity all through my body.

Every time I think JJ must be about to stop what he's doing and back off, he doesn't.

His roving hands reach my lower back and to my utter shock, his fingers slide around to my hips. What the hell.

I can't breathe as JJ starts working his way forward. He shifts slightly so he's closer to me, so close I can feel his hot breath against the back of my neck. I shiver involuntarily. I was the one who was going to make something like this happen. The last thing in the world I expected was for Julian to be the one to do it.

I'm frozen in place, desire burning through me as I wait and wonder how far JJ intends to go. If he keeps moving, there'll be no hiding the full effect he's having on me. His fingers inch closer and closer to my aching cock.

He stops just short of touching me, his hands sliding away. I exhale so loudly, I startle both of us.

I wanted so much for him to continue and go further. So much further. I still can't move. I can't even show him what I want, let alone say a word.

I want to slam my fist into a wall. I don't know how much longer I can endure this one-sided attraction. It's torturing me like nothing else ever.

JJ leans his chin onto my shoulder. "Still tense?" He asks. "Should I keep going?"

My voice comes out hoarse. "Still tense," I echo. "Need a few things worked out." I lean back so I'm pressing against him in a gesture that I hope makes it clear enough what it is that I really want. His chest is strong and solid behind me.

JJ moves his hands again, sliding them further forward than last time. My blood pumps as he brushes my throbbing cock.

He strokes me once over the taut fabric of my jeans before dropping his hands back onto my thighs. His mouth is still

right by my ear.

“Lots of tension around here.” JJ’s got a commanding presence that I wasn’t expecting at all. One of the few things that I’m sure about from that night back in college is that I was the one who made the first move. Now it’s as if I’m under some sort of spell and he’s the one calling all the shots. That’s not me, never has been. Not until right now.

“Looks like it needs to be worked out,” JJ continues. “What do you think, Logan?”

I nod, words failing me for about the millionth time tonight. My whole world’s narrowed down to JJ’s touch and his body pressed against me. I want him so badly I can’t move. What’s going on now feels too fragile. If I move, I might break the moment and it’ll all disappear. I can’t take that chance.

JJ bites at my neck. Sparks skate over my skin. “Say it, Logan,” he says into my ear. “Tell me what you want.”

I cover his hand with mine, dragging it right back to where I want it. “You know what I want.”

That’s not good enough for him. This is a side I’ve never seen from mild-mannered Julian. It’s one of the hottest things ever. For now, I’m his to do whatever he wants with.

He gives my throbbing cock a squeeze. “Tell me,” he says again, and I groan when he puts his hands at my zipper but stops without lowering it.

“Everything,” I say, and that’s all it takes to get him going again. I know JJ’s going to take that as a sexual meaning and while part of me doesn’t care, at the same time I want him to know the whole truth. I want everything with him, and as hot as I am for him, hot enough to maybe even beg for it, sex isn’t nearly enough for me.

But I’ll take it.

JJ’s lowering my zipper, his hand about to slip into my briefs and finally, finally curve around my eager cock. I’m holding my breath until I choke when we both hear the front door opening up.



JJ pulls his hands off me as if he's been burned. I struggle to get my pants back in order, the zipper snagging on fabric as I frantically tug at it. I almost want to laugh at the situation and my instant reaction to it. It's as if we're teenagers trying not to get caught by our parents but there's nothing funny here.

In sheer panic, I start to try and tidy up our beer bottles as if that's what I was already doing as Asher's footsteps come down the hallway towards JJ and I. He doesn't know a thing about this side of me. It's the only secret I have from him and I absolutely don't want to change that.

"Hey," Asher says. "What's up?"

I keep my head bent down and try to stop my hands shaking from the sudden burst of adrenaline that hasn't worn off yet. JJ sits calmly on the sofa, completely unruffled. He doesn't care that Asher nearly walked in on us. How can he not? I can't even face the idea of Asher catching us, let alone the reality. The thought of it almost makes me sick.

"Not much," JJ says easily as he crosses his legs. "Dinner and a few drinks."

"A few?" Asher laughs. "Not if Logan's your drinking partner. Did you leave any for me?" He comes over, slapping me on the back like he always does. I nearly jump out of my skin.

"Yeah," I reply rapidly, hoping he doesn't notice how agitated I am. "I think so. It's not like I didn't deserve most of them, since I managed to drag Julian away from the computer before midnight."

"Good work," Asher says to me admiringly. "That takes some doing."

"Yeah, Logan was pretty distracting. I couldn't keep my hands off of what he had to offer me." JJ gestures at the empty pizza boxes while my face burns. What the hell? Julian never jokes, let alone like that. That's what I do. I'm the joker. Not him.

JJ finds the one unopened bottle among our empties. "Do you want this?"

He holds it up to Asher, who shakes his head. “Rain check. I can barely keep my eyes open. I’ll see you fellows in the morning, we’ve got a lot of ground to cover.”

“There’s something I wanted to ask you, real quick.” JJ gets up and goes off with Asher. Their voices get distant as they disappear down the hallway and I’m left swirling in my own confusion.

What the hell is that? JJ just took off without a glance in my direction. The fuck?

I tidy up the living room, discarding the trash and placing the many bottles into the recycling bin. Any buzz I had is long gone. I consider pouring myself a triple of something strong then decide against it. This night needs to come to an end.

Goddamn it. I’m totally rattled at how JJ and I left things. It would’ve been better if tonight hadn’t happened in the first place. I’m worse off now than before.

I get ready to go to bed and nothing I do will distract my cock from what was happening earlier. Smashing my hand against the light switch, I trip over something in the dark. Fuck.

I’ve barely shed my clothes and climbed into bed when the door to my room opens, a pale stream of light pouring in from the hallway. It’s blocked by the shape of a figure who steps inside, the door clicking quietly closed behind him.

# Chapter 13

## Logan

Whipping the sheet back, JJ exposes me completely. He can easily see how ready I am for him. My erection swells under his intense gaze.

I can just barely make out the bulge in his pants in the darkness of the room. It's way too tempting. He keeps his eyes on my aching, throbbing cock even as he starts to take his clothes off.

Now I don't have to hold back.

I reach out for JJ just as he wraps his fingers around my rigid shaft. I groan and he clamps his free hand over my mouth.

"Careful." I nod and he takes his hand away, sitting down beside me. "I take it you want to keep this between us?"

Remembering that Asher's around and could walk past my room at any moment, I nod again.

JJ grins. "Same."

I don't know if that means we'll only ever do this once but there's no reason in the world to waste a thought on that right now.

I suck in my breath as JJ moves his hand. He strokes my raging cock a few times, teasing me slowly before he climbs onto the bed. We're lying side by side, so close our bodies are pressed together. I can barely stifle my next groan.

"Is this why you wanted us to live together?" Julian mutters under his breath, so quietly than I can barely hear him. I don't answer and he lifts his hand, leaving it hovering over my aching erection.

"Yes." I'm glad it's so dark in here. These blackout curtains are paying off. I don't want JJ to see my confusion. I

never thought he'd guess that.

“So you've been thinking about me.” His fingers go back to making me gasp for air.

“Yes.”

“Just me? Or Asher too?”

I can't answer him. Ash is a whole other story, one I can't even think about under normal circumstances. I snort as if the idea's ridiculous. Thankfully JJ doesn't push me for a real answer.

Everything's turned upside down. I thought if JJ and I hooked up in any way, I'd have the upper hand. I don't, not even close. I thought it was going to be me being the one to make this happen. And even though I started it, JJ's going to be the one to finish it.

Or is this just the beginning?

I thrust my straining cock through his fingers. I'm so caught up in what he's doing to me, I don't reach out for him.

I'm hovering on a cliff when JJ stops and climbs on top of me. Moving between my thighs, he pushes them apart as he presses the head of his big prick against my balls. He thrusts his hot, hard cock against mine. They grind against each other and the sensation's like nothing else in the world. It's so intense I can hardly stand it.

Reaching between our bodies, I curl my hand around both of our cocks together. I can barely breathe with the crazy deep arousal I'm feeling. It's like nothing I've ever felt before. He grinds against me and it's more than I can take.

In seconds I explode, clenching my jaw tightly to keep from making noise. Somehow trying to hold back makes what we're doing even hotter. I catch JJ grinning as he watches me losing all control.

Once my ultra-intense orgasm subsides, I try to grip him but he pulls away and kneels beside me. His thick cock fills my vision.

“Want a taste, Blair?”

“Yeah,” I say, and he moves up closer, stopping by my face. “You know I do.”

“Go on,” JJ says roughly, his voice as filled with need as I am.

Imagining sucking another man’s cock is a lot different than being confronted with the reality of it. My blood pumps with urgent desire. This is Julian, who I’ve been crushing on for so very long now. I can’t quite believe this is happening.

JJ drops his hands lightly onto my head, guiding me into place. I drag my tongue up and down the length of his shaft before I ease it into my mouth. I take a moment to explore, teasing my tongue all over, getting used to the way it feels. Enjoying the intimate taste of him before I start to suck hungrily.

JJ’s control is fraying. A low groan tears free from his throat before he can stop it in spite of his efforts to keep quiet. If I didn’t have my mouth blissfully filled with his throbbing cock I’d be grinning at the pleasure I’m giving him. Not to mention myself. Sucking on a man for the first time has my own cock completely rigid and ready to go again.

Julian groans out his approval of what I’m doing. I grip base of his cock, stroking as I continue to suck.

“Yes. Fuck!”

Julian never swears. Or so I thought. I pull out all the stops to drive him over the edge. I swirl my tongue over the head of his cock, teasing him before I go back to sucking. Without warning he tenses up, his fingers strengthening their grip on my hair.

I start to suck harder. His hips arch up as he groans, the deep sound almost echoing through me. JJ clenches his teeth together tightly as he erupts.

He floods my mouth. I swallow as much as I can manage.

Completely spent, JJ pulls away and sits back on his heels. “Jesus, Logan. Have you been practicing that?”

“No. You’re my first,” I say without thinking.

His eyes gleam. “Is that right.”

I have to wonder if JJ’s got more experience with men than I thought. When he slides down the bed so his head’s at my hips, all thoughts rush out of my mind.

I gasp as his lips circle around my engorged shaft. Holding the base firmly, he uses his free hand to massage my balls. His tongue runs all over my cock and my hips pump forward with a will of their own.

As much as I want to enjoy my cock being sucked by a man for the first time, it’s impossible for it to last. I nearly came just from sucking on him so it’s only a moment before I’m coming into his mouth.

Julian grins when I’m spent. “That was even better than I imagined it would be.”

My jaw falls open as he turns and flops onto his back, closing his eyes. Those words could’ve been mine. He was imagining it too. JJ was thinking about me the same way I was about him.

Un-fucking-believable.

“We’ll have to make that last longer next time.” JJ’s swinging his legs off the bed and standing up before I can take in what he just said.

“Next time?” I murmur quietly, hoping he can hear me as he climbs back into his discarded clothes.

“Yeah. Next time.” He leans over me, his eyes filled with a mix of satisfaction and triumph. “There will be a next time.”

# Chapter 14

## Asher

I usually get my coffee to go. Now I remember why. It's way too busy in this café for me to be able to concentrate on anything. All I'm accomplishing is watching people get their orders and hurry off on their way. That's probably what I should be doing. I don't know made me believe that I could work in a coffee shop. Probably would've worked out better if I'd found a table further away from the counter.

I wanted to get away from the office, although it might've been a mistake to come here to try and think. When I need a break from working at home, the office environment always re-energizes me. Today it's stifling, so I took a short walk to stretch my legs and ended up here. Bad choice.

Or maybe it's just that I'm too preoccupied and it doesn't matter where I go. Being distracted bothers me. I'm laser-focussed when I need to be, which is pretty much all the time.

I force myself to sip slowly at my dark chocolate espresso while some guy barks out his order and changes it over and over again. I study him with an analytical eye. He's got all the signs of being lower management at best. If he had any authority at all, he wouldn't be trying to boss around a harried barista. She's operating remarkably well under the relentless flow of people needing their early afternoon caffeine boost. He's irritating me and I'm not even the one dealing with him.

I try to tune the guy out. There's no time for idiots like him. I've got to get my mind off of the reason I escaped in the first place. The unexpected distraction of Elena.

I certainly didn't have any plans to start something with her. Not that I wasn't tempted, but I've resisted that kind of beautiful, interesting temptation before. Thanks to the constant scrutiny that CEOs are subject to even in our personal lives, I've got to project a certain public image. That includes

appearing to be part of a couple, even if that image isn't real. Advisor after advisor has informed me that it's essential. Even more important than actually being a stable, above board leader is always maintaining the appearance of being one.

I wouldn't want to take the chance of rattling our investors. A side bonus is keeping any gossip onto who I might be seeing instead of anything real, like our company or actual personal lives. Being the main face of our company, I make a point of keeping up appearances.

I should never have let anything happen between Elena and I. I can't get involved. Certain things my last ex said to me still ring in my mind. I keep her words at the forefront and let them dictate my relationships—or lack of them—because she was completely right.

*You don't have time for me. You never made space in your life for the possibility of 'us'.*

As much as I wanted to, I could never give her or our relationship the time and attention that was needed. When she broke it off, I couldn't blame her one bit. I vowed to myself not to try to have serious relationships while work is my number one priority.

It was the right choice. It's easy enough to go out and find someone for a single night whenever I want to. As long as we're both clear on that there's no future to be had, it works out. Sleeping with high-powered women who are just as busy as I am has always been the perfect solution. No strings. No attachments.

Then it happened that none of the women that are fine with being my usual plus ones were available. I was starting to have to consider attending solo, which would have raised quite a few significant eyebrows and been far from ideal. Or cancelling altogether, and that was never a real option. I was expected to be at that gala, no question at all.

Running into Elena in the building was the unexpected solution to an issue that was becoming a far bigger problem than it should've been. I'm a problem solver. It's frustrating



when something so trivial, that should be so easy to solve, was getting away from me.

I was about ready to take Logan or Julian as my date when Elena spilled the contents of her life all over the lobby and saved me.

I never expected that the more time I spent with her, the more enticing she was. By the time we got back that night, I couldn't resist her anymore. I'm glad I didn't keep trying. It was a night to remember.

Now I want more. I want to sleep with her again, of course, but it's more than just that. I want to get to know her better. Maybe even have her in my life.

The real problem is that if I do give in to what I want, the same thing will happen as it did with all of my other exes. Probably sooner too, since work's getting frenzied.

My attraction's not so easy to ignore when Elena lives right across the hall. My jaw tightens. For fuck's sake. A fake date with a neighbor turned out to be a bad move on my part.

I still don't regret it.

Except for the fact that I can't get her off of my mind. I didn't think it through far enough, which isn't like me. It's my job to consider everything from all angles and arrive at the best decision for every situation. This time I dropped the ball. I never do with work. I should've remembered that my personal life always turns out to be another story.

Impatiently I down the rest of my coffee. I've got to get back to the office and get my mind back in the game, not spend anymore time thinking about my night with Elena.

Or how much I'd like to make it happen again.

I can't keep replaying it in my mind. It's over with and I've got to keep to the plan, which was one evening with her and that's it. There's no point in trying for anything more than what's already happened.

My resolve is firm now. I can get back to work. It's after work's done and I'm back home that I'm worried about.

Tossing my coffee cup, I head up to the counter where the annoying guy is still hassling the barista over nothing.

“Leave her alone.” I let my voice drop into a commanding tone. I’m intimidating when I decide to be and this guy doesn’t take much effort to scare. His mouth opens and closes as he struggles with what to say. I bet no one’s confronted him on his low-level behavior before.

The barista shoots me a grateful look and I nod before I turn around to leave. I’m confident that even this loser won’t start up again after I’m gone.

# Chapter 15

## Logan

Nothing else has happened with JJ since that night. The one I keep replaying over and over again in my mind. I'm happy that our friendship's fine.

Not at all happy that nothing's changed between us either. It's as if the other night didn't happen at all.

Guess I was right. It's not possible to have a relationship with another man. At least not for me.

So I'm going to turn my attention onto the other person who I can't stop thinking about. Elena and Asher haven't gone out again since he took her to that benefit thing. There's nothing going on between them so I want to see where her head's at. Every time I see her, the signals I get are even more mixed.

The few years that passed since high school haven't changed how I feel about Elena. Nothing has. From the day she showed up at Asher's door, I haven't been able to get her off my mind. Now I can do something about it. I want to spend time with her and not just a couple of minutes here and there when we run into each other.

Grabbing the bags that just got dropped off, I head over to her place. Her eyes narrow when she answers her door.

"Logan." She eyes me suspiciously. "What's this?"

"I'm inviting myself over for dinner, and I brought it along. I don't get the impression that you're someone who cooks. Even if you are, this is easier. Everything's done and ready. What do you say, Olson?"

"You want to have dinner with me?" Elena asks slowly, as if she can't believe the idea.

"Sure, why not? Come on, it's getting cold."

“Okay.” Reluctantly she lets me in. That’s one of the reasons I wanted to spend some time with her. This weird aversion thing she’s got going on has got to stop. Good thing I brought a bottle of wine too.

“Nice place, Elena.” I glance around it. “Show me the kitchen, if you know where it is.”

“I’ll have you know I can cook just fine. It’s this way.” She gives me a slightly mistrustful glance as we walk. “Do you always show up unannounced at someone’s place bearing dinner?”

“No, but we’re neighbors. Nothing wrong hanging out.” I ask as she gets some plates out. “Everything good with you? Did your meeting go well?”

“Yes,” she says. “All good.”

I can’t help but notice her awkwardness. “If you don’t want me here, Olson, I can leave. Just say the word. Dinner’s yours and yours alone.”

“It’s not that. Not exactly,” she says. “I’m mostly wondering why you’re here.”

“Not exactly? Ouch.” I clutch at my chest. “I came over because I wanted to spend some time with you.”

Her brow crinkles in an endearingly cute way. “Yes, but why? It’s not like we’re friends.”

“We used to be. High school wasn’t that long ago, Elena. Don’t tell me you’ve forgotten that.”

“We were friends. Were, as in past tense. Then we weren’t, and I haven’t forgotten what you did.”

“What I did?” I echo. “What’s that?”

Her mouth hardens. “Don’t pretend like you don’t remember.”

I genuinely don’t know what she’s talking about. I spread my arms wide. “I really don’t know what you mean, Elena. Let’s discuss it over dinner.”

“Fine,” she says grudgingly. “Since we have to be neighbors now, maybe we should get to where we can be civil to each other.”

I’m about to comment that I have no problem with that, but stop myself in time. She’s actually upset about something.

“What’s up,” I prod her after we start eating and she still hasn’t said a word. I didn’t come over here to have dinner in silence. I could do that by myself if I wanted to.

Elena sets her fork down and picks it up again, turning it between in her fingers. “I don’t forgive you. You made my senior year hell. Now you’re saying you don’t remember what you did? That’s cold, Logan.”

“Elena,” I begin. “I honestly don’t. If you tell me, we can clear the air.”

She snorts. “So ruining my life meant nothing to you? Good to know. Maybe you should leave now.”

“I don’t want to leave. I want to know what’s going on. How can I make things right when I don’t know what I did? All I remember is us being friends and then drifting apart.”

“Drifting apart? That’s not even close to what happened.” Her eyes are blistering. “What happened was you made a fool out of me. You told everyone I had a crush on you. I got teased about it for months and months. It was awful. Relentless. Every day someone tacked photos of you up on my locker. I got texts from guys who I barely even knew taunting me. No one would let up on it.”

“Those were just jokes. No one meant anything by them,” I say. “Beside, I didn’t spread that rumor around. It wasn’t me.”

“You told the biggest gossip in the school that you heard I thought you were hot. He ran with that and it spread to everyone.”

“Who, Zep?” I might’ve done that. I don’t remember. He and I weren’t exactly friends, but we knew each other from around.

“Of course it was Zep. Who else? I thought he and I were friends too but he’d sell anyone out as long as he kept his reputation of being the guy who’s the first to know about everything going on. That was his whole deal, don’t you remember? Zep made being a gossip his entire personality. It was the only thing he could do to be remotely popular since he was such a creep. The rumors never died down. I couldn’t date because of it. Every single guy that I liked thought I was into you. I mean, it was bad enough that you weren’t interested in me. All of that on top of it was awful.”

“I had no idea all that happened. No wonder you always act like you hate me. But I did like you, Elena.” More than you ever knew.

“You really had no idea?” She’s suspicious. “I thought that’s what you wanted to happen.”

“Of course not. I’d never want anything bad to happen to you, Elena. I’m sorry.”

Her eyes soften. “I don’t hate you.”

“Is that right? Because every time I see you, I get the distinct feeling that you want to stab me. If looks could kill, I’d be dead over and over again. I never knew why.”

“Okay, maybe I did hate you,” she concedes. “I thought you enjoyed making me a target. I did like you back then because I thought you were a good guy. It also wasn’t easy to think I got that so wrong.”

“I was. I am.”

She’s struggling with her old ideas about me running up against reality. Without thinking, I wind my fingers around hers. “Elena,” I say. “What do you think now?”

There’s something in her eyes that makes me pause. Like she just might still feel the same way about me as she says she did back in high school.

I’m so lost in thinking about what to do with this new info that I almost crack a joke so she won’t be able to read what I’m thinking. I stop myself. Wrong moment, Blair. It’s too important.

She hesitates. I'm on edge with the anticipation of what her answer might mean to me. I want her to like me as a friend at the very least. I curl my fingers lightly around hers.

"You," she says, then stops. She's not pulling away. I don't want her to. I don't want to let go of her for a long time.

"I mean," she starts again. "I never expected you to say that."

"It's the truth." I want to convince her more than anything. What Elena thinks of me matters, way more than it should. "I might've been a jerk in some ways back then, but I'd never do anything that mean."

I catch her gaze straight on and tighten my grip on her hand. "Do you believe me?" Everything hinges on her answer.

"Yes," she says. "I do."

It takes everything in me to stop myself from gathering her up in my arms and kissing her until neither one of us can breathe. From the look she gives me, I get the strong sense that she'd be just as into that as I am.

I clear my throat. "Good. That's good." Very reluctantly, I give her hand a squeeze before I let go. "So now we can be friends."

"Friends," she echoes. Her face is completely unreadable. "Yes. Exactly what I was thinking."

# Chapter 16

## Logan

“Good morning, Logan.”

My hand jerks, spilling a few drops of hot coffee onto my skin. “Jesus, Asher. You scared the hell out of me.”

His voice coming from out of nowhere shakes me up. I was so lost in thought, I didn’t hear him come into the kitchen. The marble floor in his kitchen soaks up sound like nothing else. It’s way too easy to sneak up on somebody without meaning to.

“You’re pretty jumpy this morning. What’s up?”

A burning wave of deep embarrassment washes over me. I didn’t sleep for a moment after I got to bed last night. My own bed, that is. Asher caught me sneaking out of Julian’s room well after midnight.

All he did was say goodnight. I couldn’t stop shaking even after I closed my bedroom door behind me. I can’t exactly pretend Julian and I were working. Asher wasn’t supposed to find out about us. My throat tightens. I have no idea what to do now.

It was only our second time together. I was wrapping up a late night in front of some spreadsheets when JJ pulled exactly the same move on me as I did on him. A brief shoulder massage led directly into his bedroom.

Part of me is relieved that my secret’s out and Asher isn’t flipping over it. So far. I dig up the nerve to look at my best friend. He’s gazing at me like he always does. There’s not a trace of judgement in his slightly amused expression even though he discovered that something’s going on between me and Julian.

“Everything okay?” Asher prompts. I must look like a wreck. A night of worrying about everything from losing my



best friend to what my future's going to be like will do that to a guy.

Asher leans back against the counter. I nod as I pour him some coffee.

“Where's Julian?” He asks me.

“How would I know?”

I regret my sharp tone as much as my words. Okay, I can't dodge it. We're going to have to talk about this or I'll drive my friend away just by being a touchy asshole without meaning to be.

I don't have anything to be ashamed of. Knowing this doesn't do a thing to change how I feel. There's still that lingering shame I've carried around for so long.

“Sorry,” I begin. “I didn't mean to snap at you.”

Asher lifts his mug to his lips for a cautious sip. “This is better than usual, Logan. Much better.”

“JJ and I are sleeping together.” The words fly out of my mouth. This isn't how I wanted to start this conversation. Not at all.

“If that's what it takes to get you to make a better cup of coffee,” he says. “Who knew that gay sex was the key all along.”

I huff out an uneasy laugh. “I guess that's what it took.”

Asher's big grin starts to set me at ease. “Then you should've done it a lot sooner.”

I don't know what to make of his non-reaction. “You don't seem that surprised.”

“I'm not. I figured out there was something going on between you.”

“Really? How?” I've been making a real effort to be very careful. It was exhausting.

“It's not like you guys were obvious but I know you pretty well. It's the way you've been acting around Julian lately.

You're not yourself at all."

Asher pours himself some more coffee. "So, what's going on? Are you a couple?"

"No," I say quickly. "Not at all."

His eyebrow rises as if he can see right through me. "Do you want to be?"

I cough awkwardly. "Well, it's Julian. Even if I wanted that kind of thing with him, it's not really an option. He's married to his work. There's no room for anything else."

"Is it only Julian you're into? Or men in general?"

"I'm not gay. I'm bisexual." I take a deep breath. If I'm going to be honest with Asher, it's going to be about everything. "If you weren't seeing Elena, I would be. I've had a crush on her since high school."

"Is that right?"

My pulse wakes up again as Asher's clear eyes dive into my soul. "I was wondering about that too," he says, his lips curving into a smile that only made my heart beat faster. "You acted strangely when I said I was going to see Elena again. So you're into everybody? What about me?"

I force a strangled laugh. He has to be joking. He has to be kidding.

He's not. His eyes catch hold of mine and won't let go. Asher Kingston have any woman he wants. Does he want men too? I almost dismiss the thought flat out but then again, I have to wonder. I kept my own bisexuality hidden from everyone. What if Asher's done the same thing? The thought almost knocks me over.

His question hangs in the air between us. The intensity in his gaze is starting to become almost too much to bear. A tidal wave of emotions courses through my veins. Confusion's winning out over everything else.

Desire isn't far behind.

What will Asher do if I tell him the truth? It's not just Julian who crosses my mind in very inappropriate ways. It's always been easier to avoid thinking about Asher like that. JJ and I had our first night together back in college, so I already knew he was open to it. Asher's always been unattainable and I never thought about anything actually happening with him in reality.

His expression's serious and he's waiting for me to answer. What if I admit I find him attractive? That's no big deal. Everyone in Manhattan finds Asher attractive. So why is he asking me if I'm into him?

Asher's gaze is steady and unwavering. "Am I the only one that you don't want, Logan?"

My mouth goes dry. "Everyone wants you, Ash. You know that."

"Including you?" He steps in closer. I don't move. He keeps moving, slowly and steadily, until we're inches apart.

In a move that stuns both of us, I set my hands on his shoulders. "What if I do?"

Asher's eyes darken. His breathing gets heavier, matching mine, as he closes the distance between us even more. I close my eyes and savor the way his body's pressing up against mine. My lips part as he reaches up slowly, touching my face with the tips of his fingers. The heat of his hand radiates through my entire body.

For a wild moment I think he's about to kiss me. Instead he moves so his mouth is right by my ear, so near that I can feel his breath on my skin.

"Then there's something we need to talk about."

# Chapter 17

## Elena

After the waiter whisks our plates away, Asher runs his thumb over my knuckles. A shiver of anticipation rushes over me.

“There’s something I need to talk to you about, Elena,” he says.

My pulse quickens. “What’s that?”

“I’m glad you agreed to go out with me again. I didn’t want to wait this long to ask you, but I was torn. The fact is that I’m not in a place to be starting something up,” he says in a low voice. “I’m extremely busy with work and frankly, it’s my main priority. It’s what drives me. Work-life balance doesn’t exist for CEOs. Being in charge of a company like Vivojen means that my work is my life. I don’t have time for much of anything else.”

His gaze softens and he glances away for a moment before turning back to me. “I still couldn’t help myself. I want to be with you, Elena.” His eyes glow with determination as he slides his fingertips down my cheek. “I can’t get you off my mind. I don’t want to.”

A jumble of emotions clouds my thoughts. I shouldn’t be dating him either. We could both walk away and everything would be simpler for both of us.

“I want to be with you too,” I say. “I was hoping you’d ask me out again.”

“My job is the reason that my other relationships ended. It’s easy to think that it’ll all work out, but it never has before.” He shakes his head slightly.

My stomach tightens. “So are you saying we can’t go out again?”

“No. I don’t want that. There’s no way I can let go of you.” Asher’s penetrating eyes burn into mine. “I have another idea.”

Nerves and desire are stirring up a storm in me. I wasn’t really nervous the first time Asher and I slept together. Just a little bit, the way you get when you’re about to be with someone new for the first time. Most of that was just the newness and not knowing exactly what it’s going to be like.

As Asher’s driver pulls up in front of our building, I’m full on shaking with anticipation of what might happen.

Neither one of us says a word as we cross the lobby. Once the elevator doors close behind us, his lips go to mine.

We head straight to his place. He told me we won’t be alone when we get there.

Once the door closes behind us, Asher’s embrace tightens around me and I’m engulfed in his strength. I want this kiss to last with everything in me. It does. Time falls away and I’m still lost in overpowering mixed up feelings when Asher guides me over to the sofa.

We’re deep into a heavy makeout session when someone comes into the room. Logan. He stops short, his eyes locked onto us.

Asher takes my hands in his. “What do you think, Elena?” His voice lowers, deep with hunger. “I’ve seen the way you look at my friend.”

Asher’s solution to him not having much time for a relationship was to let me know that he’d be fine with me being involved with other men. I nearly spit out my wine when he suggested Logan.

“You’d be okay with me seeing your friend? Who you’re living with?” I asked him in disbelief. Just in case I was hallucinating the entire conversation. “Are you serious?”

“Very.” Asher paused, squeezing my fingers lightly. “I spoke with Logan last night. You’d have both of us so you wouldn’t be lacking in male attention.”

“Logan wouldn’t want to go out with me,” I scoffed.

“That’s where you’re wrong, Elena. He’s upset that I went out with you first, because he’s very interested in you.”

“Logan.” I shook my head vigorously. “There’s no way.”

“There is. Very much so,” Asher continued. “We talked at length about it. The only question is, are you into him too? Because the idea of you going out with some stranger doesn’t sit quite as well with me.”

“I don’t know what to say,” I began. “I had a crush on him back in high school.”

“And now?” Asher asked.

“There might be some feelings now too.” I didn’t want to sound overly enthusiastic. As much as I want Asher, I can’t get Logan off my mind either.

Asher’s grin was instant. “I thought as much.”

Now the reality of what I was thinking about on the entire drive back is right here and in my face.

I tense up but Asher squeezes my hands. “Nothing wrong with that,” Asher says. “Like I told you, I don’t mind at all.” I gape at Asher and his beautiful lips curve up in a small smile. “There’s nothing we aren’t willing to share.”

Logan’s gaze has more intensity than I’ve ever seen from him before. There’s not a trace of his usual sarcastic, joking manner. He’s completely serious, maybe for the first time since I’ve known him.

“Share?” I ask, my voice hoarse. “Share me at the same time?”

Asher’s eyebrow rises. “I was thinking that we could start slower than that. I like your idea much, much better.”

I can’t quite speak. Maybe the thought’s crossed my mind, since I’ve been so attracted to Logan too. The atmosphere changes as new possibilities swirl around all of us.

I stare directly into Logan’s eyes even as I answer Asher. “He can watch. To start.”

Logan doesn't blink, as if I'm challenging him to something and he isn't backing down. In a way, that's exactly what I'm doing. Our eyes only unlock when Asher strokes his fingers over my chin, turning me back to face him so he can catch my mouth in a kiss that's even more heated than before.

I didn't think that was possible.

Asher sets his hands onto my hips. Sliding them lower, he lifts me up and moves me so I'm straddling him. His fingers trace up my body, stopping when he reaches my breasts.

I'm very aware of Logan coming closer to us. I expect him to stop and stand nearby but he doesn't. His weight presses down on the sofa as he sits down right next to me. He's so close, there's barely an inch between his leg and mine.

When Asher and I have to come up for air, I steal a glance over at Logan. His excitement's visible and he sets a hand on his crotch, drawing my eyes right to his bulging erection. I'm overcome by a burning need for him to be part of this and not just by watching.

I reach over and set my hand on top of Logan's, startling him. The angle I'm leaning at forces me into Asher's crotch and his steel-hard shaft grinds against my most sensitive parts. Asher's thumbs trace over my nipples. His eyes are glued to the sight of me getting very close to touching his best friend's hard cock.

Logan takes his hand away and moves mine back to take its place. Asher pulls me closer into him so my breasts rub against his chest as I slide my hand up the length of Logan's straining shaft.

He doesn't make a move to touch me. Meanwhile Asher hasn't stopped. His hands are on my back, then my ass. Moving between our bodies, running over my thigh and working their way higher. I moan when he reaches his goal and I've never wanted to be naked as much as I do now.

The fabric mutes his touch just like Logan's pants are doing for me, but I can't reach out to unzip them or I'd slip off of Asher's lap. No need for that to happen.

Logan's hands clench into fists as if he's having difficulty keeping them to himself. His eyes are burning and I can tell how hard it is for him to just sit and watch like I said he could. I didn't mean to tease him. It just felt like the right way to start off. With some shock I realize that none of this seems at all strange or wrong. It all feels natural.

I work my hand into his and he glances at me in surprise as I pull on it. "What're you up to, Olson?"

There's a hint of the Logan I know. Slightly teasing, but his voice is rough and uneven.

Asher's so unfazed by any of this that I can't quite believe it. Now it's my turn to tilt his head up towards me, as much as I don't want to interrupt him from dropping those light kisses onto my throat. He smiles, about to kiss my lips but I have to stop him.

His exploring hands still. "What're you thinking, Elena?"

"You don't mind," I begin, but my voice trails off. Mind what? I don't exactly know what I want here. I mean, I do. I really, really do. I'm just not sure I should say it out loud.

Asher's smile returns. "I know you want each other. I don't mind," Asher says. "Truly."

For an unpleasant moment I think Logan's going to change his mind. I start to ease my hand out of his but he tightens his grip to stop me. We're all frozen in place. I can't help but think that somehow moment's been destroyed.

Then Logan moves and everything changes. He leans in and kisses me.

It's happening. Asher starts to stroke my breasts again. I'm beginning to see just how good this could actually be.

Asher's touch is driving me wild and I work my hand down to Logan's cock, gripping the hard length through his pants. I'm in no position to unzip him. We're still kissing when his hands brush over mine as he frees his cock.

Asher eases me away from my kiss with Logan so he can lift my dress over my head. He's got his mouth locked around



my nipple almost before he's got my bra off. Logan's kissing me again, moving closer so I can reach his cock. At the same time as I start stroking Logan, I grind against Asher's insistent erection.

Logan runs his hands over my bare skin. I quiver under his touch. He doesn't waste any time before his fingers are finding their way to my underwear. He teases around the edges, stroking my soft skin lightly. I twist my body, eager for more. He pushes the fabric aside, knowing what I need. I desperately want to be completely naked but I still don't want to move off of Asher's lap, even for a moment. Logan's fingers begin to explore my wetness.

When Asher groans it strikes me that with the way I'm pressed against him and where Logan's hand is, he must be rubbing Asher's cock every time he strokes my clit. Neither one of them seem to mind.

Between what the two of them are doing to me, I'm rocketing close to coming. It's not just the brand new thrill of being with both of them. I'm mostly naked and the two of them aren't. It's all way hotter than I ever thought something like this would be. Not to mention the strange, unexpected rush of knowing Logan's touching Asher. I want to see more of that. Much more.

Asher has other ideas. He lifts me slightly so he can work his hand between my thighs too. While Logan's toying with my clit, Asher slides a finger inside of me, then a second. My panties keep both of their hands pressed tightly to me. I start to pant from the double sensations, grabbing at Asher's shoulders to keep my balance. I'm coming undone but at the same time they're holding me together. Like they'd catch me if I fall.

Asher flicks his tongue at one of my nipples, barely touching me as he sends flares over my body. Taking a cue from his friend, Logan does the same thing on my other breast and neither one of them lets up on what they're doing. It's all too much to take.

I bury my head into Asher's neck to keep from crying out too loudly. They stroke me until I'm gasping for breath. I'm

not sure my body's ever going to stop throbbing and pulsing.

Soon enough I do. I straighten up and glance between Asher and Logan. They're both gazing at me with a deep desire glistening in their eyes. A thrill rushes through me when I see that they need me as much as they want me. It's unlike anything I've ever experienced before.

Asher brushes his lips lightly across my throat. "Now you're ready for us."

Us. My heart was just starting to slow down. My pulse spikes as Asher lifts me off of his lap, standing so he can rapidly shed his clothes. My eyes are on him until Logan does the same thing and I get an eyeful of two well-muscled men getting naked right in front of me.

Why has this never been a part of my life before?

Asher's got condoms from somewhere and he hands one over to Logan. Another rush of adrenaline shoots through me.

Both of them. I can have both me. This is real.

"Come here, Elena." Asher sits back down, his hands already wrapped around my ass to pull me to him. I climb onto his lap, straddling his legs. Before I can reach for his cock, Logan beats me to it. Heat flares up in me as he grabs Asher's straining erection, giving him a squeeze. He holds Asher's cock up for me and guides me onto it, still not letting go even as I start to take Asher inside of me.

I almost jump when Logan's free hand goes to my clit. I try to keep easing myself down, taking Asher inch by inch but now Logan's kissing me too, his hands still on me and Asher.

When I take him all, Asher grips my hips. Logan keeps working my clit. Having a big cock inside of me while my clit's being expertly stroked is something else.

I'm already close to another orgasm when Logan stops and stands up.

"Not yet," he says with a soft bite to my earlobe. "Hold on."

I groan and Asher runs his hands over my thighs, stopping short of where I want them to be. Logan moves to stand behind me, covering my breasts with his hands.

Asher's lifts up so that he's pumping into me. I move to meet his strokes. He's getting close to coming and I can barely hold back as he grips me tight. I ride him and he thrusts up at the same time. Our rhythm's messy and unmatched but still working to drive us right to the edge.

Logan leans down, his breath hot on my neck. "Come for us, Elena."

Asher holds me still as he drives into me. It's a good thing Logan's solid body is supporting me from behind because I'm about to buck right off of Asher even with him holding onto me.

With a groan Asher erupts, his cock pulsing so hard inside of me that I can feel it to my core.

I collapse against Asher for a moment and Logan steps so he's right beside us. His cock juts out insistently. I lean forward to give it a light lick. To my shock, Asher does the same thing.

Logan sets a hand on our heads, closing his eyes. Asher and I keep going until he takes Logan's cock into his mouth, sucking on him until he tenses up.

Asher pulls back, his eyes locking with mine. "Does watching this turn you on, Elena?"

"Yes." My voice doesn't sound like mine. "More than I imagined it would."

Logan startles. "You imagined this?"

"Maybe something like this." Very, very recently. But still. The idea of a couple of guys together has always been hot. I just never expected to see it play out right in front of my face. Especially between Logan and Asher.

Asher reaches over to give Logan's eager cock a single stroke. "Do you want Logan too, Elena?"

I swallow hard. "Yes."

Logan's already working the condom on. He sits down and Asher passes me over to him. Asher grips Logan's cock and guides me onto it. Instead of standing behind me like Logan did, Asher stays where he's sitting, leaning close so he can kiss me.

I'm twining my tongue with Asher's while Logan drives his cock into me. I take turns kissing each one of them and when Logan thrusts faster, Asher presses his thumb firmly against my clit, moving in small circles. His other hand finds Logan's balls, giving them a squeeze.

"Fucking Christ." Logan explodes and he takes me right along for the ride with him. I slam myself down into him, Asher still touching us both.

# Chapter 18

## Elena

“Seriously?” I ask. “You want to stay in and watch a movie?”

“Sure.” Logan squeezes my hand. “Why not?”

I dodge the kiss he tries to plant on my cheek. “Because we live in the most exciting city in the world. The last thing I want to do is waste a Friday night staying in.”

“That’s exactly the reason why we should. It’s Manhattan. We can go out any night of the week and do whatever we want to. We can have the same kind of night out on a Sunday as we can on a Friday.”

My mouth twists. I would’ve thought that with having two guys I can go out with, I’d at least have one real date tonight. Asher’s working late at the office and Logan’s big idea is a movie?

Logan makes a show out of stifling a yawn. “If we stay in, I’ll let you pick what we watch. We can go out and act like fabulous New Yorkers another night. I’ll take you out to the hottest new restaurant in town, some new place that’s having an exclusive opening night. Just not tonight. I’m wiped.”

“Okay,” I say. I’m already planning on talking Logan into at least going out for a drink after the movie, or maybe even during it once he realizes how boring it is to stay home. I’m way too restless from taking on an afternoon shift today, which I did just so I could spend time with Logan tonight. It’s still very early so there’s more than enough time to watch a movie and then go out afterwards. I know I can talk him into it.

“Good, because I’ve been thinking about this all day.” The way his hands run over my ass and hips starts to distract me from thinking about going out, at least for the moment.

Logan’s kiss starts out light but we both get drawn into each other. I wrap my arms around his neck, pressing my body

into him. He strokes my cheek before his fingers slide lightly over my arms.

My heart pumps as his kiss turns hungrier. Sparks shoot through my veins when his tongue touches mine. His mouth is demanding, making me breathless with excitement and instantly growing desire. My world narrows down to just Logan. There's nowhere else I'd rather be than right here in his arms.

I shudder as his hands move to my ass, reminding me of his strength as he squeezes me just enough to let me know how much he wants me.

I'm gasping when we both have to come up for air from his panty-melting kiss. I'm sure Logan's going to lift me up and carry me to his bedroom.

He's still holding me close. His eyes gleam as he gazes into mine. "Ready for the movie?"

"What?" I can barely catch my breath from wanting him. He still wants to sit in front of the TV when we could be doing so much more?

"Hello, Elena." The deep male voice startles me. It's Julian, appearing from nowhere with a big bowl of popcorn.

"Hi," I say in confusion. "You didn't mention it was going to be the three of us," I say to Logan, who's released me from his grasp.

"I didn't think JJ would actually tear himself away from his computer," Logan says. He takes my hand and I let him lead me over to the sofa, where Julian's already settling in.

"Great," I say with as much enthusiasm as I can muster. My plan B if I couldn't convince Logan to go out was to spend the movie riding him on the sofa.

"Do you two want to be alone?" Julian asks me directly. I guess I didn't sound as convincing as I thought.

"No, no. Not at all." I do like Julian. It won't hurt to spend part of the evening with him.

“Yeah, I thought we could all hang out,” Logan says. “Get to know each other a little better.” His voice is light but he won’t meet my eyes. Now I get it. It’s important to him that me and Julian to start to spend some time together. He’s dropped hints about all of us getting along. Makes sense since Logan’s sleeping with both of us.

Julian folds his hands behind his head and stretches his legs out. He’s such an intriguing guy. I never know when he’s going to alternate between being completely distracted and laser-focused. Logan says he’s always been like this.

Not to mention that he’s just as hot as his friends. His muscles flex as he shifts around into a more comfortable position. I don’t look away.

Logan sits between him and I, passing me the remote. “Like I said, your choice.”

“Are you sure?” I ask wickedly. “Anything?”

“Anything you want.”

“I’m going to keep that as an option for another night,” I say to him. I truly don’t care what we watch so I pass the remote back to him. “You choose.” The sooner we get this movie going and over with, the better.

“I don’t care,” Logan says.

“I’ll choose,” Julian says, swiping the remote from his hand.

“Nothing heavy,” Logan warns him as he tries to steal it back. Julian won’t let him get it. “Nothing that needs concentration or the ability to follow what’s going on. I left my brain at the office today.”

Julian picks a movie I’ve never heard of. It turns out to be a good drama and even though it’s not totally brainless escapism, Logan gets into it too. I dip into the popcorn and start to enjoy myself.

“Hey. This is kettle corn,” I say in surprise.

“No good?” Julian asks.

“Very good. It’s my favorite.” I glance at Logan. “How’d you know?”

He grins at me. “You mentioned it once. I remembered.”

“So sweet.” I kiss him on the cheek.

“Me or the popcorn?” Logan asks.

“Both,” I say, grabbing a handful.

When we’re about halfway through the movie, Logan gets up and disappears. He comes back carrying a big blanket and covers all of us with it, even Julian.

Logan drapes his arm across my shoulders. I snuggle up closer and melt into him, completely relaxing. Julian leans into him on his other side. I didn’t expect that. It’s so affectionate and easy.

I probe at my feelings. I don’t feel any jealousy. At all. It’s not like Logan’s cheating on me. I guess it makes sense, since Logan doesn’t mind me and Asher being together either. Everything that’s going on between all of us feels right.

I glance at Logan. His expression is blissful, like he’s exactly where he wants to be. My heart thumps. He’s completely happy.

Maybe he’s in love with Julian. Can you love more than one person romantically? I almost laugh at the thought, since I’m starting to fall for both Logan and Asher. If I can, he can too. But what would that mean for us?

I’m almost dozing off by the time the movie ends. Some of the scenes have been curling into my subconscious like a dream, like I’m kind of aware of what’s going on but at the same time nothing’s quite real.

“She picked them both,” Logan says to me as he clicks the TV off.

I blink at him, trying to pretend I wasn’t half-asleep.  
“Huh?”

“In the end. The detective hooked up with both the cop and the guy we thought was the bad guy. He turned out to be one



of the good ones. All three of them are a couple now.”

“That’s how it ended?” Maybe I was dreaming and I didn’t see what happened. “Seriously?”

“Not really.” Logan kisses my cheek. “But that’s how it should go. Don’t you think?”

# Chapter 19

## Elena

“I haven’t seen you in so long!” Riley exclaims as we hug each other tightly. “We have to catch up for real. Tell me everything that’s been going on.”

“Way too long,” I agree as we wind our way through the long lineup in her favorite café. Meeting at NYU is the only way I get to see Riley. Between work and school, I know how busy she is. Since I’m working nights at the restaurant most of the time, it hasn’t been easy for us to connect.

It’s my first time being back since I graduated and it’s strange. Hardly any time’s passed but so much is different for me.

“You know I’m working on that feature,” I tell her as I drop a bag of corn chips onto my tray. “So I’m all about writing these days.”

“That’s so amazing they gave it to you,” Riley says to me. “You’re going to have a feature published in a real magazine. That’s huge.”

“It’s the way I can prove myself to the entire company,” I say. “Even if Zan won’t hire me in the end, I’ll have a foot in the door to try for any one of their other publications. This feature is my big break.”

“I know you’ll pull it off. So what are you writing about? You never told me.”

“I’m writing about the guys who started up a biotech company that’s become a really big deal. The research they’re doing is going to lead to a cure for a certain kind of blood cancer. Then they plan to apply it to other kinds. They could be the ones to develop a significant cure, and soon.”

“Wow. That’s pretty incredible.” Riley’s impressed. “It’s the kind of journalism you want to do. Right?”

“It’s exactly what I want to cover. That’s the kind of story that needs to be told,” I say.

“Is the pay good?” Riley asks. “I have no idea what a writer makes.”

“I don’t get paid until after I’ve written the final story and it’s been published.”

Her face darkens. “So are you managing to get by?”

“Yes. My income doesn’t exactly match up with the building I’m living in, but I’m doing okay. I’m getting a few more shifts and my blog’s starting to take off.”

Riley’s eyes light up. “Really? Your blog’s making some money?”

“It’s actually pretty decent. What do you think?” I hold up a ginormous chocolate chip cookie. “Should I get this? Will you split it with me?”

“Of course. How are you getting followers?” She asks with interest. “I want to get my own blog a lot more active again once exams are done. I’m curious about what you’ve done. I’ve never taken this long of a break from posting before, so anything you can tell me is helpful.”

I laugh awkwardly. “You want tips from me? That’s a switch. I was actually going to ask you for help with how to change my direction without losing any followers.”

Her brow creases. “The thing is that you want to keep going if you’re doing something successful. You know, lean into what you’re already doing and create more of the same content.”

“I get that’s what you’re supposed to do, but I really can’t. I’ve got to change what I write about completely.”

“Why?” Riley wants to know as we slide into a couple of free seats at the long communal table.

“Because the subject I’ve been writing about is getting to be a little too personal. I need to keep it private.”

“What’s that?” she asks, her eyes gleaming. “Why are you holding out on me? Did you meet someone? Are you writing about a new guy?”

I swallow hard. This is it. I have to decide whether or not to tell my best friend about what I’ve been up to. “Yes, but it’s a really sensitive situation”

“How so? Oh, Elena. He’s not married, is he? You can’t get into that.”

I feel bad that she thinks that. Last year Riley was seeing a guy and it turned out he was married. She had absolutely no idea and it was a huge mess.

“No. Nothing like that,” I tell her. “If I spill the tea, will you promise me that you can keep it a secret?”

“You know you can trust me.”

“I know I can,” I say hastily. “Of course I do. It’s not you, it’s just that this is a big deal. I mean, really massive. I can’t let anything leak out.”

“I have no trouble keeping secrets,” she tells me.

I’d never even think about telling anyone else, but I trust Riley with my life. “Promise you won’t breathe a word?”

“Elena, you’re killing me here. You know I won’t. I never have before, right?”

“Right.” I take a deep breath. “I’ve been sleeping with Asher.”

Her laugh is delighted. “Excellent. I knew you were into him in spite of that whole non-date thing.” She rolls her eyes and waits expectantly, knowing there’s more to it. “So what’s the huge secret about that?”

I clear my throat. “He’s one of the CEOs of Vivojen. Which is the company I’m reporting on, so it’s completely wrong to be involved with my subject. It’s basic journalism. Objectivity is everything.”

“So you need to break up with him?” Riley asks.

I don't know what to say. "I mean, I should. I should stop it right now. There's something between us that I've never had before. It's not easy to give it up."

"Yikes," she says. "You're falling for him."

"Maybe." I shift around in my chair. "That's not the worst part. It gets crazier. This is what you absolutely can't tell anyone at all." I lean in and lower my voice. "I'm not just seeing one guy."

"You've got a rotation?" Riley beams at me. "Good for you. It's about time. You always get too committed way too fast. Look at what happened with Owen. You barely knew him when you moved in together. It'll be so good for you to just date around and have some fun instead of jumping in too fast the minute after you meet someone."

"That's not exactly what I'm doing," I say.

She takes a bite of her salad. "I don't understand. What are you talking about?"

"I'm also involved with his friend, who happens to be the other CEO of the company." I stop myself before I let something slip about what's gone on between Asher and Logan. I'll tell Riley eventually but I can't do it right now. Telling her that I'm seeing two guys once is enough for the short time we have for lunch. She's got to get to class and I have to head off to the restaurant soon enough.

"That's pretty complicated. They're friends? Isn't that risky are you going to break up their friendship?"

"No," I say. "They know about each other."

"You're not telling me that these guys are okay with it?" Riley's eyes about pop out of her head. "Both of them seeing you?"

"They are. They're very close friends and they share everything. Neither one of them has a lot of spare time so it works out really well. They can't let anyone else know about it though, that's why the secrecy. Most people wouldn't get it. As CEOs, they have to maintain their image."

“Damn, girl.” Riley says. “That sounds complicated. I get why that wouldn’t be something to put out there, and why you kept it a secret. That’s wild. No wonder you’ve been so busy lately,” Riley sits back in her chair. “Two guys at once.”

“Yeah, it’s something else. I know it’s different, but it works.” It’s definitely too soon to tell her that she’s spot on with saying two guys at once. I’ve got to ease her in. “You’re not too weirded out?”

I fold my arms across my chest while I wait for Riley to say something. I know our friendship’s solid, but I still can’t help but worry that she’ll judge me.

Riley pauses. “I mean, it’s pretty unusual.” She looks like she’s trying her best to digest everything I’ve told her. “It’s not like any kind of relationship I’ve ever heard of before. If it makes you happy and it’s not going to mess anything up for either one of them, then why not. I guess it’s just like the early stages of dating when you’re free to do what you want, but with everyone knowing there’s others in the picture.”

She shakes her head. “That’s not at all what I was expecting you to tell me. I actually thought you weren’t going to get back to real dating for awhile, not since the number Own did on you. Instead you jumped all the way in. Good for you.” Riley squeezes my arm. “Go for it.”

I relax a little, happy that she accepted my unconventional situation. I knew she probably would, but there’s always that chance. Sometimes you think you know someone and in the end, you really don’t. I certainly didn’t know what my ex was truly like. Own wasn’t anywhere near the kind of decent guy I thought he was in the beginning.

“What about being objective?” Riley asks me. “How can you interview either one of these guys if you’re also sleeping with them?”

I rub the back of my neck. “That’s the problem I’m having. My editor doesn’t know I’m involved with Asher or Logan. I mean, she originally gave me the assignment because she saw that photo of Asher and I at the benefit. She also figured we were only together for that one evening, which was true at the

time. We'd just met and he needed a plus one. She thinks it ended there and there were no strings."

"I still can't believe you didn't tell me all of this sooner," Riley says.

"It all happened pretty fast," I tell her. "Also the guys are very private. They don't want any attention at all on their personal lives. They were like that even before we got together. That's why they don't do a lot of interviews and for the ones they do occasionally agree to do, they make a very strict point about focusing on their company only. They have good reason for that, especially because Vivojen's on the verge of submitting their brand new drug for approval. It's a critical time for them. I've been dying to tell you all about it. You understand, right?" I ask anxiously.

"Sure I do." Riley pauses. "So why are you telling me now if it's still all supposed to be a big secret?"

"Well, here's the thing. I could probably get away with writing my article because Asher and Logan and I have only just gotten together recently, and it's not like we're going to come out publicly about being involved. I thought I could still be objective if I focused on the science part of their company. The problem is that now my editor's insisting on having a lot more info about their personal lives in the story than she wanted originally. She says that City Scan's going in a new direction and she wants me to give her a very personal look into their lives."

I twist my napkin around in my fingertips, rolling the edges between them. "I get why, they're really interesting guys and their personalities absolutely play a huge part in their work and their success. Everything they do in their lives and in their company is interconnected. Asher only allows professional publicity. Anything else could have a negative effect on the types of investors they're able to attract."

I start to tear at the thin paper. "He's the main CEO so he gets most of the spotlight, and he's not into it at all. He wants all press to focus on what they're doing because their work is so important. It's going to change so many lives. Of course

because he's so secretive about his life, that means everyone wants to know more about it."

"Makes sense that they want their work to be the thing everyone talks about," Riley says. "It's not like they're celebrities themselves."

"Not in the normal way, but they are in the business world," I say. "They're accomplishing incredible things and everyone wants to know how they're doing it. You know, the story behind the story. That's where it gets to be really tricky. My editor wants me to reveal everything I possibly can about them. Every other journalist who's written about them has only gotten the same kind of info out of them. The stories that do get published are all pretty similar. I was assigned this feature over the more experienced writers because Zan saw that I had a personal connection to Asher. I mean, we're neighbors. I didn't know anything would ever happen between us."

"You can't really write objectively about guys you're sleeping with," Riley muses. "No matter how new that situation is, it's a conflict of interest. Right?"

"Exactly. My objectivity would be called into serious question if it ever came out that we're all together. I also feel bad now that I know how much they need their privacy. I don't want to go shine a spotlight on them, especially now that we're in an unconventional relationship. That's the only thing that anyone would pay attention to. It could turn into a scandal."

"So why not just talk to them and ask them how much personal info they'd be okay with you adding into the story? That way you can satisfy your boss, get a great article and some good publicity for them out of it. Obviously leave out your relationship with them. I mean it's not a brilliant solution, but it could work."

I squirm uncomfortably against the hard plastic chair. "That's the other problem I've got. None of them actually know that I'm writing a feature on them for a major publication."



Riley blinks. “El, what are you talking about? You didn’t tell them? Are you serious?”

“I meant to.” I dig my fingernails into my palm. It sounds a lot worse when I hear it out loud. “There was never a good time to bring it up once I got involved with Asher, and then Logan. Everything sort of snowballed from there. Their third business partner, Julian, talked at length about their work and their company with me when I met him. I decided to run with that and change the focus as much as I could to being more in-depth on their company than all of them. After that I didn’t think I really needed to let them know.”

Riley’s eyes narrow. “Did you tell him that you were writing a feature on their company?”

“No,” I admit. “I never mentioned it to Julian either.”

“Oh, Elena. How could you? I’d think that you should tell anyone that they’re being interviewed, but especially men who value their privacy as much as they do.”

“I know. I’ve been feeling awful about it.” I swallow hard. “And it gets worse.”

Riley gapes at me. “Seriously? How?”

“I’ve been writing about our relationship in my blog.” I can’t meet my friend’s eyes. “That’s how I’ve gotten so much attention, because it’s so different. That’s how I’ve been getting so many likes and views and you know that leads to income. Everyone wants to read about my adventures with two guys at once.”

“What were you thinking?” Riley gasps.

I bristle a little. “I make sure it’s completely anonymous. I haven’t ever included their real names. Not once. I proof really well to make sure I’ve changed all of them before I publish. I make a point of being super careful and I double-check every time. Nothing’s leaked out. I’ve never mentioned their company by name either. No one could figure out who they are.”

“If they’re so concerned about their privacy, you can’t possibly think they’d be okay with that, can you?”

“No one will ever know it’s them.” I’m aware I’m starting to sound a little defensive. “I don’t use my real name either.”

“Didn’t you use your real name on your blog when you first started up?” Riley asks.

“Yes, but then I scrapped it and started over from scratch with a new name and everything. There’s no way anyone could connect anything I’ve written to any of us in real life.”

“I don’t know.” Riley’s unconvinced. “It seems like a risky thing to do. Especially when there’s so much at stake. Have you talk to your editor about everything?”

“Not at all.” I try to imagine the look on Zan’s face if I did. Guaranteed I’d be let go so fast. “She’d flip and pull me off the feature in no time. It’s my very first story and I can’t take any chances. It’ll be fine. I’m not hurting anyone. Nothing bad will happen to the guys or their company.”

Riley’s not convinced. She’s giving me that look she gets when she knows that what I’m saying is kind of a load of crap. I don’t blame her. The more I talk about it, the less certain I’m getting about what I’m doing.

“I get wanting to break into the industry, I really do,” Riley says. “You could still end up hurting these guys and their future.”

“That’s the very last thing I want to do,” I insist. “I care about them, a lot. Their work’s so important. I’d never do anything to damage it. I know I should have admitted that I wanted to interview them formally. I know that, but it’s too late now. What would I even say? As far as they know I’m a writer, not a journalist. I think that if I keep my story focused on mostly on the science side and write a few innocuous, generic things about their personal lives, it’ll be okay. It might not be exactly what Zan wants but I can cross that bridge when I come to it. I can pump some things up, maybe embellish things to make them more interesting. Inflate some small things into something bigger if I have to.”

Riley’s jaw drops. “Elena, that’s so unethical and it’s so unlike you. I can’t believe you’d even think of doing

something like that.”

I sip at my water miserably. “I’m not really going to do it. I’m just trying to think of what I could do if my boss wants more than I end up giving her.”

“I get that, but is it really worth it? Are you going to be able to write the best story this way? If you can’t, then what’s the point? I just don’t think this is the best way to break into your field.”

“Neither do I. If I’d known what was going to happen with Asher and Logan, I would’ve tried to do this all completely differently.”

“You always told me that the reason you wanted to get into investigative journalism in the first place was to tell the truth, and inform people of important matters that need to be talked about and brought to light. Now it’s like you’re going to do the opposite of that.” Riley leans forward, clasping her hands together. “Why are you letting your ethics slide now, El?”

I flinch under her steady gaze. “I still want that. Nothing’s changed. I’m just trying to find a way to do it without destroying what I have with the guys, and also landing a spot with City Scan. I’m going to have the life I want. I can do it all. I know it.”

“Can you?” Riley can be super-intense when she wants to be. It’s unnerving.

“You’re going to be a great lawyer, you know.” My laugh comes out way more nervous than I thought it would. “You’ve got the interrogation part down.”

“I’m not interrogating you, El. I just don’t recognize my best friend at the moment. What’s so great about this life you’re going after?” Riley asks.

“I’m still your best friend.” I swallow hard. “You know exactly what kind of life I want, because you want it too. The dream. The glam Manhattan lifestyle. Writing a feature for City Scan is going to get my name out there. Everybody will know who I am. As a huge bonus, it happens to include two

guys who are really into me as well. Life in Central Park South is going great. In fact, it's even better than I hoped for."

Riley leans back and regards me. "So what are you going to do?"

I'm glad she's dialed back the intensity. "I don't know. It's way too late to tell Asher and Logan that I'm writing a feature about them. They'd never forgive me." I shudder at the idea.

"Stretching the truth won't help with that. That won't end well no matter what."

"I'm going to do everything I can to make this work out. It'll be fine." I try to buoy myself up. "Once the feature's published and they see that it's only going to raise their profile, I don't think they'll mind."

"That's not really something you can predict, is it?" Riley asks me.

"It'll be fine," I insist again. "Maybe I'll try to talk to my editor and really sell her on getting away from a personal angle."

Riley doesn't look convinced. I can't say I am either, but I can't see any other way out.

Sitting down at my laptop, I stare at the screen. Looking blankly at a computer might as well be my actual job description since that's what I do so often. The writer's life.

Okay. I'm doing it. I'm going to tell Zan how I'm going to write up my story. It's the right thing to do. I can't stand the way Riley was looking at me. She's not wrong either. I'm slipping into a grey area and no matter what, I can't take the chance of messing up the guys' lives or their work.

I construct a careful message to my boss, tweaking it several times before I send it off. When she found one single typo in one of my messages to her, Zan had an absolute fit. She went off about how we're writers and we can't ever present anything but our best work.

Not five minutes after I press send, Zan's calling me. That's way too fast. I thought she'd take some time and think

about it.

“Hi, Zan,” I say brightly, as if I’ve been expecting a call from her all along. “What can I do for you?”

“I got your message. That’s something I’ve been meaning to talk to you about.”

“Really?” My heart beats faster. I knew this would all work out. I can do a feature about the scientific aspects of what they’re working on. I can even ask for Julian to review it for me, to make sure I’ve got it all correct. “So we can go a different direction from the original story angle?”

“Yes, we’ll need to. Although the aspects that you covered in your earlier draft were interesting and useful, they don’t fit the new direction we’re going to have to take.”

“New direction? City Scan’s all about news.”

“We have been,” she says grudgingly. “Up until now. As of this week, not anymore. Our numbers were fine but we’ve heard from the higher-ups that we’re changing the nature of what we publish. From now on, the magazine’s going to cover more popular human interest stories.”

What does that mean? My heart’s starting to sink, but I won’t let my hopes go. Not yet.

“You may have noticed people have shorter attention spans now, far more so than ever before,” Zan says.

I hate it so much when she talks to me like I’m a child. I grit my teeth. “Yes, I’m aware. What does that mean for us? City Scan’s not like that.”

“We are as of right now. In-depth journalism has been in trouble for quite some time. There are places for it, and we are no longer one of them. As much as I want City Scan to remain a serious news magazine, I’ve been told that’s not the case anymore.”

Zan bites off her words. “So I’m not only going to need you to focus on the personal lives of the CEOs of Vivojen, I’m going to need you to completely remove all of the biotech info

you've written about. The new angle you'll need to take is to find something that will generate conversation."

"Do you mean gossip?" I ask.

She winces. "Yes. That's what we're going to be about from now on. As far as City Scan's concerned, we're going to feature those CEOs as hot single New Yorkers. Those men are known for being private. There must be some secrets there. I'm going to leave it to you to expose them. You can write the fluff that's supposed to get us more clicks. Lose the serious side of what they do. Find out some dirt on their love lives."

I'm speechless. "Zan," I begin carefully. "That's not what I was wanting to do. I think it's best that we go in the opposite direction. They're dedicated, driven men who want to change the world for the better. No one cares about who they're dating."

"Your job is to make them care. Find the juiciest details that you can and do it fast. We need this and we need it now. Your deadline has been moved up, Elena. You better get on it because you've got to rewrite everything. Don't include anything about their company other than the barest minimum of what it takes to introduce them our readers. Get it done now."

I blink as she ends the call before I can even open my mouth to try to argue with her. This is the exact opposite of what I wanted. I can't do that to the guys. I can't get out of it either.

# Chapter 20

## Logan

The city flies by as the driver navigates deftly through the heavy traffic. Leaving the office earlier than usual in an attempt to miss the worst part of rush hour is working. Everything's going smoothly and I feel good. Really good, for the first time in I don't know how long.

My mind drifts back to the weekend, like it's been doing all day. Time went by way too fast. Elena and I spent an entire day together. When she went out with Asher that night, I had Julian all to myself. I still can't quite believe that the four of us being involved with each other in some way is actually working so smoothly, but somehow it is.

Julian doesn't mind a bit that Asher and Elena and I have something going on. In a way I think he's relieved that he can still spend most of his waking hours on his work but still have some time with me too. Elena's enjoying being with Asher and I. Asher's cool with it all too. Sometimes I have to make sure that I'm not dreaming the whole setup because if someone described all of this to me, I'd never believe it.

Especially the way it's all becoming about more than just sex. I always wanted more than that with Elena, and now I can see things happening between the others too. Asher and I are getting closer. Even Julian lets his guard down occasionally. Now and then I catch glimpses of him being almost vulnerable. Little fleeting moments where he looks like he's opening up to some feelings, right before his face snaps shut again.

The best part of the weekend was the end of it, where Elena and Asher and I all ended up in bed together.

All that was missing was Julian. I couldn't help but want him to be there too. He was engrossed in a virtual meeting

with his lab tech. Even if he wasn't, he wouldn't have joined us.

We're all so familiar with each other, everything's easy and couldn't be more normal. At the same time what we have is all still very new and there's something fragile about it. It's as if we're all holding our breath sometimes and waiting for things to fall apart. So far so good and if I have anything to do with it, that's how we'll stay. I want to go on like we are forever.

Forever's not something that ever crossed my mind with any girlfriend I've had before. The only constants in my life have been Asher and Julian, and that was different. This is so, so much more. They were never my boyfriends before.

I'm not entirely sure they are now, but it's starting feel like it with Asher. We spend most of our time working so nothing's really changed that much, except how it feels. I want to spend time with him as a boyfriend, not just a close friend anymore.

Julian's a different story. I'm not sure he'll ever want to be anything more than friends with benefits. As much as I love that, I want more. I can only hope he feels the same and someday he'll become open to the possibility. I try to picture JJ kicking back and sipping coffee in bed like the three of us did on Sunday morning, just relaxing with all three of us, or even just me. It's a fuzzy picture. I don't know if it'll ever happen.

Here I am skipping my end of the day workout just so I can get back to be with Elena and Asher. We're going to have dinner tonight and Julian even agreed he'd join in too. I've already got a plan to pry him away from his work just in case he gets too caught up in it and tries to back out. Even if he's not in the same place that I am, I want him to feel like he's part of our daily life too.

"Thanks," I say to the driver as he pulls up in front of the building. "See you later."

I'm on my way up to our floor when my phone vibrates. It's the chairman of the board. Unusual for him to call me at all, let alone outside of business hours.



“Something’s come up.”

The elevator closes in on me as he speaks in rapid, clipped sentences. His words hit me like bombs. “You’re not serious,” I say. Of course he is. Our chair’s nothing if not serious at all times. Especially about something like this.

“Logan,” he continues. “This is a catastrophe.”

My grip on my phone tightens. That’s the understatement of all time.

# Chapter 21

## Asher

“Unbelievable. Are you absolutely sure?” I don’t have to ask. It’s not a joking matter, even for Logan. The look on his face tells me everything. Everything that I don’t want to know.

His face is grey. “Positive.”

“Say it again.” I need a moment to let the news sink in. The implications are enormous.

Logan presses his hands onto my desk as if he has to steady himself. “Everything’s about to get blown up. City Scan’s publishing a story about us and all of our relationships. The entire board’s spinning out over it. At least two of our major investors are almost certain to pull the funding they promised us.”

“They’re supposed to be a serious news magazine, not a gossip rag.” I rub at my forehead. “Their readership’s enormous. I can’t believe they would release some unfounded, irrelevant rumors. It doesn’t make sense. It’s as if they’re trying to cause a scandal.”

“I know.” Logan rubs at his temples. “It’s not on brand for them at all. I have no idea what they’re thinking.”

Julian clears his throat. He’s as horrified as Logan. “No,” he says firmly. “That can’t be. We can’t let it come out. How do we stop this?”

I don’t have an answer for him. We don’t have any time to waste, but I need to know how it happened. There might be a solution if we know the origin of the leak. Good solutions can come from anywhere, even the most unlikely places.

“How did they find out?” I ask.

Logan shakes his head. “I have no idea.”

“You’ve got PR on it?”

“Of course. All hands on deck. No sleep for anyone tonight. The new edition’s going live at midnight. The print version comes out a couple days after that, then there won’t be any going back.”

“Legal?” I ask.

“They said it’s unlikely we’ll be able to get an injunction in time to stop them,” Logan says miserably. “They’re working on it from every possible angle, but it’s an uphill battle.”

“There’s no proof,” Julian insists. “So it should be a non-issue. Surely they can block it because it’ll slanderous. You can’t just write anything you want to and put it out there.”

“Unfortunately there’s no basis for slander or libel when it’s the truth. We’d have a hell of a time if we tried to say otherwise,” I tell him. “The best we could do if the story runs is to sue them afterwards, which will do absolutely no good. We need our board on our side and our investors happy. Our reputation needs to be intact or we can’t move forward. The damage will be extensive and likely irreparable.”

Clenching my fists, I stand up. “We’ve got to get to the office.”

“In a minute,” Logan says. “I have to take this call.”

“Is there a way out of this, Ash?” Julian asks as Logan strides off. “There has to be. Right?”

As if the situation isn’t bad enough, the look on Julian’s face is enough to do me in. Vivojen is his life’s work and he has such a big stake in the outcome of our results. Our work is extremely personal for him.

“We’re going to do everything we can.” I can’t hide the hopelessness I feel, and he can tell. Julian knots his hands as we head to the door.

A knock startles me as I’m about to swing it open. Elena’s on the other side.

“Asher, I need to talk to you,” she says.

“Later, Elena. I need to cancel dinner. Something’s happened and we have to take care of it immediately. We only have a few hours to try and prevent some irreversible damage from being done. There’s no time to explain anything now.”

“I know all about it,” she says. “That’s why I’m here.”

“What are you talking about?” Julian asks.

Elena’s acting strangely, almost cagey. She won’t meet my eyes. “What’s up?” I glance at the time. Just under five hours to somehow fix this mess, and I still don’t have any ideas. None of us do. “We have a really urgent work issue that’s come up and we’ve got to get to the office right away. We can talk later, Elena,” I tell her.

“I know what’s going on,” she says again miserably. “It’s all my fault.”

Julian’s head whips around. “What are you talking about?”

“Can I sit down?” she asks.

“We don’t have time,” I tell her.

“Okay. I understand. It’s my fault. I wrote the article that City Scan’s going to publish.”

“You did what?” Logan appears from the hallway. “Are you joking? It’s really not the time, Elena. This is a very serious matter we’ve got to deal with.”

She won’t look directly at him either. I’ve never seen her acting like this before. A cold knot forms in my stomach.

“Elena, we have to move on this. What’s going on?” I prompt her as I make an enormous effort to stay patient.

“I work for City Scan,” she begins. “Kind of. They hired me for a trial run and they assigned me a story to write when they found out that I knew you, Asher. The editor wanted me to write up the backstory on you because you never talk about yourself in any other interviews. They wanted the story behind the most successful men who’ve come up in the last decade. She wanted a real look behind the scenes at who you are.”

Elena twists her hands together. “After I got to know you, I knew I couldn’t do that. I told my boss that I was going to put the focus of my story back onto Vivojen and the work you’re doing. Nothing more than that. She told me they’re turning City Scan into more of an entertainment magazine. I would never have wanted to write for them if I’d known that was going to happen.”

“Hold on,” I say. “Back up. What have you been doing? Spying on us this whole time? Is that the reason you agreed to go out with me in the first place?”

The color drains from Logan’s face. “Is that why you’re living in this building, Elena? Is that why you got involved with us?”

Her eyes are pleading. “No. Not at all. I love what we have. I’d never do anything to hurt you.”

“That day you came over.” Julian’s voice goes flat. “You were pumping me for information.”

I glance between them. “You two discussed our work?”

JJ nods. “We spoke at length. At no time did Elena identify herself as a journalist, however.”

Elena doesn’t deny it. My heart sinks. Of all the people that have tried to pull something like this, and there have been quite a few, I never expected Elena to be one of them.

“You betrayed us.” Logan’s eyes are icy with anger.

I’m still hoping she’ll deny it, but she doesn’t. She shakes her head slowly. “No. I didn’t mean to. It was that day I spoke to you, Julian. I was coming to ask Asher for an interview. Then you started talking about everything and you were so into it. I didn’t see anything wrong with writing about the stuff you explained so well to me. I wrote up an even simpler explanation for my story. In the end, the article I submitted didn’t have any personal stuff about you guys at all, and not a thing about our relationships. I’ve kept that secret. Except for my best friend.”

“You told your best friend?” Logan’s voice is strangled. “Why would you do that? Keeping it to ourselves means

exactly that. Telling no one. At all.”

“You’re a reporter.” I almost choke on the words. “Not a waitress like you told us. You were lying the entire time.”

“No. I am a waitress, but I’ve always wanted to be a journalist. When I got the chance to write this feature story I didn’t know you guys at all. It was assigned to me right after you and I went to the charity ball, Asher. I promise you I didn’t reveal anything personal in my story. I meant to tell you I was writing it and I would have. It wasn’t supposed to come out for at least another month, not until next month’s issue. I was planning on trying to talk my editor around into not going with the gossipy angle at all.”

Elena crosses her arms. “I submitted my story to her today and all it covered is the work your company’s doing. Nothing personal like she wanted, no secrets being revealed about us. That’s when she told me the feature I wrote couldn’t run the way I wrote it. She told me she’s going to run it anyway after editing it significantly. I have no idea how she found out, but she knows all about our relationships. The worst part is that she’s going to add everything in. All the details she couldn’t possibly know about, but she does”

“Your friend is her source.” Logan’s gone from shocked surprise to bitter anger. “So, Elena. Did you split the money you made by selling us out? I hope it was worth it.”

“It’s not like that,” Elena says. “Riley would never. I trust her. I know she didn’t do this.”

Logan laughs bitterly. “You trust her? Like we trusted you? You can see how well that worked out for us. Is your friend as trustworthy as you are? If she is, then we absolutely know the source.”

“She wouldn’t betray me,” Elena insists, her tone turning a little less certain.

Logan’s lips curl up. “I thought the same thing about you.”

“It doesn’t matter right now,” I interject. “What matters is that the board could fire all of us.”

Her hand flies to her mouth. “Is that true?”

“If our investors pull out over this article that you wrote, they absolutely could and they will,” Logan says. “They’re very conservative. After everything I went through to acquire them, our funding could disappear.”

“If we get ousted, they could take the company in an entirely new direction,” I say with a glance at Julian. “Our cure could get buried.”

Julian makes a choking sound. Logan puts his arm around him and he doesn’t pull away. A flare of anger rises up in me at the devastation this could cause to everyone.

“We have to go to try and fix this, Elena,” I say. “Before it’s too late.”

“I’m sorry,” she says miserably. “I never meant for anything to get out. You have to believe that.”

“I don’t,” I say simply. “Because even if that’s true, you still wrote an feature story about us without informing any of us. You interviewed Julian without his permission or knowledge. You talked to him at length about our proprietary work. Nothing should be made public until we put it out there, if and when we decide to. So no, Elena. I don’t believe you and I can’t trust you.”

“I’ll make it right,” she says, her eyes pleading.

“How are you going to do that?” Julian’s the one who speaks up. He’s shell-shocked, more wounded than angry. Unlike Logan, who’s the exact opposite. I don’t know how to feel about her. It doesn’t matter now. Not anymore.

“We’re leaving,” I say firmly. “We’ve wasted enough time that we don’t have.”

“I’ll do anything I can to stop this from happening. It’s my fault,” Elena says as I herd everyone out.

“That’s right,” Logan says. “It is.”

“When will you be back?” Elena says as she hurries down the hall with us.

“What does that matter?” Logan calls over his shoulder as he strides on ahead. “It’s not like we’ll be stopping by.”

‘We’re going to try everything we can to put a stop to this ridiculous article,’ I tell her. ‘We’ll be gone for as long as it takes. It’d be best if you aren’t around when we get back.’

She nods, clearly distressed. A glimmer of doubt about whether she was just using us tugs at my mind. She did, of course, but maybe there was some more to it than that.

Not that it matters. I stab at my phone as we reach the elevator. We could never trust her again. I couldn’t. Gathering from the stormy expression on his face, neither will Logan.

I’m still talking to our legal department as the car pulls us up to the office. ‘Are you absolutely certain we can’t serve them with any kind of an injunction to prevent them from running it?’ I ask. There’s got to be a way. I’m grasping at straws, I know. I won’t stop until it’s over.

‘We’ve tried everything we could. I got in touch with a judge I know to call in a favour, but there’s no legal way to stop it. The best they’ll do is pull it down later if they’re forced to after a hearing. Sorry, boss.’

It’s not the answer I want to hear, but I’m not surprised. ‘Right. Thanks.’

I end the call. As we head upstairs, I check through the messages that have accumulated while I was on the phone during the drive. Nothing helpful there.

Logan’s speaking with someone in low tones. He ends the call when we reach our floor. ‘Nothing new from PR. I think the best they’re going to manage is damage control after the fact. By then, it’ll be too late.’

There’s got to be something. All of our years of work can’t go up in smoke just like that.



# Chapter 22

## Elena

Somehow I have to fix this. The only thing I can think of is to go down to the office and try to talk Zan into pulling the feature.

I get downstairs and my frantic search for an Uber still hasn't come up with anything available. I can't afford to waste another moment. I've got to try and get a cab. Once the new edition goes live, there's no turning back.

I spot a flash of yellow and I sprint across the lobby. Bursting out onto the sidewalk, I slam straight into a someone that I didn't even see.

"Whoa," he says. "Slow down."

I grab at my purse before it falls as I start to apologize and it registers that something's not right. I recognize that voice. My stomach drops as I look straight up into Owen's face.

He set his hands on my shoulders and he's not taking them away. Even though it might've been an automatic reaction to being bumped into, he's holding onto me way too long. I take a step backward, stunned that he's here.

"Elena. Where are you off to?" Owen asks.

"What are you doing here?" The cab I wanted is already pulling away with the people that snagged it before I could. Damn it. I glance down the street. There's nothing else coming yet but fortunately this is a busy area as far as cabs go.

"I came to see you," he says. "I didn't think you'd be running into me like this."

"What are you talking about?" My eyes track a cab that's slowing down but it doesn't pull over. I can't be wasting time talking to my ex but this is too much of a coincidence to let it

slide. I have a bad feeling that he's not just here out of the blue.

"I need to talk to you, and you've blocked me everywhere. So the only thing I could do is come to your place."

"What do you mean, my place?" He can't have found out where I'm living. Another two cabs fly by before I can flag them down. I can't let Owen distract me. I start to walk to the corner and he follows me.

"Your place." He gestures back at my building. "Where you live, Leen." He's using that condescending tone that I just cannot stand. He knows perfectly well I hate it when he does that.

"What makes you think I live there?" He might be fishing for info and if he is, I have no intention of giving it to him. The last thing I need is for Owen of all people knowing where I live.

He frowns impatiently. "Of course I know you live here."

"How? I never told you where I was moving to." I curse myself silently for even engaging with Owen. I turn away and fix my gaze on the street.

"You didn't need to. I set it up." I'm about to throw myself in front of an empty cab when I stop short and turn back to face him.

"What are you talking about? You didn't. I got my place through Riley."

Owen laughs. I can't even stand his laugh anymore. Everything about him makes my skin crawl. I don't understand how I ever could have been attracted to him in the first place. Let alone moved in with him. Ugh. How embarrassing.

He rocks back on his heels. "Yes, Leen. I know you got it because of Riley." He takes a step closer to me. He's way too close for my liking. "Who do you think told her about it?"

"You?" If my jaw could hit the sidewalk, I'd be picking it up right now. "I don't believe you. She would've told me."

There's no way she would've given Owen my address no matter how much he badgered her. A needle of doubt pokes at me. Could it be true? Did Owen use Riley to manipulate me?

I can't think about that. "You shouldn't be here, Owen," I tell him. "I've got to get going. Right now."

"There's no need to go anywhere, Leen," he says. "There's nothing you can do."

"Do about what? You have no idea where I need to be."

The only cabs I'm seeing now are across the street. I'm debating making a run for it when Owen's next words stop me cold. "You can't stop the story from running. It's a done deal."

The air leaves my lungs. I turn to look him straight in the eye. "What did you just say, Owen?" There's no way he could know what's going on with me. No possible way. I must've misheard him.

"I know all about the feature you've been writing for City Scan." Owen waves his hand dismissively, as if he's not completely rocking my world. "I know about your boyfriends. I know what you're going to try to do. Alex told me all about it."

"Who the hell is Alex? And what makes you think you know where I'm working? Are you stalking me?" Anger mixed with fear washes over me. I can't let him see how much he's freaking me the hell out. How on earth does he know anything about my life?

He juts his chin out. "I know everything you've got going on. Alex is your boss, of course. I guess you know her only by Zan. Her first name's actually Alexandra. She goes by Zan professionally but people she knows personally call her Alex. Guess that doesn't include you, Elena."

"Are you stalking me, Owen?" I ask as a cold chill of dread trickles down my back.

"No," he says, but he won't look me in the eye. Huh. Somehow he is. I have no idea how and that's creepy as fuck. If it's true that he's the one who's behind me living in Central

Park South, could he have put cameras up in my apartment? That's messed up, even for him.

"Do you really want to know?" He's enjoying this. Of course he is.

"I don't care. I've got to go. Now." A cab starts to slow down and this time I do jump in front of it to get it to stop. I dodge Owen as he tries to grasp my arm. I glance at him out of the corner of my eye as we pull away. His face is contorted with anger and shock that I'm not letting him continue to waste any more of my time playing games. I'll deal with him later.

Luck's on my side with traffic and I make it to the office in good time. The building's eerily deserted. I cross my fingers that Zan's still here. I remember her talking about having to stay late on publication nights. She doesn't have to but she likes to oversee everything. It strikes me now that she might be a little controlling.

I shake my head. It doesn't matter. All that matters is that I can convince her to put a stop to running the feature. I should've been spending most of the cab ride figuring out what to say and how to convince her. Instead Owen got into my head. I thought I got him out of my life completely, and now somehow he knows where I live and work. Unbelievable.

Sure enough, the lights are on in Zan's office. She's staring intently at her computer, absorbed in whatever she's doing. I practically run towards her office. "Zan!"

She jumps as I call out her name. "Jesus, Elena. You scared the hell out of me. What on earth are you doing here?"

"I need to talk to you. You can't run the story, not the way it's been changed. It's nothing like what I wrote."

Zan rolls her eyes. "Everything gets edited. That's how this works, Elena. Not every single word you write is golden. Far from it. All elements of every story are subject to editing and additions as needed. Why do I even have to explain that to you?"

“It’s so much more than just editing, Zan.” I try to keep my voice steady. If there’s one thing I know about my boss, it’s that she doesn’t respect weakness. I need to come at her with logic, not emotion. “It might as well be a brand new story. It’s going to do a lot of damage if you run the new version.”

“This version is exactly what we want,” she says, barely glancing up at me as she goes back to scrutinizing her screen. “You know it’s going to be uploaded tonight. There’s no reason to pull it.”

“That’s right.” The voice comes from right behind me. I nearly jump out of my skin.

It’s Owen.

“Did you follow me here?” I ask him, stunned. “You need to leave right now, Owen. I’m sorry, Zan. This guy’s definitely not with me.”

I’m expecting her to call security or at the very least to tell my ex to get the hell out of here, but she doesn’t. When Owen walks around the desk and put his arm around Zan’s shoulders, I’m absolutely floored.

“You,” I begin. What the hell? She’s letting him touch her instead of punching him in the face. I can’t believe what I’m seeing. My brain takes a long moment to catch up with my eyes.

“You’re...together?” It can’t be true. How in the hell does he even know Zan?

“Yes. We are,” Owen says.

I ignore him as he waits for me to react. “Okay. Zan, please. You can’t run the story. That’s private information that can’t be leaked out.”

“Since you didn’t write the type of article that we discussed, I’ve had to take matters into my own hands,” Zan says. “The information you wrote on your blog is about the CEOs of Vivojen, is it not?”

“What makes you think that?” I straighten up. I never imagined standing up to my boss but I’ve got no choice. I have

to stop this from happening. “You have no reason to believe that’s who I wrote about. There’s no evidence to support that claim.” The best chance I have is to appeal to her professional side. Zan’s very big on proper journalism and real evidence to back up any claim.

“We have more than enough to support the story,” Zan says.

“That’s right,” Owen adds. “You use those guys’ names when you write about them, then you change them right before you post to your blog.”

I go numb. “Owen,” I say carefully. “Did you somehow plant a camera in my apartment? Is that why you manipulated my best friend into getting me to stay there?”

He laughs. “I didn’t manipulate Riley at all. All I did was make a suggestion. I thought I’d have to work harder to convince her. Instead she was all concerned about helping you out, as if it was so urgent for you to leave our place.” His mouth curls up in contempt. “It was so easy to get you into that building, I was a little surprised.”

“If you put a camera in the apartment without my knowledge.” I’m trying to keep my voice steady as I force myself to look at his smug, arrogant expression. “That’s so, so illegal. You fucked up hard if that’s what you did.”

There’s that annoying laugh again and I want to strangle him to make him stop. “No. I didn’t do that. I’ve never even been there. I know that housesitter that Riley’s friends with. It’s how I met Riley in the first place, through her.”

“Owen.” Zan’s tone holds a warning. He shakes his head at her dismissively. Nice to know that he’s no more respectful with her than he was with me.

“I didn’t need a camera,” he says. “I was monitoring your computer.”

I gape at him. “You can do that?”

“You can do anything these days,” he scoffs. “I saw everything you did. I watched every single boring keystroke you made. Every agonizingly dull word you wrote about those

CEOs. Do you actually believe that you're in a relationship with two of them? That's crazy."

I want so much to tear Owen down but I can't. Instead I've got to convince him and Zan that what they're doing is wrong, because it looks like they're in this together.

"You use their names whenever you write a draft before you post it, then change them later. Maybe that was the only way you could tell them apart from each other. It was a great help to us, so thanks for that," Owen says.

I didn't even know that monitoring someone's computer from a distance was possible. Surely it's got to be against the law.

"That's not right. Zan, you can't seriously be going along with this, can you? Owen got all this information without my consent."

Zan's eyes narrow. "Tell me, Elena. Did you get consent from any of the CEOs before you spoke to them?"

I open my mouth and close it. Her lips curl up in a way that makes her look mean. "Exactly. And before you ask how I know, I've been doing this job for quite some time. I can tell when a writer is BSing me. If I couldn't tell from the way you acted when we spoke, I certainly would've figured it out from that story you submitted to me. It's not hard to know when formal interviews are conducted. Nothing you wrote reflected that."

I flinch. "You're right. I shouldn't have done that. That doesn't mean it's okay for you to publish a piece that will do serious damage to their company. They don't deserve that."

The story's the story," she says firmly. "It's going to run as is, as long as you told the truth in your blog. You did, didn't you?"

I clamp my jaw shut to keep from telling her where to go, but I've never been good at hiding what I'm thinking.

Zan gives a self-satisfied nod. "I knew you would, Elena. Since it's true, we can publish it. City Scan's got the inside

scoop on the very unusual love lives of the Vivojen CEOs. The world will find out all about them tonight.”



# Chapter 23

## Elena

Miserably I step out into the lobby. I don't want to leave yet. I'll regroup and come up with the perfect plan that'll make Zan reconsider everything and pull the story.

The coffee shop that joins up with the building is still open and it's almost as busy as a Monday morning. Peering through the glass, I recognize one out of several men in suits. It takes me a moment to place him but when I do, my mind takes a turn. It's the publisher of City Scan. He actually runs quite a few of the company's magazines and I only know him from his formal picture in the print copies. He looks almost exactly the same as he does in his photo.

I've never met him and he has no idea who I am. I don't know much about what a publisher does but Peyton told me he always has the final say over everything that goes into the magazines.

He's the least friendly looking man in the place. I'm not very good about striking up conversations with strangers and he must be the least approachable person I can imagine. Every instinct I have is telling me to run.

I can't. If I have any hope at all, it's with him.

My pulse pumps wildly as I make my way over to his table. He doesn't even glance up until I speak.

"Excuse me," I begin.

"What?" He's impatient at being distracted from his tablet.

My mind races as I stand before him, my cheeks burning. "I'm sorry to bother you, but I need to talk to you for a moment. I work for City Scan and it's about the edition going out tonight."

I pause and he stares at me blankly. “Young lady, what is it that you want?”

“I know you don’t know me, but I need your help. It’s a matter of great importance.”

He’s not impressed by my urgency. “Call the office. My assistant can see about making you an appointment.”

“I need to talk to you now,” I say as firmly as I can while I’m quavering on the inside. “It’ll only take a moment. Please.”

A deep frown creases his brow and he glances around. He might be looking around for security so I plunge straight in. I don’t stop talking as fast as I can until I think I’ve told him everything he needs to know.

His stony expression hasn’t changed from the moment I came up to him. I wait expectantly but all he does is stare back at me.

Climbing out of the cab, I stop and gaze at my building. How can things have changed so much since the day I moved in? I thought for sure I’d arrived and my glamorous life was just beginning.

Instead I’ve ended up hurting the men who mean the world to me.

I can hardly believe that everything’s fallen apart this badly. Logan and Asher and Julian will never forgive me once the feature comes out. I can’t come up with anything else I could possibly do to stop it.

The publisher listened, I’ll give him credit for that. As I told him what was happening he leaned back in his chair and folded his hands together, as if he didn’t quite know what to make of me.

After I was done, all he said was that I should go home. I have no idea what he thought or if he even believed me.

I know I was grasping at straws. Some random stranger telling him to pull a major story from one of his popular

magazines isn't going to have a lot of credibility. I wouldn't believe me if I was in his position.

I don't want to go inside. Not yet. I don't know if the guys are back but I'm not ready to face them if they are. Even if they've somehow fixed it, I can't undo the things that I did. I don't even know what I could possibly say to them if I ever see them again.

So instead I walk down the block and head into the restaurant at the corner. The late dinner crowd's thinning out so there's a decent chance I can get a seat.

I find a small table in the corner. One quick glance around the place shows me that coming here was a mistake. I'm completely surrounded by couples and groups of friends having fun.

The waitress brings my drink quickly and I sip it while I stare out at the street. What I wouldn't give to be sitting on the sofa watching a movie with Logan and Julian. I don't want to be sitting by myself in a cool Manhattan restaurant. All I want is to be with Asher and Logan and Julian. It doesn't matter where we are or what we're doing.

"All alone, Elena?" The voice grates on my last nerve. "No more men to hang around with?"

I clench my glass tightly. "Stop following me, Owen. This is getting beyond stalkery."

He sits down across from me, completely uninvited. He lifts up his beer as if he's making a toast me. "Still drinking those girly drinks? Nothing's changed, huh."

I'm so done with him insulting everything about me. "Girly drink?" My eyes narrow as I stare at him. "This marg has two kinds of hard alcohol in it, including tequila. They're close to forty percent each. That's a lot higher alcohol content than that weak-ass beer you're drinking, isn't it. What is it, like, three? That's not very manly of you."

He blinks at me. "More than that," he says unconvincingly. He obviously has no idea and he hates it when he can't get one over on me.

“My drink’s not so girly then, is it?”

He ignores me, of course. God, his arrogance is ridiculous. “Why are you here?” I try. If I give him some attention, maybe he’ll leave sooner.

“I wanted to make sure you’re okay,” Owen says. “Those guys you got involved with must’ve done a number on you.” He shakes his head condescendingly. “I don’t know what you were thinking, getting involved with any of them. Let alone more than one.”

I grind my teeth together before I ask him what I need to know. If I don’t try and stroke his ego, he’ll never tell me. “I’m so curious.” I want to throw up from talking to him like this. “How did you manage to monitor my computer? That was so clever.”

“It was easy. I installed some software back when I borrowed it.”

“You didn’t borrow my laptop. You took it,” I say sharply even while I’m trying to digest what he said. Is that even possible? It must be. “Why, Owen? That’s so invasive. It’s got to be illegal.”

He shrugs dismissively. “It’s not illegal at all. It might be someday, but there aren’t any laws covering that kind of thing. It’s so great that the law can’t keep up with tech anymore. Privacy’s a thing of the past. You know that perfectly well. It’s not like you cared about the privacy of those men you wrote about.”

A fresh wash of humiliation rushes over me, but I’m not going to give Owen the satisfaction of knowing he made me feel bad. “Even if it’s not illegal, it’s still wrong. How could you?”

“Alex needed a great story, not something half-assed. I read what you wrote and she was right. It wasn’t at all what was needed. I was helping her out.” His smirk’s triumphant. “That wasn’t the only reason. I was worried about you. Once I saw what you were getting up to, I knew it was a good thing for me to be keeping an eye out.”

“Keep an eye on me?” I say incredulously. “My life’s none of your business, Owen. It’s not like you cared when we were together. Why the sudden interest now?”

“Admit it, Elena. You need me.”

“I sure as hell don’t need you, Owen. Not for anything.” As usual, he keeps on talking as if I hadn’t spoken. My ex is sure in love with the sound of his own voice.

“I knew Alex would go for this kind of a feature. She’s got an eye for what’s going to hit. She has a great career and she’s going places. I knew it wouldn’t take much to get her to give you the story. Hell, I suggested it to her. I’m the reason she hired you in the first place.”

He has to be joking. Somehow I don’t think he is.

“What the hell, are you serious?” I say. “You didn’t do that. You couldn’t have.”

“I sure did. When Alex and I met, I told her you’d applied to work for her. She didn’t even notice your resume until I got her to look at it. Then I mentioned how you’d be living near those guys that run that company and could write about them. Alex went for it.”

My stomach’s twisting. “How do you know that I applied to work at City Scan?”

He beams, pleased with himself as always. “Like I told you. I saw every single thing you did on your computer. Every job application. Every single unedited blog post. Every email, every message.”

I’m speechless. I have so many questions but they all come back to one thing. “Why, Owen?” I manage. I need another drink but I can’t see my waitress.

Owen takes several swallows of his beer before he answers. “Because you and I should be back together, Elena. I was planning on giving you some time to come to your senses. When I found out that you were seeing someone else, I knew I needed to put a stop to that.”

“It’s none of your business who I’m seeing. Besides, you’re one to talk. You’re with Zan.”

“Yeah, right,” he says absently. “None of those men are any good for you. That’s why I handed over the contents of your blog to Alex. All of the drafts, not just what you posted. Every single file that you threw into the trash? I have copies. Like I said, every word you’ve ever written.”

“Did you bug my apartment too? Put cameras in it somehow?” I’m trying to be sarcastic but I really need to know if he went that far.

“No. I wouldn’t do that,” he says casually. “Although that would’ve been a good idea. Anyone who doesn’t want a spotlight on their actions is hiding something. I figured you’d get a taste of the lifestyle that you always talked about having and realize how wrong you were about wanting it in the first place. Then you’d realize you’re supposed to be with someone like me, back in the real world that most of us live in.”

I pick up my glass and slam it back down on the table. That gets his full attention. “Owen,” I say distinctly and carefully. “We’re never getting back together. No matter what. I will never get back with you. It’s over. Don’t ever try to spy on me again.”

His laugh is so arrogant, it’s almost more than I can take. “Okay.”

So now he’s calm. His mood swings are giving me whiplash. He’s claiming he wants me back and then two seconds later he just accepts that it’s over? Yeah, right.

“You’re crazy. Leave me alone. I mean it,” I say.

“Uh huh.” Owen’s gaze strays around the restaurant. As if he thinks I won’t notice that he’s checking out every other woman in here, right in front of my face.

“I don’t ever want to see you again.” I leave without waiting for his reply. I need to get away from him and it’s time to face going home. I’ve got to find the guys. I need to really explain what happened and that it wasn’t me who let our relationships slip to City Scan. It’s still all my fault and they’ll

hate me forever, but at least I can let them know that I didn't try to ruin their lives on purpose.

With a heavy heart, I walk the short distance back. At least the doorman's nowhere to be seen. I can't take him judging me now. He hasn't liked me from the moment I arrived and maybe he was right. I don't belong here. This isn't my world.

The elevator opens up to its usual empty space and I step on. I'm relieved to be alone, right up until a hand waves in between the closing doors.

Owen forces his way into the elevator and grabs me by the shoulders. "You can't walk away from me like that, Elena. We're not done," he says.

I'm instantly furious. "What are you doing, Owen?" I twist out of his grip and shoot him a look that convinces him not to try pulling that again. "You followed me inside?"

"Relax, Elena. We still need to talk. Why do you think I came here in the first place, then trailed you to that restaurant?"

"Because you're crazy?"

"No. Because we need to talk," he says.

"Why are you trying to ruin my life?"

Owen's startled. I don't usually show it when I get angry with him. He didn't pick up on it in the restaurant but I sure don't want to hold back now. "You had no right to do any of the things you did to me."

"Elena, none of that matters. You belong with me. We should be back together. I can protect you."

"Protect me? From what?"

He shakes his head sadly as if I'm too dim to understand his great words of wisdom. "This lifestyle you've gotten yourself into. Those men you got tangled up with."

Owen's condescension makes me clench my fist. "Even if I did need protection, which I don't." I bite my words out. "That sure as hell wouldn't involve you. You're the one who's

made a whole mess out of my life. I know I did some things that were wrong but so did you. You had no right, especially because you didn't just hurt me. You're causing some serious problems for other people who don't deserve it. I made mistakes of my own and I'm trying to do what I can to fix them. At least I'm owning up to what I did. You don't even think that you did anything wrong, do you."

"Elena, I don't think you know what you're doing, or what you're really involved in. It's too big for you to understand. These guys play on a level that you can't even imagine. Do you even have the slightest idea of how much they're worth? They don't need their company to be successful. They're set for life even if none of them works a day in their lives ever again."

"That doesn't matter, Owen. Not everything's about money, or image."

Owen snorts. "That's hilarious coming from you. How's life on the 70th floor?"

"Seriously? You claimed that you're the one who got me into the building. Now you're trying to make me feel bad about it?" I do, but that's not the point. "This isn't about me anyway. Those men are working to make things better for a lot of people who really need help. Their work's so important that it's going to change the world and save a lot of lives." I bite at my bottom lip miserably. "Or it would have, if you and I hadn't fucked everything up."

Owen's lips curl up derisively. "Yeah, that's what they like everyone too think. Don't you think it's strange that they want to keep it all so secret? Don't you think that if you had something that was going to save so many lives that you'd be shouting it from the rooftops?"

"They have their reasons, Owen. They're none of your business. Why do you care about them anyway? It's not like you know them. What's your deal?"

"They're bad for you, Elena. They shouldn't be in your life like you've let them be. You belong with me," he says, pulling a flask out of his pocket. The strong scent of whiskey fills the



tiny space. Thankfully the doors slide open before I start to choke on it.

“You keep saying that, but it’s never going to happen.” I step out and reach back in to press the button for the lobby. “Goodbye, Owen. Stay the hell out of my life.”

I stride off but it was too much to hope for that he’d leave just like that. He catches up to me easily. “You know we’re right for each other, Elena. Stop resisting it.”

“What about Zan? I thought she’s your girlfriend now, whatever you call her.” I still can’t believe that someone as driven and successful as my boss would go for someone as basic as Owen, but I can’t blame her too much. I made the same mistake myself.

“That’s over,” he says, taking another long swig from his flask.

“What, since when? Tonight?” I slow my pace down. I don’t want him to come to my door with me.

He shrugs. “I’ll tell her sometime. It doesn’t matter.”

“That’s not cool,” I say. “You’re with someone else. Even if you weren’t, we can’t be together. We. Are. Over.”

Owen stops short and grabs my arm, holding on tightly to make me stop too. The maliciousness in his sneer stops me cold. His eyes are narrow and there’s a nastiness in them that I’ve never seen before.

“You need to go. You can’t be here,” I tell him as calmly as I can manage. I don’t want him to start acting any crazier than he already is. He’s holding me so I can’t walk away and at the same time, he’s using me to stay upright. He must be drunker than I thought. I used to trust him but he shattered that to bits now that I know what he’s done. He’s capable of anything.

“I’m not leaving, Elena,” Owen says, his grip tightening around my arm. “Neither are you.”

# Chapter 24

## Elena

“Come on.” Owen pulls my arm roughly. “Let’s go.”

I can’t let him force his way inside my place. There’s no telling what he’d do. This isn’t the Owen I used to know. I can’t tell if he’s changed, or if I never got to know the real him. Which scares me even more. He’s never been the greatest guy, but this is next level.

All too soon, we reach my door. If he comes in, I’ll never get him to leave. I have no idea how to talk him down from whatever he’s thinking.

“You need to go,” I tell him again. “I’m not inviting you in.”

“I’m not leaving,” he says, pressing his hand against the wall for support. “We’ve got to spend some time together. Go on. Let’s go inside.” Owen rips my purse off my arm. “Need some help finding your keys?”

“You heard her. She’s not leaving.”

I’m so focused on Owen that I didn’t hear the footsteps on the thick carpet. I turn around to find Logan and Asher and Julian striding over to us.

“Get lost,” he tells them. “We’re busy.”

That pisses Logan off. “Elena told you to leave,” he says tightly. “That’s what you need to do.”

“You’d best be going now,” Asher says, closing in on Owen along with Logan. Even mild-mannered Julian’s getting angry.

For a moment I wonder if Owen’s thinking about fighting them, but even he’s smart enough to realize he’s out-numbered by three men who are all bigger than him. He’s not that drunk.

“Okay, fine.” He lifts his hands up as if in surrender.

“I’ll see you later, Elena,” he says in an undertone to me, but he’s not quiet enough.

“Not if she doesn’t want to,” Logan says. “I don’t want to catch you in our building ever again.”

“You’re going to have to come through us if you even think of showing up here,” Asher says. Julian looks like he’s going to shove Owen as he passes by, but he thinks the better of it.

“Are you okay?” Logan asks me. They all crowd around me, concerned. My eyes burn. No matter how angry at me they are, they’ll always protect me.

“I’m fine. I’m just glad he’s gone.” I swallow hard. “Can I talk to you?”

With that Logan’s guard goes right back up. Same with the others. It was their instinct to protect me but nothing’s changed between us.

“I need to talk to all of you. Please. It’s important.”

“Sure,” Julian says. “Come on.” He puts his arm around my shoulders in a surprisingly affectionate gesture as he guides me to their place.

I’m almost overcome with nerves. I was hoping to plan exactly what to say before I met up with them. I don’t have time to come up with the perfect thing now, but I need to bite the bullet.

“Elena, there’s something we need to tell you,” Asher says as we all settle in their living room.

“I really want to say something first if you don’t mind. I’m so sorry about what happened. My ex, who you just met, is the one who leaked everything to City Scan. Although the whole thing is still my fault. I should’ve come clean with all of you in the beginning.”

I take a deep breath and continue. “I was just at the office to try to stop my editor from publishing the story. It’s been so heavily edited, it’s not even close to what I originally

submitted to her. I'm not making any excuses, I just want you to know that I would never have written that kind of a story. I'm really sorry about how everything turned out. I got so caught up in wanting to get hired, and what was happening with us. It was so wrong of me. I don't expect you to forgive me and I don't deserve it. All I want you to know is that I would never have hurt you intentionally."

Logan folds his arms across his chest. "You really tried to stop the article from running?"

"Yes, I did. I did everything short of wrestling my editor to the ground so I could delete it off her computer myself."

"I don't know what you said, but it worked," Logan says.

I frown. "What do you mean?"

"Our legal team just got back to us. They got through to the publisher and he assured them that he's pulling the story," Asher says.

I gape at him. "The publisher?" So he did pay attention to what I told him after all. I thought he might've flinched just a little when I told him how Owen and Zan got the info about our relationships, and how much editing she had to do. "I can't believe he came through."

I explain what Owen did with my computer and everything else. "I don't know if it's actually illegal to tap into someone's computer like that. If it isn't, it should be. Owen said it wasn't, but I don't know. He lies all the time."

"It's a grey area," Julian says. "Spyware can be illegal to install, but simple mirroring isn't. What he did was certainly unethical, but likely not illegal. I'd have to take a look at what specific steps he took."

"We're going to monitor and make sure it doesn't pop up anywhere else," Julian adds. "That editor of yours doesn't seem very trustworthy. She still has the story in her possession."

"For now," Asher adds. "Our legal team's working to get all traces of it destroyed, and they'll be successful in that soon. For now we have the publisher on our side and that's enough."

Knowing that the information was stolen from your computer will go a long way towards making that happen. We should be able to get rid of it completely.”

I want to collapse in relief. “That’s such amazing news.”

Logan’s gone quiet. I sneak a glance at him. His expression’s softening but not by much. I hate that I’ve hurt him, and all of them.

“I’m really sorry that I didn’t tell you I was writing that story,” I say again. “I got caught up in everything.”

“I get that, I guess.” He shrugs. “Are you still going to work for them?”

I haven’t even thought that far ahead. “No. Even if they wanted to hire me after all of this, I never would.”

I squeeze my eyes closed for a moment. All of this was for nothing. I risked their company and our relationship and now I won’t even have a chance to work at City Scan.

“I’m so glad that the story’s going away,” I say as I stand up to leave. “And I can’t say it enough. I’m really, really sorry I screwed up your night and everything else.”

“Where are you going?” Logan asks me.

“Well, it’s late. I should go home.”

He shakes his head. “Don’t you want to stay?”

I blink at him. “Stay here? With you?”

“Yes, of course,” Asher says. “Why wouldn’t you?”

“Are you breaking up with us?” Logan asks.

My heart constricts. “Me? After the huge mess I made and all the damage I did, I didn’t think you’d want me in your lives any more. I mean, I wasn’t even sure you’d want to see me again to let me apologize.”

Logan shakes his head. “I didn’t, at first. Everything was in a bad state, and it could’ve gotten a whole lot worse. Is there anything else you haven’t told us that we need to know, Elena?”

“Nothing.” I twist my fingers together. “I promise you. I’m a waitress who has aspirations to become a journalist. Or I used to. I’m going to have to rethink my future career plans now.”

“Why?” Julian asks.

“I wanted to work in investigative journalism to inform people and make the world a better place. While I was trying to do that, my own ethics got twisted around. I never wanted to do any harm damage to worthwhile endeavours. I can’t risk it happening again.”

“It wasn’t just you,” Asher says. “Your ex had a hand in it and he’s a real piece of work.”

“You shouldn’t leave your dreams behind because of one bad experience,” Julian says. “Just be more careful next time. Test out all the options and make sure you get the right result.”

“The scientific approach.” The glint in Logan’s eyes betrays his serious expression. “Works every time.”

“Even if I wanted to, I won’t be able to work for City Scan or any of the company’s other publications. Going above Zan’s head is career suicide.” I rub at my eyes miserably. “Word travels fast.” I flinch when I picture Zan talking about me. No one crosses her, especially not someone who’s as new to the industry as I am. The realization hits me with full force. My chances at being a journalist anywhere are destroyed. “I won’t be able to get hired anywhere else either.”

“You can figure that out later,” Logan says. “There’s no reason to leave now. We want you to stay tonight. Maybe even longer than that.”

My heart swells up. I glance over at Asher. “We know you didn’t set out to deceive us,” he says. “Everyone makes mistakes.”

“That’s right,” Julian adds. “It would take a very long time to tell you all the different versions of our research we’ve gone through to get to where we are today. If we’d given up at any stage, there wouldn’t be a company to write about.”

“We’re not breaking up with you, if that’s what you thought,” Logan says.

“Of course I thought that. I screwed everything up so hard. I can’t believe you can’t even look at me now.”

“You made some mistakes, and your ex took advantage of you. It’s getting ironed out now. Even if it wasn’t, I don’t think there’s any chance we wouldn’t want you in our lives,” Logan says. Asher nods in agreement.

“I like having you around too,” Julian adds. “These two are a lot happier when you are.”

Now my eyes are burning. Logan brushes away the tears that I can’t hold back. “Don’t cry. It’s all taken care of.”

“We want you,” Asher says. “No matter what happens, that will never change.”

Logan catches me up in a hug. I can’t even speak so I throw my arms around me and kiss him. He murmurs into my ear as he lifts me up off the ground and I wrap my legs around his waist. “Let’s go to bed.”

# Chapter 25

## Elena

I move between Logan and Asher, undressing them piece by piece. They're so gorgeous.

Asher's impatient. He pulls me in for a long, drawn out kiss. Logan steps closer, running his hands over me, then Asher, then back to me. I reach for him, keeping one arm around Asher.

Logan starts to take my clothes off. Asher joins him until I'm as naked as they are. They both lead me over to the bed.

"I want to see you ride Logan's face, Elena." Asher joins me, taking hold of my hand to guide me in place as Logan stretches his tall frame out.

I climb to straddle Logan, leaning forward to rest my hands against the wall. Asher stops me. Gently he pulls my hands behind me, holding them together.

"I've got you," he murmurs into my ear with a nip to my sensitive ear lobe. He moves so he's right behind me, his throbbing cock grinding against my back. His hands go to my hips to help me stay in place. It's a strange sensation, not really having my own balance, having to lean against him, and still stay in reach of Logan's talented tongue.

"Trust me," Asher says. "Let go."

I do. I'm on high alert, trying to stay upright as Logan drives me into ecstasy. It makes me much more aware of my body. Every sensation's heightened as I get shakier.

Leaning harder into Asher, I grind against Logan's mouth. He swirls his tongue over my clit in a way that makes me want to scream.

Asher kisses his way down my neck. He moves his hands to cover my breasts, his thumbs teasing my taut nipples. I



press backwards into his broad chest.

I'm breathless with need. All I can do is give myself over to every single feeling these men are causing. Logan thrusts his tongue into me. My hips take on a mind of their own, rocking and thrusting at their own will. Asher wraps his arms around me to keep me as steady as possible. Burying his face against my neck, his hand snakes down my body. I jump when he reaches my swollen clit.

Logan grips my thighs so I never move out of his reach even as I roll my hips with abandon. The double sensation of Asher's stroking finger and Logan's expert tongue sends me crashing over the edge. I come so hard I cry out. My thighs tremor and I'm only staying upright because of Asher's solid strength keeping me where I need to be. I'm gasping and spent by the time they let up on me.

"Are you ready for me, Elena?" Asher's cock is hard as steel. "Or do you need a moment?"

"I'm ready." I love the feeling of a hard cock inside of me right after I've come.

As I start to shift around, I jolt in shock.

Julian's standing in the doorway with his arms folded across his chest. He leans casually against the wall even as his gaze is laser-focused on us.

On me.

I have no idea how long he's been standing there. I guess he couldn't help but see us or hear us since no one stopped to close the door behind us. A small thrill shoots through me at the idea of him watching everything we did. There's a highly visible bulge in his pants.

Logan follows my gaze. "Looks like JJ might want to join in."

I glance at Asher, who nips at my neck. "It's up to you, Elena."

"You don't mind?" I'm surprised.

"Not a bit."

I lock eyes with Julian. I've got two hot men in bed with me and there's no reason in the world to turn down a sexy scientist guy. All it takes is a nod from me to get him in motion.

By the time Julian joins us on the bed, he's already as naked as the rest of us. For the first time I find out that Julian isn't just tall, he's big in the best possible way. His cock is long and thick, solidly upright and ready for attention. I want to feel it but Logan gets there first. He keeps one hand on my breast, extending his other one out to curve his fingers around Julian's stiff shaft.

Julian thrusts forward into Logan's palm. At the same time Asher grabs for my hips and starts to enter me very slowly. Julian's eyes rove between all of us, taking everything in. I wasn't sure if he was only into men but he's staring at me just as much as he is the others.

Interesting. Our eyes meet and a flare of desire lights up in me. From the way Julian grins at me, I know he feels it too. The lust in his eyes is clear and it's for me too.

Asher's cock pulses as he pumps into me from behind.

Logan gives me a kiss. Our eyes lock and he's the most vulnerable I've even seen him. My heart thumps. This is real.

Julian edges closer, so close his cock is right in Logan's face. Logan sticks out his tongue and drags it up the full length of Julian's cock.

Julian sucks in his breath. "Fuck," he groans as Logan sucks him between his lips. After a moment Logan pulls back. Julian angles slightly towards me, offering up his cock. Asher's next thrust pushes me close and I open my mouth. Julian's cock slides over my tongue. I suck him until I need more air and Logan takes over. It's an indescribable sensation, sucking on him while Asher fills me up completely.

Asher's breath gets loud and ragged. He thrusts faster, clenching at my hips, throbbing deep inside of me as he comes hard.

Julian drops one hand to my head and one to Logan's. He groans and tenses up, his shaft buried in Logan's mouth. I want my own taste but Julian's too close to the edge. His face twists as he explodes.

I close my eyes and Asher strokes my hair. He kisses my neck lightly before he pulls back and moves off me.

"Elena."

Logan's tone makes my eyes fly open. I was right, he's wide open to me. To the others. I brush my lips across his.

"Come here."

I kind of roll onto him and he helps me. My limbs are weaker than I thought they'd be but I want to ride him again.

Arranging my thighs around him, I grind my clit against his iron-hard cock as it lays stiff and hot against his stomach. Logan's arms flex as he digs his fingers into my hips. I love his strength. I love him, I realize distantly. I want him so much, it's overwhelming.

He raises me up slightly, his eyes burning. I think I can see my own feelings reflected back to me. He loves me too.

A wash of need floods over me as he parts my lips with his fingers. Julian lifts Logan's cock up and Asher guides me down onto it, making sure to get in a few strokes of my clit as he does so.

Julian's eyes are gleaming wickedly. "Ride him good, Elena."

I groan out something that's supposed to be a yes. It's all I can manage. I'm hyper aware of Asher and Julian around us but I can't look away from Logan as I take him deep. Our gaze never shifts from each other. It's like he's looking right into my soul as he's penetrating into my body.

Once he's filled me up completely, I lean down. I need to be kissing him. He pushes into me as our lips lock. I only break our kiss when I need more. Sitting up again, I start to ride him with an urgency I've never felt before.

"Yes, Elena." Julian sets his hand on my lower back.

“Damn,” Asher says.

I try to keep a steady pace but it’s not easy with my next orgasm rising up and demanding attention. Logan bucks his hips up, driving into me. He doesn’t want to wait. My body doesn’t either. I tense up and Logan grins at me. He strokes my clit and I call out as my climax slams into me.

“Elena.” He groans out my name as he surges up, his orgasm slamming into him too as my muscles clench him tightly. We both lose control and yet Asher and Julian being right here, part of it too, are grounding both of us as we explode in bliss.

As I collapse down onto the bed, I can’t help but thinking that this could be too good to be true.

“We’re yours, you know.” I open one eye to find Logan’s grey eyes sparkling wickedly.

Grinning lazily, Asher strokes my leg. “If you want us.”

Julian’s lying on the other side of Logan. He doesn’t agree, or say anything at all. Maybe this was just a spur of the moment thing for him. Maybe he’s still only into Logan.

“Of course I do.” My voice catches with thick emotion.

Logan and Asher drape their arms around me, their warmth lulling me into a half-sleep. Even if Julian’s only here for Logan now, I’m loving being surrounded by all three of these men. I could definitely get used to this.

I don’t remember falling asleep but it’s morning. Logan’s draped over me before he rolls onto his back with a big yawn.

“Morning,” he says sleepily. I kiss his cheek, only half-awake myself.

Asher kisses my neck on the other side. “Sleep well?”

“Yes, but I’m dying for some coffee,” I say, trying to stifle a yawn of my own.

“I can make some,” Logan says.

“No.” Asher reaches across me to pin Logan down, although he isn’t making a move to get up yet. “Julian’s doing

that. You don't need to scare Elena away with your inability to produce something drinkable."

Before Logan can retort, Julian rushes into the bedroom and right away it's obvious that something's wrong.

"What is it, JJ?" Logan asks, taking in his friend's pale face and wild eyes. Asher sits upright, instantly on high alert.

"I got a message from the head lab tech. Our data has been stolen. It's in someone else's hands right now."

"How?" Asher asks sharply.

"I don't know yet." Julian's eyes stray over to me. I go hot and cold. Not me, I want to say, but my throat's gone completely dry. Asher and Logan are tensed up beside me.

"Elena," Logan says in a strained voice. "Where can we find your ex?"

## Preview: [My Three Guys](#)

*MMMMF Bisexual Reverse Harem Menage Romance*

What if you don't know what you  
need until it finds you...

Liam and I just moved in together. We're rock solid. I haven't  
so much as looked at other man since our first date.

Until our two best friends crash-land on our sofa.

Then everyone's secret desires start to come out.

We're going to need a bigger bed.

Continue reading for a preview.

# Chapter 1

## April

“Really, April. This is disgraceful.”

Garrett has a really grating voice. I never realized that before. Probably because his personality is so off-putting, you don’t notice anything else because your first instinct is to get away. I have to force the distaste out of my expression before I glance up from my computer to see what he wants.

“Is this how you think an MSmith professional works?” His mouth is twisted up into a thin line as he frowns at the chaos on top of my desk. And around it. Just because I’ve got piles of contracts surrounding me now doesn’t mean I’m not going to get them filed. Or clear off the papers strewn around.

I’m busy. I like a tidy workspace, but I haven’t had a spare moment in a long time. It’s crazy at the firm lately. All of our clients are trying to recover from the aftermath of the quarantine lockdowns as fast as they possibly can and our public relations company is the key helping them do just that.

Every single director gives me tasks to do and I never say no. Garrett knows perfectly well why that is, or he should. It’s one of the better ways to move up and I’m determined to do so as soon as I can. I need the money and I want the job security. Who knows what can change or when? Nobody expected a global pandemic to tear up the economy the way it did. In the aftermath, everyone I know is constantly worried about losing their jobs at only a moment’s notice.

“Well, I know where everything is.” It takes everything in me to stop myself from telling Garrett where to stick his opinion. It’s not just that I have to tolerate this man. It’s worse than that. I have to walk a very fine line between letting Garrett believe that I don’t dislike him, and that I have no interest in him. My chances at getting a promotion hinge on being known as a team player. The same thing should be true

for Garrett, but it's not. The CEO of the entire company favours him for some reason.

And he knows it.

The two of them even see each other socially sometimes and that's hard to compete with. Garrett started at MSmith just before I did and by all accounts, I'm doing better than he is. But he thinks he's got the next promotion locked up.

I don't agree. Neither does anyone else in the office.

"My desk's under control." I want so much to tell him to get lost, but I never would. I hate confrontation as much as Garrett seems to love it.

If his lips got any thinner, they'd disappear. "It certainly doesn't look that way. At MSmith, we have higher standards than this."

I grit my teeth. "Of course. I'll work it out before the end of the day." He's not even senior to me, but from the way he talks, you'd think he runs the entire firm.

I meant for that to get rid of Garrett but he's still leaning against the door frame. I want to tell him to get the hell out of here but at this point, I can't even come up with a polite way to do it. I'm killing myself working so hard every day and here he is, lounging around doing nothing. I want to have that kind of time.

At least if I get promoted, it'll all ease up. Everything will get better. And with the raise that comes along with the new senior position that's opened up, I'll be able to relax a little more about money. My secret hope is that I can get Liam out of his job. My boyfriend works in sales for his family business and his father's always on his back. Even Liam admits that he needs to get away from that kind of situation, and he's not one to go against his parents on anything.

Garrett shifts from foot to foot, trying to find something else to needle me about. He's doing this on purpose. It's his new game, to distract and bother me in any way he can so he can figure out how to really undermine me. He's terrible, and there's nothing I can do about it.



I can't believe I used to think he was a good guy. When I first started at MSmith two years ago, he was nice as could be. He showed me around, and let me know how things worked in the office. I liked him and I even thought we were becoming friends.

Until I stayed late one day to finish setting up a social media blast. I thought I was the only one left in the office. I wrapped up my file and I closed my dry eyes for a moment to refocus. When I opened them, I nearly jumped out of my chair. Garrett was standing right beside my desk, gazing at me in a super creepy way.

He acted like sneaking up on me was the most normal thing in the world. Then things got worse.

“How would you like to go out with me on Saturday night, April?”

“What?” My heart was still racing from being startled. “What are you talking about?”

“My wife's out of town this weekend.”

“Wife?” I glanced at his left hand. He wasn't even wearing a ring. He never mentioned that he had a wife, not one time. Even when I occasionally referred to my boyfriend. “You're married?”

He shrugged. “Our marriage is basically over, but leaving her would cost me too much.”

I thought he was joking. I really did. But he wasn't. It took me ten minutes to get Garrett to leave me alone and I was worried he'd follow me out of the building. I was still shaking when I got home afterwards.

Ever since then, Garrett's been a total asshole to me. I agonized over reporting him but I was so new to the company, I didn't want to rock the boat. And he hasn't pulled anything like that again.

Now he just acts like a jerk in general. I spend as little time as I can with him, but lately he's ramped up his game of trying to get to me and I don't know why.

I turn my head away and stare pointedly at my screen. It's late enough that he shouldn't even be here. Neither should I, but work's piling up. I need to put a dent into the growing stack of press releases that need my attention.

Finally he walks off without another word. I'm sure that's only because he can't think of another way to try and bother me. I exhale with relief. With Garrett gone, I whip through what I need to get done.

I'm already in a better mood by the time I get down to the ground floor. I've been looking forward to tonight for a long time and it's finally here. Liam and I moved in together at the beginning of the month and we're having our very first party in our brand new condo.

I'm about to text Liam when I see I missed a message from him, asking when I'll be home. I stop before I leave the building to tap out a reply. Stepping out into the dusk, I can't help but grin as I hurry to the subway. My mood's already improved. I've got a big surprise for Liam tonight. I've been planning it for weeks. He's going to love it. I can't wait.

\*\*\*\*\*

[My Three Guys](#) is available on Amazon.

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## **MMMF Reverse Harem Menage Romance:**

Book 2 in the Central Park South series

Coming Spring 2023

### [My Three Guys](#)

*What if you don't know what you need until it finds you...*

Liam and I just moved in together. We're rock solid. I haven't so much as looked at other man since our first date.

Until our two best friends crash-land on our sofa. Then everyone's secret desires start to come out.

We're going to need a bigger bed.

### [Jump Start](#)

*Moving back to my home town is humiliating.*

It's only temporary. I'm not giving up everything I've worked for just because my ex set me up.

I can't bear to stay in Manhattan with everyone I know believing I made a huge, career-ending mistake.

So I head back to my hometown to lie low until my name can be cleared.

I never thought I'd stumble across a kind of temptation I didn't know existed. I've never been so intensely attracted to any one man before, let alone three. My dull nights heat up to a scorching level and I can't resist Sy or Bolt or Kevin.

When what we have starts to unravel, I'd do anything to stop my life from blowing up theirs. The ex jocks have a secret of their own to keep and I can't let it come out. Just like I can't let myself fall for all three of them. That could never work.

### [My Three Crushes](#)

*Sometimes it takes getting lost to find what you really need.*

Especially when I end up sharing same bed as the three hot men I find tucked away from the rest of the world in their cabin. They aren't what I expected. And they certainly weren't expecting to have me crash into their own private world.

It's just a few days in a fun fantasyland that I couldn't ever have imagined. Nothing more can come from it. Our lives are just too different. They're small town guys. I live in Manhattan.

And even if it was an option, there's no way I could choose between all three. I want them all.

How crazy is that?

### [My Three Bosses](#)

*Dating your boss is never a good idea. Especially when you have more than one.*

Things are looking up when I meet a very handsome man who urgently needs an executive assistant. I desperately need a job. And someone to help mend my

broken heart. Maybe Jaylen Davenport can do both.

But I'm not going to be working just for him. Jay's got two other hot partners in the firm he works very closely with. When I finds out that Corey, Shawn and Jay are all partners in the bedroom too, I'm in heaven.

Until life outside of the foursome breaks in and threatens to break us up. It shouldn't matter anyway. I can't keep seeing them all. Relationships doesn't work that way. Right?

## **MMF Threesome Menage:**

### [Snow Bound](#)

*Three coworkers are trapped together. But a dangerous blizzard could become a perfect storm for love.*

I'm all about work. Always have been, and even more so since my last relationship ended. I don't mind being single. Not at all. I get what I need when I need it.

And I'll do anything to get ahead. Even go on a three week long team building retreat, way the hell out in the middle of nowhere. In winter. Being organized by a woman I can't stand.

### [Power Surge](#)

I caught my two hot bosses together. Then they invited me to join them.

Rob is the last thing I need in my life. Same with James. But I can't help what I want. This isn't how my career is supposed to be starting out. I don't want to get distracted. Not even by two of the hottest men I've ever seen IRL. One's a man whore. One's married to his work.

Oh, and did I mention that they're both my bosses?

There's no chance that anything good can happen with either one of them. I'm looking for love. So I shouldn't want them. But I do.

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