



Fakin' it

WITH MY

BOSS

SHANA HOLDEN

Fakin' It With My Boss

Shana Holden

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Also By Shana Holden

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Chapter One

Malcolm

I wake up to the sound and feeling of someone wrapping their warm mouth around my cock. With the glare in my eyes, I slowly pull the face of the redhead towards me, kissing her deeply, leaving my signature bite on her lips. That way, there is no chance she can forget me anytime soon. I can't remember where we met, probably at the bar last night, but that doesn't matter. What matters is that I'm getting some action, so I pull her down and let her ride me. I'm thrusting into her, letting her moans wash over me, when my phone rings, the shrill noise piercing through the haze of lust. I groan and roll over, reaching for it on the nightstand. It's Ellen, my assistant.

"Hello?" I say, my voice thick with lust and anger.

"Hey, Boss! It's Ellen," she says, her voice urgent. "We've got a problem at the office. I need you to come in right away."

I blink, trying to clear the fog from my brain. "What kind of problem?"

“There’s an issue of data confidentiality, and an official is here to meet you,” she says, tense. “We need you to take care of it.”

I rub my eyes and sit up, trying to shake off the drowsiness. “Okay, I’ll be there in a bit.”

I glance down at the redhead, whose name I don’t remember but will not dare ask for, taking in her tousled hair and peaceful expression. She’s beautiful, so alluring, with a fantastic body. And we had an amazing last night, one that I don’t want to end just yet.

I feel a pang of guilt as I consider what to do. On the one hand, I have a sense of responsibility towards my company and employees. On the other, I have a beautiful woman in my bed, with the morning light casting her in a warm glow.

But in the end, duty wins. I gently extricate myself from her and get out of bed, quickly pulling on some clothes. I can tell that she’s confused, but I don’t look back. I can’t let her distract me from the task at hand.

As I reach the door, she calls out to me. “Malcolm, where are you going?”

“I have to rush to work,” I say, trying to keep my tone light. “There’s a problem that needs my attention.”

She sits up. “Can’t someone else take care of it?”

I shake my head. “No, this is something only I can handle.”

She nods, her expression understanding. “Okay, I get it. But can we see each other later?”

I hesitate momentarily, torn between my hard-on for her and my responsibilities as the CEO of my real estate empire, Malcolm Graff Realty. But in the end, I know what I have to do.

“I’m afraid not, sweetheart. But I will instruct my driver to take you home. Feel free to let me know when that will be.”

And with that, I leave, feeling the morning’s weight settling over me. I have a job to do, and I can’t let anything get in the way.

I arrive at the office a short while later, feeling the adrenaline starting to pump through my veins. Walking into my job makes me feel alive, sharpens my senses, and focuses my mind.



“Everyone, look lively! The boss is coming!”

Those imps! I think, scowling as I stride purposefully toward my office. As I walk past my highly efficient employees, I see them clattering away at their keyboards with a feigned look of concentration that would have made a lesser man laugh out loud. I am barely seated at my desk before my assistant strolls in casually with my cup of coffee.

“We need to discuss why you believe you can strut into my office like a runway. You know, assistants to powerful men scramble after them,” I say as I take my steaming cup of coffee—Caffe Mocha, just as I like it. I nod, pleased.

“Which is why I’m grateful I work for you and not them,” Ellen says with a cheeky smile, and I shake my head. If she weren’t so efficient, I would have fired her for daring to backtalk at me.

“Which was it this time? A blonde? Redhead?”

“Shoot me,” I say, following our usual routine, where we talk about my schedule for the day. I was tired of the conversation. Thankfully, Ellen got right into business.

“Well, you’ve got *Vanity*, *Techbizz*, and the *New Yorker* waiting for the interview confirmation.”

I look up, confused. “A confirmation for what interview?”

“You don’t know? You got Most Eligible Bachelor again. They want an interview.”

“I’m not doing it.” I scowl and watch Ellen make some notes.

“What else is on my schedule?”

“You’ve got the meeting with HR about the work retreat. There’s also a call from your sister, and your niece, Desire, also asks that you call her back.”

“Anything else?”

“Nope. That’s all for today,” Ellen replies.

“Where does HR have in mind?” I ask.

“Rhode Island,” Ellen replies chirpily.

“Rhode Island?” I grunt. “That’s not too far away.”

“Yep. HR wanted us to have a road trip instead of a flight, so they picked a place not too far from home. So we are headed for Newport. I hear the beach is great. The goal is to bond, after all. Nothing better than watching fellow employees in bikinis and shorts.”

I notice Ellen staring at me.

“What is it?” I ask.

“It’s the beach in the summer; live a little boss.”

“Is that all? Because if you have something else to say, say it now.” My damn assistant with her unsolicited opinions.

“Nothing. I’m simply waiting for your orders.”

“Get me Desire on line two and tell HR to come see me at noon for the meeting.”

“Will that be all?”

I stare at her dead in the eyes until she gets the message.

“Noted. I’ll leave you alone now.”

“Hold on, Ellen,” I say before she walks out of the office.

“Yes, Boss?”

“You can tell them to stop pretending. I can see Matthew from here looking like he could shit in his pants from feigning such seriousness.”

We both laugh. We are an unconventional enterprise, just as I always envisioned work to be. I pay them for results, not to pretend to respect me.

“Will do, Boss.”

“Thank you,” I say as Ellen walks out.

I swirl my chair around and stand up. From the glass windows in front of me, I can see the layout of the entire city. New York in all its pomp and glory. I take a deep breath, go back to my chair, and pick up the phone to speak to Desire, wondering for the umpteenth time what my niece could possibly want this time.

I have barely placed the phone to my ear when I hear Desire, my thirteen-year-old niece shriek in joy,

“Uncle Malcolm! It’s so great to be speaking with you again.”

I laugh heartily, but I’m not fooled. “I love you, Desire, but if you don’t get talking now, I will have no choice but to end this call.” I threaten.

“Then I would come to the office and cause quite the ruckus,” she retorts. In that instance, I picture her dropping into my workplace with her spaghetti-strap top, her hair all wavy, gothic makeup, and whatever boots teenagers are into these days, and I shiver. I had stood before CEOs and didn’t cower, but the thought of my niece showing up was enough for me to consider fleeing for the hills.

“Fine. You win. Please tell me what it is you want,” I concede.

I can hear her whispering to someone in the background and assume it is her mother, my sister.

“Desire...,” I warn.

“I just wanted to know if you would attend the Thanksgiving dinner this year.”

I sigh. “Did your mother put you up to this?”

“No,” she replies, but it is too quick, and I have always been able to catch her in a lie.

“You know what? How about I check my schedule and see if I can work something out? If it turns out that I can’t, we will go out for dinner. Just you and me. Anywhere you like.”

I hear her sigh of disappointment and ignore the twist in my chest. “That’s the same thing you said last year.”

“I know,” I whisper.

“Mom sends her love, uncle.”

“You tell her I’ll be speaking with her soon, but for now, I must run.”

“Have a good day, Uncle Malcolm. I love you.”

“I love you too,” I reply as I hang up the phone.

I let out a sigh of relief. I had barely zoned out for a minute when I hear Ellen walk in again.

“Excuse me, Boss.”

I open my eyes to find her inside my office, staring at my face with concern.

“Yes, Ellen, what is it?”

“You know how you said you didn’t want to interview with any of the magazines?”

I nod. “Yes, so?”

“Well, *Vanity* called, and they aren’t taking no for an answer. They said, and I quote, ‘Even if it means coming up there to get an interview from him.’”

I stare at her in horror. “That cannot happen.” We have an unwritten policy. It was only five words. *No strangers in our building.*

Ellen nods, already one step ahead of me. “My sentiments exactly, which is why I booked you for 1:00 p.m., and your driver can drop you off at the governor’s house for your meeting. Don’t worry about what to wear. I’ve picked an outfit for you, and you should get it there. Let me know if you need me to accompany you or if you would rather do this alone.”

I look at her incredulously. “You booked an interview with *Vanity* without informing me?”

Ellen, in turn, stares at me like I’m stupid.

“You know my rules, Ellen. No interviews.”

“I’m sorry, Boss. But this one couldn’t be helped. Besides, you haven’t given a single interview in the six consecutive years you’ve won Most Eligible Bachelor. So it’s high time we stepped out of our comfort zones.”

I shake my head and stare at my wristwatch. I had to leave now to make it in time for the interview. “Fine. But try this again, and I’ll have you transferred to bathroom duty for a week.”

Ellen smiles at me. “I promise you, Boss, it will never happen again.” For a brief moment, I am disoriented, wondering how I never noticed until now how Ellen has the most beautiful smile, but then it is gone, and she is all “assistant Ellen” again.

“Are you okay?”

I nod. There is no way I will tell my assistant that, for a brief moment, her smile drew me in. “Never been better. Shall we?”

“Yes. Please do not forget to smile and act like there is nowhere else you would rather be than there.”

I give her a mocking smile. “How’s this?”

“Turn it up a notch, and you will be perfect.”

I laugh and walk out of my office with Ellen trailing behind me. I see my employees put their heads down and pretend to get busy again. I ignore them this time and walk outside to find my driver waiting for me. I get to the car and walk into the Vanity Magazine headquarters in twenty minutes, where a gushing intern is attending me.

“Tell us one secret to your success.”

I look at the interviewer, who smiles at me encouragingly. The truth is, I’m uncomfortable; the concentrated light on my face, the silence, and the anticipation make me feel dizzy, but I do not break character. I smile warmly. “Well, I wouldn’t say it’s one thing. It’s a combination of things, but definitely,

persistence. You want something badly; don't stop working until you get there.”

“That is so profound.”

Not as profound as any you've heard, I think. I can't wait to wrap up this interview. I look down at my Italian shoes and smile. As usual, Ellen has done an excellent job with her selections. She takes on my assistant role like she was born for it. Like it wasn't a few years ago, she accidentally bumped into me and pitched herself into getting a job at my company.

“Mr. Graff?”

I look up, suddenly embarrassed that I had zoned out. “I'm sorry. Could you repeat the question?” I ask, giving my most charming smile.

“I was asking how you felt about being one of the nominees for the Governor's Contract.”

I smile, relieved. Now, this was a subject I was interested in. The Governor's Contract was the most prestigious project awarded to a real estate firm and developer for five years to be in charge of every major project the city government would undertake. If one did a good job, it would cement their career for life.

“Elated to be sure. It means a lot to me that I was selected for this. It just goes to prove that I'm doing something right.”

“Do you think you stand a chance at winning?”

I chuckle to seem humble. *Stand a chance?* “I strongly believe I have what it takes to win this thing.”

“Mr. Graff?”

I look at my interviewer, wondering why she had such a high-pitched voice. It makes every pronunciation of my name sound like a scream. I smile tightly.

“Yes?”

“Are you aware that Gary Foster is also nominated?”

I am convinced that I must have misheard. “What do you mean?”

“It was announced earlier today that Gary Foster was also nominated for the Governor’s Contract.”

I immediately feel sick to my stomach. Gary Foster is the second most eligible bachelor in New York City, and a people’s favorite because he grants many interviews. I swear, there is no mystery to that man. Not only that, he is my business rival as well. Our companies have always been at loggerheads, competing to outshine each other during projects. If anyone else other than me stands a chance of winning the Governor’s Contract, it is Gary Foster. *This day just got significantly worse.* I remain composed on the outside, though, and even manage a warm smile. “Well, congratulations to him. It seems like the race just got more interesting.”

“My thoughts exactly. I look forward to seeing your different pitches.”

I nod thoughtfully. “May the best man win,” I finish, smiling.

I briskly exit the building and enter the car after the interview is wrapped up. I instruct my driver to head for the governor's house, where he is having lunch with all the nominees. I dial Ellen.

"How was the interview?" Her voice, a lazy drawl, knots my stomach, but I ignore it.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"It was just announced, and I knew it would be too late by the time I got to you. I apologize. Was it a shocker?"

I shake my head; *What was I expecting? No competition?*
"Nothing I can't handle...."

I'm going to the governor's apartment; clear the rest of my schedule for today. Then, I'll be leaving for home from there."

"Yes, Boss."

"Thank you, Ellen."

"Oh, and Boss?"

"Yes, Ellen?"

"Go knock 'em dead today!"

I chuckle. "Now, *that* I can do."

Chapter Two

Ellen

I'm sitting at the overly priced restaurant that is way above my pay grade while trying not to bite my nails. A nervous habit I have in stressful situations. I'm sitting in our usual corner, upstairs. In the spot reserved for VIPs, although secluded and private, this one affords me a view of the people downstairs. I watch a lady stifling a yawn at her date, a short stuffy guy who probably works on Wall Street. He can't seem to shut up.

My eyes drift from them to a young teenager on her phone, clearly waiting for someone. Maybe a busy father. I shake my head; I know something about busy fathers. I had one myself; he just left the house one day and never returned. The next time I heard from him, he needed my help in a hospital. But that is not why I'm here. I glance nervously towards the stairs to find with relief that my date has finally arrived.

"You're late," I say simply. I pick up a copy of the menu, knowing fully what I want to order but studying it like I don't. I wait for him to speak, knowing that, although he knew

enough not to try this again, he would be late again. This is the drill we are used to. He remains silent, and I look to find him on his phone. *Talk about being an asshole!*

“Gary!”

I watch him look up, startled. He looks at me and around the restaurant as if surprised to find me there. Like he doesn’t remember walking in here.

“I’m sorry, Ellen; what did you say?”

I take a deep breath and count slowly to five. “I said that you’re late. Again.”

“No, I’m not. You’re early.”

It is true. I am early. Immediately Malcolm informs me that he will be heading home from the governor’s house. I had decided to come early to my weekly meeting with Gary—the fact that he was also going to be late from the governor’s house totally slipped my mind.

“I’m early, Gary. But you’re still twenty minutes late. You’re supposed to be here at seven-thirty, and although—”

Gary cuts me off with a wave of his hand before I have a chance to finish. “Why, my darling Ellen, enough of this, please. We have a lot on our plates.”

I bristled. “I would appreciate it if you wouldn’t cut me off like that next time while—”

But he did it again, and I swear I almost slapped him. “Why haven’t you ordered? You’re probably hungry and tired,” is all

he says, and calls for a waiter, who hurries to his side.

“I’ll be having a steak. Medium rare. The lady would be having the same?” And then he has the audacity to look at me inquiringly.

“Well done, please,” I say to the waiter, smiling tightly.

Gary looks at me with amusement and then shrugs. “I could have sworn you were a medium rare lady.”

“Why would you think that?” I ask.

“Well, no offense, but you do look cold, and I swear, on some days, it’s like you could eat me alive.”

“That’s because you’re an annoying bastard, Gary, not because I’m some cannibal.”

There is a brief silence where I fear I have overstepped; there is no use annoying this man, but then Gary laughs out loud, and I heave a sigh of relief. Our meal arrives shortly, and we both dig in.

“How was work today?”

“Fine,” I say simply, cutting into my steak.

“I will need a little more than ‘fine,’ Ellen.”

I place my cutlery gingerly on the table and take a sip of water. “Everything at work is fine, Gary. My boss still doesn’t suspect that I’m working for you. So, if you’ve got something you need to get off your freaking mind, you’ll have to let me know.”

“Ah. There’s that fire that I love. You know it was there the first time we met. Then, when I bailed you out of your situation, you stared at me, too proud to admit you were grateful.”

I tense. My past isn’t something I like to be reminded of. “So, you bailed me out because my father got sick, and I loved the man too much not to do anything about it. Bravo, Gary! You helped save the life of a girl with Daddy issues.” I raise my glass in a mocking show of a toast.

I see Gary shaking his head. “I saved your life. Who would have given you all the money to keep your father alive?”

“You mean you’ve made me your spy, and now I’m forever indebted to you? Can we move along, or do you want to keep doing this drill?” I ask, flipping my curls impatiently. He must have read my mind as he went quiet for the remainder of the meal.

When we finish, a waiter clears the table. We stare at each other until, finally uncomfortable, he begins to talk.

“I have been nominated for the Governor’s Contract.”

I nod my head. This is not new; half of New York City must have heard by now. The remaining half would catch up at dinnertime.

“I’m happy for you,” I say, but Gary moves on as if I haven’t spoken.

“I’m pleased, of course. It is such a huge honor to be considered worthy of nomination by the governor.”

I stifle a laugh. Gary can be so full of himself. Everyone around him knows he didn't get there because he was so hardworking. He wouldn't have pursued it if I hadn't dropped the hint.

“What do you want from me, Gary? It's almost time for me to head back home. It's a busy day at work tomorrow,” I say, visibly bored.

I saw a weird expression on Gary's face for a moment, but it was gone before I could blink.

“What I need you to do is simple. We all know Malcolm was also nominated. So I need you to tell me everything he has planned for his pitch, and I mean everything. I want to know what he's thinking, what he's planning, and whom he's bringing on board. Everything.”

I pause for a beat. “That would be difficult,” I say quietly.

“Why would that be?” The blond-haired Gary with an adorable face that would give Leonardo DiCaprio a run for his money could sometimes be so foolish.

“Because this is our most valuable project yet. Eyes would be up all over it. There is no way to replicate it.”

“And who says I'll be replicating his pitch?”

“Gary, don't you fool me. You and I know you don't plan on creating a presentation from scratch.”

“That's what my workers are there for,” he says with a wave.

“The thing is, Malcolm works hard and prefers to handle important projects like this himself. If he feels generous, he invites an employee or two on board, and I do not doubt that this will be the same. But you, on the other hand, are a trust-fund child who had everything handed down to your bubbling company. So what do you need Malcolm’s pitch for, when you could have anybody do it for you?”

“And risk the city finding out that I’m an undeserving dumbass who can’t even work on his project himself?”

“I see your point. I’m just saying it would be hard.”

At that, Gary leans across his table to pat my hand, and I shrug it, slightly disgusted. “And that is why I got you. To be the best assistant ever to that man.”

I swallow and look up to find Gary watching me with that mean look that scares the shit out of me. “I mean it, Ellen. Don’t fail me this time. The results would be damaging.”
Ellen; Don’t fail me this time.

I nod. “I understand.”

“Good girl. Unfortunately, I have to leave now; the bill is on my tab as always; feel free to order something else.”

“I’m good,” I tell him. I feel nauseous already. “I think I’ll be heading home now as well.”

Gary looks at me, and for a second, I fear that he can tell all the evil thoughts I’m thinking about him, and he smiles.

“Then, I’ll see you outside, my dear.”

I shake my head quickly. “No, please.” It would not do good for us to be seen together publicly.

“Hmm. That is wise.”

I smile again, hoping my face wouldn't crack from faking it for so long.

“Well, I'll go out first. Have a good night, Ellen.”

“You too,” I say, weak with relief.

He brings out his phone again and starts to type furiously on it as he heads for the exit. I wait for a few minutes, and after making sure the coast is clear, I head down as well, walking briskly to my car, which was parked a few meters away from the restaurant. I drive slowly, feeling the night breeze. I arrive at my apartment building and take the elevator to my studio apartment to find Lassy, my cute little dog who comes alive the moment she sees me. She runs into my arms, and I plant kisses all over her. I sigh deeply.

“You would not believe the day I had!” And I tell her about my day, knowing from her barks that she's paying attention.

I walk to the kitchen, fix some food for her, and make myself a sandwich. “I should call him, don't you think? I should ask him how the meeting went.” I'm talking to Lassy, who is so buried in her meal that she has stopped listening to me by now. I sigh and go to pick up the phone. I know he would still be up because he rarely sleeps at night like me. He picks up on the first ring.

“Yes?”

“I know this is out of work, but I wanted to know how the meeting went.”

“And it couldn’t wait until tomorrow?”

I hear him groan and listen to a voice in the background. I am mortified. I have interrupted him when he’s with a woman.

“I apologize, Boss. Wasn’t aware you would be... erm, engrossed in the activity.”

Malcolm chuckles like I hoped he would. “I will fill you in about it tomorrow.”

“No problem, Boss,” I chirp, even though I’m slightly disappointed.

“Oh, and Ellen. Don’t you dare arrive late at the office tomorrow. Don’t think I didn’t notice you were late two days ago.”

This time I laugh. “I won’t be,” I promise.

“Good. Have a good night.”

“You too,”

I say and hang up the phone to find Lassy staring at me. “What? I told you I would call him, didn’t I?”

Lassy whines, and that’s when I understand what it means. “You want more? Are you not even concerned about me?”

I am rambling. Whoever said dogs were a man’s best friend, clearly didn’t meet Lassy. I add more food to her bowl and head for the sanctity of my bedroom after giving her a rub. I

need a shower to wash off the scent of Gary and the restaurant on me.

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Chapter Three

Malcolm

I see Ellen when she walks into the office, her blonde hair a whirlwind behind her; she is late again; technically, I'm early. There are only two other employees present with me. I watch her hurry to her cubicle. One of the perks of being boss is that I get a great view of everyone when my office isn't closed. Like I know the head of marketing, Donna, snacks on chocolate cookies when she feels pressured to deliver on a project; I know George has a stress ball he touches almost always; I also know that Matthew teases Donna between work. I guess that he has a crush on her. Here's what I've been able to tell about Ellen: that she's a hard worker (when her eyes hit the screen, it takes a miracle to break her concentration) and that I was a little in awe of her.

I watch her now, grabbing a cup of my coffee and strutting towards my office; I see her expression when she realizes I'm already there.

“Good morning, Boss.”

“Good morning, Ellen.” I wait a bit for her to break.

“Before you say anything, I’m not late. You are super early.”

I laugh. “I agree. You are not in trouble, Ellen. At least, not today.”

She sighs visibly and then hands me my cup of coffee, and I take it gratefully.

“So, shoot me.”

She takes a seat opposite me with her legs crossed. Her stilettos are red this time. I have no idea how she manages to make office fashion look sexy, but I quiet the voice in my head and shift my focus.

“Before we begin, I need you to tell me everything that went on at the governor’s house.”

“Why? Haven’t you been with dignitaries before?” I tease, and we laugh.

“It was good. I arrived... well, a little behind time, thanks to Vanity. But, thankfully, the governor was running late, and we were encouraged to get acquainted.” I drew out the word acquainted and see Ellen raise her eyebrows.

“I can imagine. So many egos in the room.”

“It was terrible,” I admit. “Am I like that?”

“Like what?”

“So self-absorbed?”

Ellen laughs and nods. “You can be.”

I shrug. “It is something to work on.” If Ellen says I’m self-absorbed, then it must be true.

“So, tell me what else happened.”

I frown, thinking about my encounter with Gary Foster. The smug bastard dared to come and say hello. “Can you believe that? He told me I was lucky to be among the nominees.”

Ellen laughs. “If there’s one thing I know about Gary Foster, it’s that he has the balls.” My frown deepens. I did not like that frown, but Ellen apologizes before I could admit it. “I’m sorry you had to go through that.”

I wave it aside. “It’s all right; I just need to finish my project as soon as possible.”

“Speaking of the project, can I help you with anything? You know I would do a good job.”

Her gesture profoundly touches me, but this is one project I have vowed to begin and end by myself. I want the Governor’s Contract to be solely on merit if I am awarded it. Therefore, it matters to me that I prepare it exclusively.

“I appreciate it, Ellen. You’ve been the best help, but I’m afraid I’ll have to go through this alone.”

“That is not a problem, Boss. However, do let me know if you ever change your mind.”

I nod, knowing that would never happen but agreeing nonetheless.

“So, shoot me.”

“Well, you’ve got two meetings scheduled for today, both in your office, it shouldn’t be long, and the logistics for Rhode Island are in place. You just need to sign off on a few things.” She pauses, waiting to see if I’m following, and I nod, gesturing that she continues speaking.

She nods in confirmation.

“The interview with Vanity will be airing by noon, and I was wondering if you’d want to watch it with us in the break room. Or in the privacy of your office, if you prefer?”

“The privacy of my office,” I respond. Of course, we both know I won’t be watching it either way; I have far too much to do other than watch an embarrassing video of myself.

“The good news is, many people would be tuned in tonight, which is good for business.”

I nod.

“You also have a scheduled meeting with Calvin, which is set for tomorrow. That would be all.”

“Thank you very much, Ellen. Please send the head of resources in so we can wrap up plans for Rhode Island.”

She nods and leaves. Watching her leave the office, my eyes are drawn to her figure, and I wonder, for a moment, what her life looks like when she’s not in the office. I’m barely finished with my thoughts when Heidi, the head of resources, enters my office, and we discuss the work retreat. A conversation that lasts for about an hour: time speeds up while the rest of the team gets busy on various projects across the city.

I have my head bent toward my laptop for a minute, and by the time I'm done, I find I'm the only one left in the building. The entire building is so quiet that I can hear the steady hum of the freezer in the break room. I stand up to stretch for a minute, walking towards the transparent windows; from here, I have a clear view of the city, and as I go through ideas I've thought out for the pitch, I realize that I'm missing something. Something crucial, and I can't seem to place my fingers on it. I walk up and down, opening one file after another.

Think Malcolm! You know you want this badly. But why do you? To show Daddy that you're not a failure? To provide for the family, you never seem to be around for? Admit it; you are just as selfish as Gary Foster! At least he has the decency not to be a hypocrite about it.

I begin to laugh. I had too much coffee, with how I am conversing with myself? I shake my head to clear out the fog. I should get some snacks from the break room. I think for a second and then head out to do just that.

"I would have sworn I was the only person left here."

I turn around sharply to find Ellen holding her coffee mug behind me. I am surprised.

"Ellen, what are you still doing here?"

She moves towards the coffee machine, indicating she wants to pick some, and I step to the side to let her pass.

We both watch the machine pour out dark coffee in uncomfortable silence. I watch her prepare her coffee, two

sugars and cream. I smile. I don't understand why for some reason, everything she does now is cute in my eyes.

“Working, Boss. What are you doing here?”

“I should be asking the questions.”

For a moment there, we stare at each other, her from the rim of her cup, me standing so close, I can smell her perfume—something like vanilla. I shift from one foot to the other.

“Fine. I noticed you were still working and couldn't bear to leave you all alone, so I took the time to schedule my tasks for tomorrow and fill in on other people's work,” Ellen says.

I shake my head. “I do not understand. Surely you have other things you should be doing. Places to go, a life outside of this office. A boyfriend?”

She smiles, and I shift uncomfortably. “No boyfriend. I'm afraid you've ruined me for normal men. I'm now a fan of self-absorbed CEOs.”

I chuckle at that and grab an orange. I then gesture that we sit on one of the tables and talk.

“I'm missing something,” I tell her as I peel an orange.

“What? Is it the project?”

“Yes. I have an outline, a structure, but it's missing a heart.”

Ellen looks at me inquiringly. “Heart?”

“Yes,” I affirm. “It's missing a heart.”

“You want me to take a look at it for you?”

I pause for a minute, considering Ellen's offer. She did have great precision and was brilliant. But then I remember why I want to do it myself and shake my head. "I wish I could, Ellen. But I can't."

Ellen looks disappointed for a moment, but she recovers pretty quickly. "Of course, Malcolm. I understand."

I look at her, amused. She rarely calls me Malcolm. "Do you want an orange?" I ask, offering her a slice, but she shakes her head.

"I'm happy with my coffee."

"Suit yourself.... You have to tell me what you do outside of work." I couldn't stop asking.

Ellen looks at me, surprised. Although, to be honest, I've surprised myself. "Well, I go home."

"Where is home?" There is no use pretending I wasn't dying of curiosity.

"Downtown."

"Who's home?"

"My dog, Lassy."

I smile. "I wouldn't have pegged you for a dog owner."

"Me neither. But Lassy belongs to my father. After he got too ill, he entrusted Lassy to me. So now I take the dog to see him every weekend."

I chew on my orange thoughtfully. "I'm sorry."

Ellen looks at me, puzzled. "About what?"

“That Lassy and your father won’t be reuniting this weekend.”

“Who says they won’t?”

“Well, the retreat is compulsory.”

“I know. Which is why I’ll be taking Lassy there for the whole week.”

I nod. That is smart.

“Do you like working here?”

Ellen chuckles. “Is this a trick question? Something to judge my loyalty to the firm?”

I smile. “No, call it curiosity. It is often difficult for me to see that other people can have a different perspective than mine. I sometimes have wrong assumptions about others.”

Ellen nods in understanding. “I want your thoughts about the company I’m building.”

Ellen coughs slightly. “I’ll be honest.”

“Please. I expect nothing less.”

“I think that the work culture is great. I have never seen anything like it. You carry so much and do it with such grace and poise... that, frankly, it inspires us. We are not employees; we are a family. That is what you’ve managed to turn Pyramid into. I love working here. I wouldn’t have wanted to be anywhere else but here.”

I feel my heart fluttering, and I chide myself. I have to be straight-headed about this.

“Thank you, Ellen. Please know that your opinion matters. Not every day do you come across people who are passionate about their work like you are. Your words mean a lot to me.”

Ellen raises her coffee mug in a mock salute. “I aim to please.”

We both laugh.

“How about you? When you leave here, where do you go?”

“Home,” I answer. Wondering if I shouldn’t cut off this conversation before it goes too far.

“And where is that?”

“Where is what?”

“Home for you?” She is persistent. I have to give her that. But I didn’t rise to become one of New York’s most influential CEOs without learning to dodge a question. So I pick up another slice of orange and stretch it towards her. “Are you sure you don’t want an orange?”

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Chapter Four

Ellen

I would be lying if I didn't admit I dreamt about the oranges. I decide to make the thirty-minute walk to the office today, hoping that the scent of oranges still clung to my skin would disappear by then. As I sat there the previous night with my cup of coffee, I could not blurt out my secrets.

To what end exactly? Malcolm would never see me the same way again. His sweet, brilliant assistant would be gone, and in its place would be the cold, heartless betrayer! I regret and dread that day and would do anything to postpone its arrival as much as possible.

I stroll, passing hundreds of people already on the way to their various places of work. One thing about New York City is that it never sleeps.

I finally reach the enormous building that houses our small team and pause momentarily, taking it all in. I take a deep breath. Gary might have helped me financially in return for spying on Malcolm recently, but I had found a family to call my own. I could feel the tears dripping from my eyes, but

brushing them away quickly, I strut into the office to find Malcolm at the coffee machine. What the hell does he think he's doing?

I take his coffee mug from his hands.

“Here, let me fetch that for you.”

He looks at me, and I gasp. His eyes look swollen and baggy, confirming that he hasn't had a wink of sleep.

“I don't mean to offend you, but I think it's only fair to let you know that you look like shit right now.”

Malcolm smiles and nods. “I know.”

“No, I mean it. You look horrible. Like, ‘you need to take a week off to rest, not that the governor would probably see you in this state and announce you as the winner out of pity!’ ”

“Wow, Ellen!”

I blush, embarrassed. “I apologize; I have overstepped; I just felt I was helping.”

“Well, don't,” he says, grabbing his mug from me and fixing his coffee. I stand behind him, waiting for his irritation to simmer down. I can tell the instant it does; his hunched-up shoulders relax a bit. His fingers loosen around the mug, and he adds one sugar instead of two or three. That is how well I know him.

“Ellen, I'm sorry for snapping at you.”

“I know,” I tell him because I did know.

“Did you find your heart?” I ask him.

“My what?”

“Your heart, the missing piece on the project you were looking for,” I remind him. Wondering how he could have forgotten so soon.

“Oh. No. I spent all night trying to decipher what could be wrong. How this could be made better, and I got... nothing.”

“What do you mean nothing?” I press. I need to know what he kept finding so difficult.

“There’s still no heart, Ellen.”

“I’m sorry for getting you worked up,” I say. But I can tell that there’s something else bothering him on the inside. Something that has to do with the company that he hasn’t yet shared. “Malcolm, I know this might come out as me overstepping my boundaries, but you realize you can talk to me, right?”

He sighs. “Thank you, Ellen. But I got this; if I need any help, you will be the first to know.” Although he reassures me for the umpteenth time, I’m a little desperate. Gary will soon ask me to give him information, and I will have nothing to say.

I nod outwardly, trying to think of other strategies I could employ in my search for info. I stare at him while he sips his coffee; I stare at him for so long, reality blurred with imagination. In this new reality...

I stand up from my seat and go over to the other side. I pull his legs apart and situate myself within him. Then I take the mug of coffee from his hands and place it gently on the table

and take his hands and suck on them one after the other. I don't stop until I hear him groan appreciatively. I move to his lips, and our tongues have a slow, passionate dance that pools a warm wetness in my pants. I kiss him until I feel his fatigue leaving, until he lifts and carries me to the table while we push things aside. I'm on my back, and Malcolm is kissing every inch of my skin, from my head down to my stomach, until he gets to my thighs. Right there, he bites gently on my skin, placing tiny love bites and marking his territory, and I swallow, trying hard not to yelp out in pleasure. Finally, he reaches my center, and from the moment his mouth comes in contact with my warmth, I can't help but moan out loud.

“Ellen? Ellen? Is everything all right?”

I look up, startled to discover that I was still in the break room with my boss, who hadn't, even kissed me but keeps staring at me like I have grown another head.

“Are you sure there's nothing wrong?”

I nod, trying to be reassuring. How do I tell my boss that I was having fantasies about him? I would rather die than admit that out loud. “I'm perfectly fine. It's nothing.”

“But you were staring at me and making weird sounds like you were choking.”

I almost gag. “Did I do that?”

“Yes. If I didn't know better, I would have thought you were... never mind.”

I smile inwardly. So, the thought of me moaning has occurred to him.

I stifle a smile. "I'm okay," I say again.

He keeps eyeing me suspiciously, and I laugh out loud. "Malcolm! I'm fine. I just had a long night."

"Okay. If you say so."

"You should leave the office and rest," I say, sure that some evil was about to befall him if he didn't go to bed now.

"I'll leave, but first, I must take care of some business."

"What business?" I ask, intrigued. I know everything on his schedule, and as far as I know, he has no business meetings today.

"It's personal." That is all he says, and I look at him, wondering if I should press on but decide to let it go. If he said it was personal, then it is best to let him be. I shrug and nod, conceding.

We are barely finished with our conversation when I see a striking man walk into our office. Because of how private we tend to be, a stranger easily stands out. I am watching this handsome stranger standing in the middle of the room, looking around for something... or someone, when it occurs to me that somebody ought to ask him what he wants, but I have barely gotten to my feet when I see Malcolm walk past me towards the figure and to my surprise, they hug. And it isn't those types of hugs friends make; this one seems brotherly. So, this is the personal meeting he has planned.

I walk outside the break room and look around to find everyone else with the same expression as mine. Confusion. Who is the handsome hunk, and what is his relationship with Malcolm? And most importantly, what is happening in a private meeting with Malcolm now? I pace around the break room; I am not used to being shut out, especially when it comes to Malcolm. I handle his affairs; I don't see why he would want a meeting with an old friend and not inform me. I dismiss the thought as soon as it comes. I am being ridiculous. Malcolm doesn't have to tell me about anything outside of work, and I didn't have a right to question that.

The break room suddenly feels too stuffy. I go back outside and slowly march to my cubicle. I sit there, moving my chair around, and for the first time, I cannot distract myself from my thoughts. So, I decide to stalk him. I hear from the team members that Malcolm had called him. So, I search the internet for a Calvin matching his description. At first, my search is futile. There are so many search results for Calvin; despite trying to narrow it down, I frown and knit my brows in concentration. If only I knew what Calvin did for a living, and something occurs to me just as I think about it. With my heart pounding, I type Calvin's name into the search bar again with the word Private Investigator next to it. My hands are shaking, and I can barely focus on the screen before me. This is a dangerous game that I'm playing, and I fear getting caught at any moment.

I have to know more about this private investigator Malcolm has hired. I need to find out what kind of person he is

and what tactics he uses to get the information he needs.

As I scroll through the search results, I start to feel a sense of unease. Some articles and forum posts suggest that Calvin is one of the best investigators in the business. He's known for his ability to find the truth, no matter how well-hidden it might be.

But there are also darker rumors swirling around him. Some people claim he's ruthless, willing to do whatever it takes to get the information he needs. Others say he's been involved in some shady business deals, using his skills to help people cover up their misdeeds.

I start to feel a knot forming in my stomach. What if Calvin is too good? What if he discovers I'm the mole and exposes me to the entire company? I can't afford to take that risk.

But at the same time, I know that I need to keep digging. If I don't learn more about Calvin, I won't be able to protect myself or the information I've been leaking to our competitor.

As I delve deeper into my research, I start to find more and more unsettling information. There are reports of Calvin using illegal tactics to get the information he needs, such as hacking into computers and stealing sensitive data.

I tremble even more as I read these reports. I take a deep breath and try to steady myself. I need to keep digging, no matter how scary the information might be. If I can find out more about Calvin's tactics, I might be able to find a way to protect myself.

After more searching, I found a blog post that caught my eye. It's written by a woman who claims to have worked with Calvin. According to her, Calvin is one of the best investigators in the business, but he's also highly paranoid and secretive. She describes how Calvin always double-checked everything she did, ensuring she wasn't holding anything back. She also mentions that he's been known to use lie detectors on his employees to ensure they're not lying to him.

As I read these words, my stomach churns with fear. I look towards Malcolm's office again to find them laughing at something. I shake my head; this seems like a recipe for disaster.

I know that I need to act quickly if I want to protect myself. I need to ensure I'm not leaving any traces of my leaks and not giving anything away in my behavior. So I act more cautiously, careful not to draw too much attention to myself.

But even with all of these precautions, I can't shake the feeling that I'm already doomed.

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Chapter Five

Malcolm

“**W**ell, well, well. By God, Malcolm! Who would have thought you’d be running a real-estate empire?”

I laugh heartily. Already, I can feel the exhaustion in my bones slip away in the presence of Calvin. Calvin has always been that person that could single-handedly get me out of a surly mood. We were roommates in college, and we quickly became inseparable. We would spend hours talking about everything from politics to our favorite TV shows, and we always had each other’s back no matter what. But what most people don’t know is that Calvin is also a highly skilled private investigator. He’s been working in the field for years, using his skills to help people solve all kinds of problems. I’ve always been amazed by Calvin’s talent and dedication. He’s incredibly thorough and always goes above and beyond to complete the job. And even though he’s worked on some tough cases over the years, he’s never lost his sense of compassion or commitment toward his work.

I open a cabinet, bring two cans of beer from my secret stash, and hand one to him.

“This should come as no surprise, Calvin. Remember how I always said I would build Malcolm Graff Realty and become famous?” Calvin nods, listening attentively as he gulps his beer.

“You did it, my friend.”

“Almost did it,” I correct. “There’s still a lot more to do. But all that will come later; have your seat, please. We’ve got some catching up to do.”

Calvin sits. “Who’s she?”

The question catches me off guard. “Who?”

“The stunning lady with you in that tiny kitchen?” Calvin asks.

I smile ruefully. I know Calvin’s reputation with women, and although I have no doubts that Ellen can handle herself, especially when it comes to Calvin, I wouldn’t throw her to the Big Bad Wolf. While that makes Calvin an excellent private investigator, it also makes him a terrible partner.

“She’s my assistant.”

I see Calvin raise his brows in disbelief. “Your assistant, with a figure like that? You must be kidding me.”

I shake my head. “I’m not. She is my assistant! Of course, you didn’t expect my assistant to be ugly, did you?”

“But how do you even concentrate?”

“Like any other person,” I respond briskly.

“So, she’s off-limits.”

I nod. “She’s definitely off-limits. I would not like to keep you, and I also need to hit the sack early today, so on that note, I would prefer that we dive into why you’re here.”

“Hmm, let me guess. You want me to find a private place for you and your secret lover.”

I stare at Calvin incredulously.

“How did you know?” Two could play this game.

“Well, it’s not that hard to figure out. I help CEOs do that all the time.”

I laugh. “I’m sure you also have the thrill of your life while at it.”

Calvin closes his eyes and breathes in deeply. “The thrill!”

“Are you sure you’re a private investigator? Don’t you dare mess this up with your humor,” I warn him.

“Fine. So the thing is, firms or businesses invite private investigators for either of two things: someone stealing money, and they want me to find out who or someone selling information out to a rival. It could be any, and you’re fucked either way.”

“Wow” is all I can say. Although, I’ll admit I feel a little comfort knowing that my case isn’t peculiar.

“Yeah. It would surprise you to know how often these things occur.”

“But here’s the thing, I trust all my employees with my life. They would never betray me like that.”

“We’ll get to that,” Calvin says before he asks me to tell him about the first time I felt something was wrong within my organization. So, I do. I tell him everything from the beginning until today.

“It’s Gary Foster. Before I can take any step, he does the same thing, and then I can’t implement my idea as it would look like I was copying him.”

“So, you’re saying he does the exact same thing.”

“Yes, every detail, and you know how much of a freak I am over details.”

Calvin nods, remembering our similar moments in college together. “Go on.”

“He always seems to be one step ahead of me. I’m convinced that he’s getting his hands on confidential information, and I want to stop it.”

“Okay, I understand your concerns. What makes you think Gary is getting his hands on confidential information?”

“As I said, whenever I come up with a new strategy, Gary is already implementing it. He’s always ahead of me, and it’s starting to feel like he knows what I will do before I do it. I’m sure he’s getting information from somewhere.”

“I see what you mean. That is suspicious behavior. Have you considered the possibility of a mole within your organization?”

“Yes, I did think about it, but I trust my employees. I don’t think any of them would betray me like that.”

“It’s always a possibility, even if it seems unlikely. We should look into it just to be sure. In the meantime, I’ll start doing some background research on Gary and his company to see if I can find any leads.”

“That would be great. I appreciate it. I can’t shake the feeling that something isn’t right.”

“Don’t worry, Malcolm. We’ll get to the bottom of this. I’ll keep you updated on my findings.”



A few days later, Calvin has some information to share with me.

“Malcolm, I’ve done some digging, and it looks like Gary might be using some underhanded tactics to gain an advantage. I’ve found evidence of him using illegal means to obtain confidential information from your company.”

“What? That’s outrageous! I can’t believe he would stoop that low.”

“Unfortunately, this kind of behavior is unthinkable. But it does happen.”

I nod my head. “I have heard rumors from the circle that he didn’t have an original idea and outsourced everything.”

“Try not to overthink about it. We’ll resolve this and make sure he’s held accountable. In the meantime, I suggest tightening up security within your organization and being extra careful with the information you share.”

I nod. “Thank you so much for your help. Much appreciated.”

“Of course. That’s what friends are for.”



Over the next few days, Calvin and I exchange many calls as he continues investigating and gathering evidence against Gary.

Frankly, I am relieved and grateful for my friend’s help. This is one thing to get off my plate while I focus on channeling my creative juices toward my project while I make changes within the organization to improve security and try to prevent any opportunity for my project to be leaked from happening.

Here’s the problem: I have a reputation for delivering top-quality work. However, ever since I have been tasked with this project for the governor of the state, a highly prestigious and vital assignment, I’ve found that my usual confidence and drive have deserted me. I’m feeling uneasy, exposed, and pretty vulnerable about this project.

I am also restless, unable to sleep at night as I ponder all the different ways the project could go wrong. I am used to

pressure, but this is different. This project is of such high importance that the stakes feel higher than ever.

One evening, after another night of tossing and turning, I decide to take a walk to clear my head. Walking through the semi-quiet streets, my thoughts were consumed by the project. I remembered a wise old saying: “When you can’t sleep, it’s because you’re awake in someone else’s dream.”

I was passionate about making a difference and using my skills and expertise to help people. That is why I am good at what I do and enjoy it. With this newfound clarity, I return home, feeling more at peace. I write down my thoughts and goals for the project and place the paper on my nightstand. Whenever I felt overwhelmed, I would read it and remember what was necessary.

The next day, I approach the project with renewed energy and focus. I seek general advice from my mentor in another state, carrying him along as the project progresses. The more I work, my confidence grows, and I am filled with pride and satisfaction.

I know now that no matter what happens, I will be pleased with the project’s outcome, but I have also learned an important lesson. That my confidence and success are not solely based on external factors but also my self-belief and motivation. I need to trust myself, my abilities and never lose sight of what is truly important.

Chapter Six

Malcolm

I sit across Calvin in my office, watching him flip a notebook and start outlining his plan to catch the spy.

“We need to start by identifying potential suspects,” he says, his voice calm and measured. “We’ll look for patterns in their behavior, inconsistencies in their stories, anything that might give us a clue.” I nod, impressed by his thoroughness. Calvin is a true professional, which shows how he approaches his work.

“Once we’ve narrowed the list of suspects, we’ll start creating fake scenarios to see how they react,” he continues. “We might leak false information or set up a sting operation. Whatever it takes to flush out the mole.”

I lean forward, intrigued by the idea. “Do you think it will work?”

Calvin shrugs. “It’s hard to say. But I’ve used these tactics before, and they’ve worked. So, we have to be patient and persistent. Or we switch to plan B.”

I nod, feeling a sense of relief wash over me. Listening to Calvin makes me feel better.

“I want you to picture this. Malcolm is a successful business owner, but lately, he has been feeling a sense of unease. Something is not quite right in his organization, and he has a nagging feeling that there is an infiltrator among his employees. The thought of a traitor within his firm makes him uneasy, and he knows that something must be done. So, he turns to his good friend, a private investigator, for help. And together devise a plan to expose the mole.”

I roll my eyes. Calvin could be dramatic when he wanted to assert a point. “Could we just get to the good part already?”

“Fine. The plan is simple yet cunning. That is why it is plan B for Best—the firm plans to host a week-long retreat for all of Malcolm’s employees. The summer retreat would be an opportunity for the team to bond and work on improving their skills and relationships with each other. Myself, the private investigator, would be in attendance, disguised as a motivational speaker, and he would keep a close eye on the employees, looking out for any suspicious behavior.

I perk up. Attentive. This doesn’t sound like an evil plan.

“The retreat would be held in a secluded location, far from the distractions of the city. It is the perfect setting for the employees to focus on their work and for the private investigator to do his job. The first few days of the retreat would be uneventful, with everyone enjoying themselves and

getting along well. But on the fourth day, things started to change. The spy starts to get restless.”

“Why would they be getting restless?” I interrupt.

Calvin looks at me like he would love to wring my neck for interrupting his flow of thought. “Because whoever they are, needs to know your plans for the Governor’s Contract, and no information is forthcoming.”

“I apologize. Please carry on.”

“One of the employees, a woman named Jane Doe, no, a man named John Doe, becomes agitated and nervous.”

“None of my employees are named Jane or John,.” I chip in cheekily.

“I am imagining...Grr..! If you interrupt my thought process again, I will leave here.”

I chuckle. “Forgive me. But why not use something better than Jane Doe or John Doe? That’ll be better, don’t you think?”

“Oh, shut up,” Calvin huffs. “The private investigator notices this behavior change and monitors them closely. The next day, Jane or John Doe disappears from the retreat, and the private investigator does what he came to the retreat for; investigate. He discovers that this snoop has been communicating with someone outside the retreat, and that person has been feeding off information about the company,” he says, ignoring my earlier suggestion.

“You mean Gary Foster?” I ask.

“Of course. It should be his mole.”

“ Here’s the best part, Malcolm is shocked when he learns the mole’s identity. One of his most trusted employees. They have been working with a rival company, passing on sensitive information in exchange for money. Finally, the private investigator gathers enough evidence to prove their guilt, and they are arrested. The exposure of the mole has a profound effect on the organization. Malcolm and his employees can strengthen their bonds and trust in each other, knowing that the traitor has been caught and the company was is now secure. They return from the retreat with a renewed sense of purpose and a stronger team. With the private investigator receiving public accolades for his services and a trunk load filled with cash. The end.”

I laugh. “How about, Malcolm was is then able to rest easy, knowing that his organization was is secure and that he has the support of his friend and employees? He was is grateful for the experience and knows it had made him a better leader. He vowed to always be vigilant and protect his company from those who would do it harm. He also pays the private investigator a shitty amount of money.”

“Make it a trunk load, or you’ll never see me again.”

We both laugh out loud.

Reflecting on our friendship, I realize how lucky I am to have someone like Calvin. He’s been there for me through some of the most challenging times I’ve ever faced, and I know that I can always count on him no matter what. But now,

as I think about the challenges facing my company, I can't help but wonder if Calvin might be the answer to our problems. His skills as an investigator are unmatched, and I know he will stop at nothing to help me uncover the spy leaking information to our competitors. Of course, I would never want to put Calvin in harm's way. But I also know he's more than capable of handling himself in any situation and would be the best person for this job.

“Find my mole, and you'll get it,.” I finally say, shaking Calvin's hand.

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Chapter Seven

Ellen

I wake up late this morning. The second time this week, I'll be damned if I don't find a way to find myself in the office in thirty minutes. *Okay! I can do it.* I take my bath in less than five minutes and hurriedly put on an ensemble to take any man's breath away, although it's one man in particular, I hope I have that effect on- Malcolm! Saying his name gives me that butterfly effect, and I must remind myself that I'm no longer in high school. *Malcolm! Malcolm! Malcolm!* His name keeps on roving through my mind, disturbing my thoughts.

Hallelujah! Miracles exist because only that would explain my entry into the office building within ten minutes. Whether time stood still or was slowed by something, all I know is that I made it on time. Maybe it's my long legs and the distances they seem to cover with every stride I take. But now is not the time to wonder and let my mind wander. It's time for me to take action as an undercover.

As expected, men around the huge building turn to look at me. Some even let it turn into stares, and I am satisfied that I

had done my job well. More applause for me this morning. It's like I'm a magnet, and they are what they are supposed to be. It's beautiful how men flock to good-looking women like moths to a flame. I guess I can say that because I'm pretty attractive. If I weren't... well, I wouldn't have this conversation. It's easier to talk about what you have than what you don't. It's easier to talk about beauty when you're gorgeous. It's just that. I remember Malcolm, in a rare burst of affection, telling me I make office fashion sexy. I bet he probably doesn't remember. But I do.

I'm walking into the elevator with thoughts of how good I am at this job of an Executive Assistant. I have noticed from reading crime novels that the person considered most innocent is usually the culprit in a crime. And here I am, living that life and regretting it. No one suspects a thing yet, which gives me the extra confidence boost this morning that I didn't realize I lacked. Especially having that visit from Calvin to the office days ago. It's like I have an omnipresent view of the situation on the ground because I know what's going on with both parties and it's scary to have that kind of knowledge.

I see Calvin, and knowing who he is to Malcolm, I continue my job. Thanks to Google, I found that Calvin is a Private investigator. Malcolm has always mentioned Calvin to us as his friend, but it was finally good to see him in person. He's lovely, ginger-haired, and a brilliant and cool person to talk to. I hope I don't fall under his radar for suspicion.

“Hi! Your suit looks lovely, Calvin.”

Calvin is pleased by my compliment, and I see him trying to act sanctimoniously. But it throws him off guard. He must be so focused on what he's doing *-staring into space and looking like he's trying to figure out something-* that it takes him a moment or two to respond.

“Hi, Ellen! I didn't see you come in. I was lost in my thoughts. By the way, you look good,” he struggles to say. I'm sure I won because he avoids mentioning anything about my figure-hugging outfit.

I ask what he's doing at the office now because I doubt he's anything like an early riser. Working with Malcolm has taught me much about him and the people who visit. I know when his visitors arrive, and Malcolm doesn't come all that early, even though he claims he does. So it has to be either top-tier confidential or bothersome to Malcolm for him to require Calvin's presence this early. And because I don't want him to be suspicious, I keep the actress in me alive.

“Fancy seeing you this morning; today must be a good day. It already has a great start!”

“Oh! You flatter me, Ellen.”

“I'm not! It's rare seeing you ordinarily and seeing you at this time; I guess the heavens decided to favor me.”

“Ellen! I have to learn how you do what you do. I had to see Malcolm. You know he's worked up about the project and work!”

“What project? The Governor’s Contract?” I hope I’m smart enough to act this stupid and that Calvin falls for it. I once read that one has to be extremely smart to act stupid, and I hope I’m that smart for the sake of my life.

Calvin chuckles, and I can’t tell if it’s because he’s falling for it and wonders how in the hell I can be that stupid or if it’s because he’s onto my game. I better keep playing.

“Yes, Ellen. The Governor’s Contract. It’s all anyone can think about and the other thing.”

“What other thing?”

Calvin looks at me like he’s deciding to trust me, and I give him my best curious facial expression.

“The mole. A mole is sharing inside information,” he says.

“What? You believe someone would do something like that?” I gasp, hoping he has an answer and also hoping he doesn’t have an answer because if he does, then it would mean I’m screwed. Or can it be that he already knows and is watching me to see if I squirm?

“I don’t know yet, but I intend to find out. Please keep this information to yourself for the time being.”

I nod solemnly. “You have my word.” I know Calvin falls for my act, and I’m surprised. I’m flustered, but he doesn’t catch it because he’s focused on apologizing for his slip error. Or maybe, just like me, he has perfected his acting skill. I convince myself that he didn’t know, and if he did, perhaps he hasn’t found proof. Somehow, optimism kicks in, and I begin

to think of how wonderful the day is and I'm about to start with the information I didn't even know I needed.

He asks me a few random questions, mainly about Malcolm's routine and work life, and I answer the best I can, taking time to seem thoughtful. We laugh about Malcolm's trust, and his baritone voice makes him audible enough even from ten feet away. I've heard him yell, and my heart beat faster from the memory of the vibrations around me as his voice boomed.

I immediately indicate that it's my time to get off the elevator, and it dawns on me that I have already had a busy morning. In other words, my life is usually dull, and nothing is exciting except this new sprinkling of Malcolm. And all in the morning, I learned that I am not all that good a mole and that Calvin suspects that there's a thing between Malcolm and me. I don't know if even to call it "a thing." All I know is that seeing him or hearing him makes butterflies flutter in my belly.

I get to my cubicle and quickly settle down. Then arrange the files for the day and take them to Malcolm.

I find his door closed, which, although rare, happens. I knock on his door softly, but he doesn't answer, also quite unusual. I knock again gently, then hit a little louder and hear Malcolm ask me to come in. When I enter, he sucks in a breath loud enough for me to hear, and if I weren't in a hundred moods, I would do a tiny happy dance for achieving my goal. But hey! I've got to keep the two jobs until I can find a

permanent solution for my debt to Gary and forget the regret forever!

“Good morning, Boss!” I finally utter.

“Ellen, Good morning! How are you doing?”

All this feels quite strange, and things are eating us up. I carefully set the files on his table and retrieve the ones I’m supposed to sort out today. I remind him of the files needing urgent attention, and he nods absentmindedly. As soon as I’m done, I leave, wondering if I was able to avoid giving any hint that I was ruffled.

And that is why dressing well never goes out in style. If I had looked like a wet rat this morning hearing all that news, I am sure that GUILTY would have spelled out across my forehead before I sat at my desk.

It’s almost noon, and Malcolm calls me into his office. I’m a mess as all my emotions clash, and not even one is winning this battle. Nevertheless, I try my best to look as cool as a cucumber even though I’m all mushy on the insides like an overripe banana.

Malcolm surprisingly tells me he’s worried there is a traitor among us, and I’m taken aback. How should I even react to it?

I try to comfort him, saying he will win the contract no matter what...

“Thank you, Ellen! You always know how to lighten the weight I’m carrying on my shoulders.”

I'm blushing on the inside and tell him that he's welcome and he's paying for my services. I'm going all *Yes! You are HER! You're that woman!* But it's all in my head.

"I'm giving you a raise."

I'm in shock cause I have never seen Malcolm act on impulse. Except it appears he has thought this through and through.

"Thank you so much! Thank you so much, Boss!" I finally manage to utter. When Malcolm gives you a raise, he sends you up the ladder by ten steps, adding an extra zero to your salary. I'm so happy about this, mainly because it was unexpected.

He asks me to remind him of what I said earlier when I dropped the files. I quickly go through my Notes App and explain that he should be on his way to a meeting with an investor. I give him an even briefer recap and tackle the rest of the job waiting to be done.

I thank him over and over again.

"Please leave my office if you want to thank the life out of me."

I'm so happy to tease him back. "Ellen, please don't! I'm your boss, remember? I could just as easily remove that 'zero' if you don't leave me now."

It's a joke, so I take it as such. "I'm sorry, Boss," I reply and attempt to leave the office.

“Saying ‘sorry’ and ‘thank you’ all the time can kill me. See? My blood pressure just dropped.”

“What’s the opposite of thank you and sorry, then? I need you alive.”

“You are so silly, Ellen.”

“I believe it’s also a part of my job to brighten your day, and that I have done. So please, keep the smile on.”

“For you, anything goes.”

“Well, that is interesting.”

I’m laughing as I leave and head back to my cubicle. There, I remember that I am the mole Malcolm wants to get rid of, and it breaks me into pieces.

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Chapter Eight

Ellen

F'uck! I stare at myself in the bathroom mirror. I look so pale, like I have seen a ghost. If anyone looks at me right now, they will figure out something has gone wrong, and the last thing I want is for Malcolm to be suspicious of my behavior. Especially since it started—*this running into the bathroom to quiet my panic attack*—and that's when Calvin arrived. I may be a trusted employee, but Malcolm would look at everyone with a microscopic lens at this point.

I know Malcolm is brilliant; I just never expected him to sniff out a mole this early in the game. I do not blame him, however. The Governor's Contract is a huge deal, and everyone was dying to be shortlisted, and now Malcolm has to go up against his number-one rival, Gary. Who I, unfortunately, also happen to be working for.

The race for the Governor's Contract had just begun, and I might've made a mistake giving Gary the pitch that Malcolm was working on. A pitch that earned him a nomination. A

pitch that Gary clearly copied to also earn himself a nomination.

I admit that was not a smart move. I should have just ended it with a hint. But Gary persisted.

Shit! Shit! Shit!

Nothing is going as planned. Gary promised me this would be an easy task. I shouldn't have trusted that sly bastard.

I panic.

The fear must be driving me crazy. Did the thought of being caught start making me feel more righteous? Am I just as bad as him, stealing someone's ideas and breaking someone's trust?

As desperate as I was, I should have never agreed to this. Corporate espionage is a major crime, and I could do years in jail for a few pages of documents I gave to Gary. Nevertheless, I have to do something, and I must do it fast.

I splash some water on my face and stared deep into my reflection in the mirror.

It's too late for regrets now. I have to fix this. I will fix this with as minimal backlash as I can manage. It might not be too late to stop being Gary's informant. Things are already high-pressed, and I love working here.

I dabbed my face and headed to my desk, where I grabbed my phone and sent Gary a text: *We need to talk. The usual spot at 7 pm.*

Throughout the day, I was on edge. I only remember sweating bullets and waiting for Gary to return my text. He is doing this on purpose, I'm sure. I texted him almost three hours ago, and he hasn't even read it.

At this point, I am shivering and biting on my nails again. This whole thing was making me crazy and distracted.

It was like I am walking around with a billboard saying, "I'm the mole." This is not good. I pack my stuff hurriedly when the clock hits five, say goodbye to Malcolm, who is working all night again, and bolt out the door.

I go home, remove my clothes, and go straight into the bathroom. Right now, I need a cold shower and a strategy to escape this mess in case Gary does not let me go.

I sit in the bathtub for an hour and come up with nothing.

Around 6:30 p.m., Gary finally texts back: *Sure*.

That is what the text says and nothing else. No apology, no reason for not texting back. Nothing else.

I decide to sit for a couple more minutes to calm myself. Later, I walk into the fancy restaurant opposite the apartment complex Gary owns. I wear gray slacks, a black hoodie sweatshirt, and some sneakers. I try to be as unnoticeable as possible but stick out like a sore thumb instead. How could I forget how fancy this place was? I make my way to our private section. If anyone wonders why I'm dressed like this, they will probably think I'm a Hollywood actor being anonymous.

Gary is already seated, which surprises me. He doesn't express it even if he is shocked at my outfit choice. He looks too sophisticated for a place like this and is dressed casually, but his aura is so strong that he obviously fits in, unlike me.

Gary wears an annoyed expression, but the moment I sit down, it turns into a sly smirk.

"I thought we agreed you wouldn't contact me till next week till we are supposed to meet?"

I scoff. I did not know what I expected. I would not go as far as to call Gary, but I expect to be shown a little courtesy—a simple apology along the lines of "*Was busy when you texted earlier.*"

"It's quite unusual for you to text me first, and it's not time to meet, so what's up?"

Me texting him was enough to show that something new came up or we were about to get caught.

The only time he cares for me is when he needs me to get some new information from Malcolm. I make a fist and swallow my words. Now is not the time to argue about his behavior; I came here to put an end to everything. "I will no longer be your spy," I say briskly, letting the words fall gently between us.

The sound of his laughter makes my body jolt. The expression he had earlier instantly vanishes, and I cannot tell if he finds what I said genuinely funny or if he is mocking me.

“Yunno, I never took you for a comedian, but boy, am I surprised.”

“I’m serious, Gary. I no longer want to be your mole.”

The smile that causes the corners of his mouth to fold, making his wrinkles more visible, disappears, and his eyes grow dark.

“And why is that?”

I shift in my seat and move closer.

“Malcolm caught on that there’s a traitor, and he’s hired a private investigator. If I keep doing this, I will get caught and land in jail; and you’ll go to jail too.”

“Oh, please. No one would go to jail.”

The waitress walks to our table with a plate of chicken kebab and French fries. I watch Gary smile at the waitress, who smiles back at him, and he takes a bite of the fries. He motions to me in an invitation, asking me to join him, but I decline. I neither have the appetite nor interest to share the same plate with Gary.

“What do you mean no one would go to jail? It’s corporate espionage.”

“It’s simple, Ellen. If no one gets caught, no one will go to jail.”

“I’m telling you we’re about to get caught. That’s why we have to put an end to this.”

He chuckles and eats some more fries. “It’s too late for that. I told you, once you’re in, there’s no way out. The only way is to finish the job.”

“I... I can’t do this, Gary. I really can’t. I will try to repay you all the money you lend me to help my dying father.” I look at my hands. They feel so small, and as I rub them, they do not feel like mine. I do not know why I feel this nervous or scared. Malcolm might fire me and not turn me into the authorities, but that’s not something I’m willing to bet on.

“Listen!” he says, banging the table with his palm. “You chose to do this on your own, aware of the consequences. If you want to do something dumb and get caught, be sure not to drag me into your mess, or you’ll regret it.”

I am not scared of Gary because he is not a scary person. I just never thought he would get this aggressive. Rivalry can make you do stupid things, but I don’t understand Gary’s need to win. It seems he has something to prove other than winning the Governor’s Contract.

Gary has stopped eating by now.

He looks me square in the eye. “Do not forget the debt you owe. You agreed to do this to repay my favor. I never forced you.” He cleans his mouth with the napkin, sighs, and takes a couple of bills out of his wallet. “I would give you some time to calm down and rethink your decision. Then, contact me next week, and you better have something for me then.”

He stands up and leaves. I could not say anything as I had nothing else to say. I knew he would not let me off easy, but I

hoped he might make it flexible for me to end this rat race.

I put my head on the table and took a few breaths. Times like these are when people cry, but I am helpless for even that.

I do not know Malcolm's plan, but I must develop countermeasures. Should I just come clean or frame someone else to get his scent off my tail? I don't think I have the balls to target someone else in the company. They are family.

Different thoughts are running through my head. I imagine how I would handle different scenarios in my head, but none ends with me still breathing at the other end.

I make my way out of the restaurant and walk around. It is almost midnight, but the streets are still quite busy.

“This city never sleeps, and that's the beauty of it.”

That was something my father used to say.

I met Gary when my dad was diagnosed with cancer. The insurance could no longer cover his treatment, and we had blown through our savings, which I thought was hilarious for a man who was almost never around.

My mom and I were working multiple shifts to cover his medical bills along with my college tuition, so things were challenging. I was flunking and had to skip a year to focus on working.

The air outside is a mix of hot and chilly, or maybe my mind is playing tricks on me. I walk to the park and sit on a bench. I do not live around here and should head back home soon. Getting a cab later would be a hassle. I decide not to

drive in case Calvin is on my tail; that way, he would not easily track me.

I must be crazy. All I can think about is how badly I want this to be over so that I can have a good night's sleep with no debts and regrets hanging over my head, no secrets being kept, and no sneaking around.

I look around and find a couple walking and laughing. They look so happy, with not a care in the world. I am jealous.

I stand up and walk out. While trying to decide if I should order an Uber or hail a cab, the bar's light attracts me. Since a shower could not help me clear my head, maybe a shot of vodka will. The smell of smoke hits me immediately as I walk in. I go straight to the bar ignoring any weird look I am probably getting. I order two shots of vodka. I look round the bar, my eyes casually strolling around.

A pretty lady sits across the bar with a bald man beside her. She does not seem interested in him but is laughing hard at what he is saying. It probably was her sugar daddy.

That's when it comes to me. I do have another option. I do not know why I did not think of that. If I play my cards right, I can pull it off. This is a piece of cake. I stand up feeling better for the first time since noon. I pay for the vodka, leave the bar, and hail a taxi.

Tomorrow is a new day, and I will set my plan in motion.

Chapter Nine

Malcolm

I have always prided myself on being punctual. As the CEO of Malcolm Graff Realty, I believe timeliness reflects one's work ethic and professionalism. I have never arrived late to the office in my entire career, until today.

It is a Tuesday morning, just like any other. I wake up early in my side of New York, go for my usual jog, and have a healthy breakfast before heading out to work. I feel energized and ready to tackle the day ahead, but fate has other plans unknown to me. As I drive to the office, I encounter a significant traffic jam. Cars are backed up for miles, and the streets are gridlocked. I sigh, disgusted, as I try to maneuver through the chaos, but there is no escaping the bottleneck.

As time ticks by, I become increasingly anxious. I check my wristwatch repeatedly and calculate how much time I have left before the start of my first meeting. I dread the thought of being late for work. But no matter how much I wish for the traffic to clear, it remains stubbornly congested.

I sigh and let Ellen know I'll be late and to reschedule my morning meetings.

Finally, after an eternity, I arrive at the office. I am over an hour late. As I walk through the door, I can feel eyes on me, so I scowl at them. They better focus on the work I am paying them to do.

As I walk to my office, I see Ellen strutting towards me with a cup of coffee; believe this or not, it's almost like she gets more beautiful each day.

"Ellen. I could almost have sworn that *the* Gal Gadot walked into my office," I say, settling down at my well-arranged table and reaching for my cup of coffee.

"Are you by any chance comparing me to Wonder Woman?" I can see her eyebrows raised suspiciously as she hands me the cup.

"Yes, why? I find her incredibly sexy. There is something about a woman that gets the job done that does it for me," I say as I sip my still-hot coffee. *God bless Ellen.* I notice oddly that it's suddenly silent, and I turn to find Ellen watching me with amusement.

"Spill it?" I say.

"I'm just trying to get used to the fact that my boss just said I turn him on while I do my job."

Oops! Did I say that? I look at her carefully to see if my thoughtless statement offended her, but I can see only amusement written on her face. I sigh with relief.

“Just appreciating women and all of that.”

“Mm-hm” is all she says.

“Shoot me,” I say.

“You have a general meeting at the center of the building to inform everyone about the retreat in Rhode Island. I already asked HR to send everyone a personalized email, but word of mouth would also be nice.”

I nod my head, waiting for her to continue.

“That’s all. I rescheduled the meeting with the Bioform firm until tomorrow.”

“Thank you, Ellen. Please come fetch me when it’s time for the announcement.”

“Will do, Boss.”



In the middle of the day, Ellen knocks on my door.

“Hey, Boss. It’s time.”

“Be right there,” I say, trying to detach myself from the file I am engrossed in.

I stroll into the conference room and take a deep breath as I look around, taking in my employees’ faces. They are all sitting attentively, waiting for me to speak. I can feel the excitement building inside me as I prepare to deliver the news I know will be well-received.

“Good morning, everyone,” I begin, a smile spreading across my face. “I have some exciting news to share with you all today.”

I pause for effect, letting the anticipation build.

“We’re going on a weekend retreat to Rhode Island!”

The room erupts in cheers and applause, and I can’t help but grin from ear to ear. It is the kind of reaction I had been hoping for.

I have been planning this retreat for months, and I am thrilled to be able to announce it to them finally. I appreciate my employee’s hard work and think they deserve a break to recharge and regroup.

“As you all know, we’ve been working long hours,” I continue once the room has settled. “And I think it’s time for us to step back and relax.”

I explain that the retreat would take place over a long weekend until the week after and that we will stay at a beautiful resort in Rhode Island. I have planned various activities, including team-building exercises, brainstorming sessions, and some relaxation and fun time.

“I truly believe this retreat will help us come together as a team and strengthen our bonds,” I say. “We’ll have the chance to get to know each other on a deeper level, and I’m confident that we’ll come back to the office refreshed and rejuvenated.”

The excitement in the room is palpable, and I can feel my employees buzzing with anticipation. I can tell they are

already looking forward to the retreat, and I am thrilled to see that my plan has brought a smile to my employees.

As the meeting winds down, my employees approach me individually to express their gratitude and excitement. I can see the enthusiasm in their eyes, filling me with a sense of satisfaction and pride.

As I walk out of the conference room, I know the retreat will be a once-in-a-lifetime experience for more than one reason, and I am grateful to be sharing it with such a fantastic group of people.

“What did you think about that speech?” I ask Ellen when we are back in my office.

“Perfect,” she says, but I am not convinced.

“I don’t believe you. No corrections? No add-ons? You just think it was perfect?”

“Believe it or not, Boss, for the first time, I completely agree with you.”

I laugh heartily. This retreat was already looking up.

“So, why such a gloomy face?”

“Me? My face isn’t gloomy.”

“Yes, it is; I watched you during the announcement, you didn’t look happy at all, and I understand you will miss your family but let them know you will be back in time for Easter. I promise.”

“Yes, Boss. That is such a relief to hear. I shall now be taking my leave.”

“Before you leave, please see to it that Calvin’s details are included in our plans for the retreat. And that we are ready to leave without any hitches soon.”

“Yes, Boss.”

“Thank you.”

When she leaves, I spin my chair and grin. I am looking forward to the retreat.

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Chapter Ten

Ellen

After the conversation with Malcolm, I hurry to my cubicle and pick up my phone to dial Gary. My heart is racing as I wait for him to answer. It takes a few rings before I hear his voice on the other end.

“Hey, Ellen, what’s up?” he says casually.

“Gary, I think they’re onto me,” I whisper urgently while pasting a smile in case anyone watches me.

“What do you mean?” Gary asks, his tone hardening.

“I think they know I’m the mole,” I tell him, my voice barely above a whisper.

Gary lets out a sigh. “Okay, take a deep breath. We’ll figure this out.”

I close my eyes and take deep breaths to calm myself down. “I don’t know what to do,” I admit.

“Okay, let’s think this through. What have they said or done that makes you think they know?” Gary asks.

“Well, I overheard a conversation between Malcolm and the head of security yesterday. He was filling him in on his conversation with Calvin, the investigator. They were talking about ‘finding the leak,’ and I just had this feeling that they were talking about me like I was a suspect, too,” I explain. “Plus, we’re going on this weekend retreat, and I swear, that’s how they intend to find the undercover.”

“Okay, that’s not good,” Gary replies. “But I need you to calm down, Ellen. At this point, everyone is a suspect. That is the reason for this retreat.”

“I don’t know, Gary. Maybe someone saw me sneaking around, or maybe they found some documents with my handwriting on them. I’ve been so careful, though,” I say, my frustration slowly creeping into my voice.

“I know you have, Ellen. You’ve been doing great work for me since you started,” Gary says. “But we can’t change the past. We need to focus on what we can do now. Do you have any plans for how to get off the hook if it eventually gets serious?”

I think for a moment. “I could try to blame someone else. Make it look like they’re the mole; *but everyone is like family*,” I say tentatively.

Gary is quiet for a moment. “That could work, but we need to be careful,” he says.

“I know. I’ll only do it if I’m sure,” I promise.

“Good. Let’s keep that as a backup plan for now. Is there anything else you can think of?” Gary asks.

“I could try to deny it. Say that I’m not the mole and see if they believe me,” I suggest.

Gary chuckles. “Ellen, I’m afraid that the ship has sailed. They won’t believe a denial if they’re already suspicious of everyone.”

I sigh. “I know. I’m just grasping at straws here.”

“It’s okay. We’ll figure this out,” Gary says. “Do you have any other ideas?”

I think for a moment. “What if I quit? Just tell them I can’t handle the pressure and want to leave the company.”

Gary is silent for a few seconds. “That could work, but it’s a risky move. They might pressure you into confessing before you leave if they suspect you. Besides, you forget something. You can’t quit now, not until I want you to.”

“I know, but I don’t see any other options,” I say, more desperation creeping into my voice.

“Okay, we can work with that. Here’s what I want you to do. Don’t think about quitting. Keep working normally for a few days, but stay under the radar as much as possible. Don’t do anything that might draw attention to yourself. Then, when you’re ready, go to Malcolm and say that you’ve been thinking about your future and decided that this job isn’t for you. Make it sound like your decision has nothing to do with the

company. See if they'll let you leave on good terms," Gary instructs.

"Okay, I can do that," I say, finally feeling a glimmer of hope. "I can do that. I just have to get through the retreat."

"That's my girl! Call me if anything else happens," Gary says and hangs up.

I leave for the ladies' room, where my brain works the best. I've been working as Malcolm's assistant for years and have always been a valuable team member. But recently, I've also been that spy, passing information back to Gary Foster, who offered me the financial help needed to keep my father alive. I thought it would be simple, but as I've found out, nothing is ever just simple. Malcolm has figured out that there's a mole, and I've been thinking about this day and night, and now I've come up with a plan. It's not perfect, but it's the best I've got.

I'm going to make Malcolm fall in love with me.

It's a risky plan that could backfire in many ways. But I have no choice. If I get caught, my life is over. I've thought long and hard about this and decided it's worth the risk.

This is a plan I have been subtly putting into action. The first thing I did was change my appearance. I've never been plain; I kill with my looks. But nowadays, I step it up a notch. I've dyed my hair blonde and started wearing contact lenses. I've also been wearing more makeup and bought a few new outfits to show off my curves. I have to shop intentionally for the retreat now. I've never been the type to use my looks to get ahead, but desperate times call for desperate measures.

The next step is to start flirting with Malcolm. This is easy because Malcolm is a goofy ass; all he needs is a little encouragement to step further. I've also been finding excuses to spend more time with him and cracking jokes to make him laugh. I've also been touching him more and wrapping my arm around his shoulders while talking. At first, he seemed a bit taken aback, but now he's starting to warm up to me. I might be killing it at being an assistant!

I've also been doing my homework on Malcolm. I've found out that he's recently heartbroken and that he's been feeling lonely. I've been playing into that, listening to him talk, sympathizing with him, and letting him talk about himself. People love talking about themselves, and Malcolm is no exception.

I splash water on my face as if I was washing off the guilt from me. I feel mortified about what I'm doing and what I intend to do. I know I'm manipulating Malcolm, and it doesn't feel right. But at the same time, I have no choice. If he discovers I'm the traitor, that's THE END of me. I can't let that happen. I've got too much at stake here. After I have gotten the information that Gary needs, I will leave the company. Say goodbye to Malcolm Graff Realty for good. Go to an island or escape somewhere, maybe Fiji. I'll perhaps send Malcolm an apology note, a gift, and tell him how truly sorry I am. I'm sure one day, he'll forgive me.

The splash of water instantly makes me feel better. I reapply my makeup carefully and return to my cubicle—the perfect assistant.

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Chapter Eleven

Malcolm

The next morning, I am excited as I stand outside the office building with the HR and the Head of Security, waiting for the rest of my employees to arrive. We are heading out on our road trip to Rhode Island today. I have been planning this trip for months and look forward to spending time with my team outside of work.

My employees arrive individually, yawning and stretching as they leave their cars. I greet them with a smile and a cup of coffee, and we all chat excitedly as we load our bags into our assigned vans.

The van is comfortable and spacious. Heidi, the head of Human Resources and the one in charge of planning the trip, rented a few to fit in all of us and thankfully has ensured that it is well-stocked with snacks and drinks. I want everyone to be comfortable and happy during the journey.

I tried dialing Ellen several times, but the call went to voice mail. I see a car pull up in front of the office. I see her legs, impossibly long and sexy, and her toenails painted a deep red.

As she steps out of the car in a crop-top shirt and long slim skirt, I feel my breath stop.

“Stop staring, man; you look like a moron.” I turn to find Calvin staring at me, smirking.

“When did you get here?”

“Just now. But how would you know when you’re busy licking the pavement on which Miss Executive Assistant walks.”

“Stop talking; she’s here.”

I flash a mock look of anger at Ellen.

“You’re late.”

“I apologize. The traffic was insane. Hello Calvin, nice to see you.”

“Likewise,” Calvin says smoothly and takes his leave to acquaint himself with the rest of the employees. *The bastard!*

“We should leave,” I say, stepping aside for Ellen to pass through. *We will pick this up later*; I vow mentally.

As we set off, the sun rises, and the sky is beautifully pink and orange. We drive through the city’s empty streets, watching the buildings and people fade behind us. I can feel the excitement and anticipation build in the van, and everyone is chattering excitedly about the to-do’s when we get to Rhode Island.

The journey itself is a long one, but we made sure to keep things interesting. We play games like “I Spy” and “20

Questions” and sing along to the radio at the top of our lungs. We also take turns telling stories and jokes, and I am pleasantly surprised at how talented some of my employees are at comedy.

We stop for breakfast at a diner along the way, and I can tell that everyone is grateful for the chance to stretch their legs and get some fresh air. We order stacks of pancakes and bacon and laugh and joke as we eat. I can feel the camaraderie building between us, and glad we are all enjoying the journey so far.

As we continue our trip, the scenery starts to change. We leave behind the busy highways and urban sprawl and enter rural New England’s rolling hills and forests. The trees are beginning to change color, and the leaves are a riot of red, orange, and yellow. We drive through quaint little towns and villages and see signs for apple orchards and pumpkin patches.

We stop at a roadside stand to buy fresh apples and cider and chat with the friendly old couple who runs the place. They tell us stories about the area’s history and give us tips on the best places to visit in Rhode Island. I can see the excitement on my employees’ faces as they listen, and I know we are all looking forward to exploring this new place together.

As we get closer to the island, the excitement builds even more. We can see glimpses of the ocean in the distance and pass by signs for famous landmarks like the Newport Mansions and the Cliff Walk. We sing sea shanties and make pirate jokes, and I feel the sense of adventure and possibility building between us.

Finally, we arrive at our destination. We check into the hotel resort right on the beachside, and all of us run to our rooms to change into our swimsuits. We spend the rest of the day swimming in the ocean, lounging on the sand, and watching the sunset over the water.

As we sit around a campfire on the beach at night, roasting marshmallows and telling ghost stories, I feel a sense of pride and happiness. Having brought my team together, we have all experienced something new and exciting today, and I hope it lasts for the days ahead. I knew that this trip would be challenging but bring us closer as a team, and I feel the gratitude from my employees with the look on their faces.

We decide to retire for the night soon after, and when I got to my room, I had barely just stepped out of the shower when I got Ellen's call. Curious about why she would be calling me now, I attend the call and hear her voice sounding panicked and upset, and I can tell immediately that something is wrong.

“What is it, Ellen?”

“Hi, Boss.” She sounds off.

“Talk to me, Ellen. Where are you? Is everything okay?”

“Yes... yes, I lost my room keys, and I've been staring at the door because I don't know what to do. How could I be so careless?”

I heave a sigh of relief. “Ellen, is that all?” I ask her gently.

“Yes, I'm sorry.”

“Don’t be. I’m on my way,” I tell her, and I quickly put on some clothes and head for the block of rooms rented to us to find Ellen outside.

As she explains the situation, I can hear the frustration and fear in her voice. I know that losing the room keys could potentially ruin her mood, and I don’t want that to happen. So, without hesitation, I offer to accompany her to get a new key.

Ellen is grateful for my offer, and we quickly approach the front desk. I can see that she still feels embarrassed about losing the keys, but I reassure her and tell her it is a common mistake and nothing to be ashamed of.

As we wait in line at the front desk, I try to make small talk with Ellen to ease her nerves. We talk about the resort and the activities we want to do over the weekend. I can see her start to relax a bit as we chat, and I am glad to see her smile again.

When it is our turn at the front desk, I let Ellen take the lead. I want her to feel like she is taking charge of the situation and not just relying on me to fix everything. She explains her case to the receptionist, who quickly hands her a new key.

Ellen thanks the receptionist and turns to me, her eyes shining with gratitude. “Thank you so much, Boss,” she says. “I really appreciate your help.”

I smile at her. “I think for this trip, just Malcolm will do. And you’re welcome, Ellen. I’m glad we could get this sorted out for you. We’re here to have a good time, and I didn’t want anything to get in the way.”

As we return to her room, Ellen thanks me again for my help. I can tell she is feeling much better now that she has a new key, and I am happy that I could be there for her in her time of need.

“You know what? I’m not feeling sleepy just yet.”

“Oh,” I say, then mentally beat myself up for that stupid statement. “Do you want to walk around and talk for a bit?” I ask her. To my surprise, she agrees.

“I would love to.”

As I walk along the beach, feeling the sand beneath my feet and the salty ocean air on my face Ellen turns to me and grins. “You’re not bad company.”

I laugh at the sarcasm, and as we walk along the beach, I feel a sense of ease between us. After our experience at the front desk, I feel like we have formed a new bond. We have helped each other out, and now we have mutual respect, or is it love for one another?

As we walk, we chat about our arrival at the resort. As the conversation flows between us, I realize I don’t know much about Ellen. She is one of my top employees, but I have never really taken the time to get to know her on a personal level.

“Hey, Ellen,” I say as we approach a stretch of empty beach. “Can I ask you a personal question?”

Ellen looks up at me, her expression curious. “Sure, Malcolm. What do you want to know?”

I take a deep breath, trying to phrase my question carefully. “What do you like to do outside of work? I mean, what are your hobbies and interests?”

Ellen smiles, seeming happy to share this part of her. “Well, I love to read,” she says. “I’ve been on a mystery kick lately. And I also enjoy painting, although I’m not very good at it.”

“That’s cool,” I say. “I’ve always admired people who can paint. Do you have any of your paintings hanging up at home?”

Ellen shakes her head. “No, I usually just paint for fun. But it’s a nice way to unwind after a long day at work.”

As we continue walking, Ellen opens up about other aspects of her life I had never known about. She talks about her family and how she grew up in a small town in the Midwest. She also shares some of her struggles in her personal life, which made me feel even more connected to her.

I realize there is so much more to Ellen than just her role as an employee. She is a complex, multifaceted person with dreams, fears, and passions. It makes me wonder how many other people on my team I have underestimated or overlooked because I have never gotten to know them.

As the sun sets, I suggest we sit on the beach and watch the waves. We find a comfortable spot on the sand, and I can’t help but feel grateful for this moment.

“Thanks for walking with me, Malcolm,” Ellen says, breaking the silence. “It’s been nice getting to know you

better.”

“The feeling is mutual, Ellen,” I say. “I feel like we’ve formed a new connection, and hope we can keep it going.”

Ellen nods, and we both sit in silence for a few moments, taking in the beauty of the ocean.

As Ellen and I sit on the beach, watching the waves crash against the shore, I can’t help but feel a sense of peace. The only light comes from the stars above us. It is a moment that I want to savor, but there is something else that I can’t ignore: the attraction I feel toward Ellen.

As we sit in silence, I notice that Ellen has shifted closer to me. I can feel the warmth of her body, and I wonder if she feels the same spark of electricity that I do.

I take a deep breath, trying to steady my nerves. It is so unlike me to be so forward, but I know I might never have the chance if I don’t act now.

“Ellen,” I say, turning to face her. “I need to tell you something.”

Ellen looks at me, her expression confused. “What is it, Malcolm?”

I take another deep breath, my heart pounding. “I don’t know how to say this, but I feel like there’s something between us. Something more than just colleagues. And I know we’ve only just gotten to know each other, but I can’t help but feel like something here is worth exploring.”

Ellen's eyes widen, and I think I have made a colossal mistake for a moment. But then she leans in towards me, her eyes locked on mine.

"I feel it too," she says, her voice barely above a whisper.

And then, before I can process what is happening, Ellen leans in to kiss me.

It is unlike any other kiss that I have ever experienced. It is soft and gentle, but it is also intense and passionate. I can feel the weight of the unspoken feelings between us now. She tastes exactly how I imagine. Like vanilla. I catch her lower lips and kiss her again, more deeply this time. Pressing my lips firmly against hers, letting her know how much I want this.

When we pull away from each other, I can see the hesitation in Ellen's eyes. She is worried about what this would mean for our work relationship. I can't blame her for that thought.

But I know that I can't let this moment go. "Ellen, I know we work together, but I can't deny the connection I feel with you. And I don't want to let this go without exploring it further."

Ellen smiles at me, and I can see the relief in her eyes. "I feel the same way, Malcolm. I want to see where this goes."

We sit there for a few more moments, enjoying the warmth of each other's company. And then, as the night grows cooler, we stand up and make our way back to the resort.

Chapter Twelve

Malcolm

The following day, as I walk down to the beach for an early morning run, I see Ellen sitting by the shore. She looks up as she sees me approach, and a smile spreads across her face.

“Hey,” she says, standing up and walking towards me. “I couldn’t sleep, so I thought I’d come here and watch the sunrise.”

I nod, feeling a little nervous. I wasn’t sure how to act around her now that we had crossed that line from being colleagues to something more. But as we walk along the beach, it feels like nothing has changed. We talk and laugh, and I feel the same sense of ease and comfort I felt the day before.

As we reach the end of the beach, Ellen turns to me and takes my hand. “Malcolm, I know that we work together, and this is new territory for both of us. But I want to say I’m contented and don’t regret it for a second.”

I smile at her, feeling a weight lifted off my shoulders. “I’m glad to hear that, Ellen. I don’t regret it either.”

We stand there for a few more seconds, watching the waves crash against the shore. And then, before I know what is happening, Ellen leans in and kisses me.

This time, the kiss is more prolonged and intense. I can feel her body pressed against mine, and I know instinctively that this is just the beginning of something that could be really special.

As we pull away from each other, Ellen looks at me with a glimpse of wonder in her eyes. “Malcolm, I know that this is new for both of us. But I can’t help feeling like this is something that’s meant to be.”

I take her hand and squeeze it gently.

As we walk back to the resort, hand in hand, all I can think about is the feeling of Ellen’s hand in mine and the possibility of what this could lead us to.



I look out at the sea of faces in front of me, feeling a mix of excitement and nerves. I am in charge of supervising today’s activities along with Heidi.

I choose a game that will unite the team and encourage us to collaborate in new ways. It is a scavenger hunt, but with a

twist— they will have to work together in groups of two to find all the items on the list.

As the teams pair up, I am relieved I have been paired with Ellen. Apart from the fact that I want to be with her, she is also one of my top performers, and I have always admired her drive and determination when it comes to challenges.

As we go through the list of items, I can tell that Ellen is just as excited as I am. We quickly decide to split up and cover more ground, with me heading towards the beach and Ellen heading towards the hotel.

I run down the beach, feeling the sand crunch beneath my feet. Already. I can see a few items on the list that I know would be easy to find—a seashell, a pebble—but others seem more difficult.

As I reach the end of the beach, I see Ellen running towards me, a big grin on her face. “Malcolm, I found a ball! And some sea glass too!”

I high-fived her, feeling a sense of camaraderie I hadn’t expected. We were working towards a common goal, and nothing else mattered.

As the day progresses, we find more and more items on the list. Some were easy, while others required a bit more creativity. But through it all, Ellen and I keep working together seamlessly. We laugh and make jokes, and I can feel our bond growing stronger.

As the sun sets, we head back to the hotel to tally up our finds. We have collected nearly every item on the list, and I feel a sense of pride in what we have accomplished together.

As the night wears on, we all finally gather around a bonfire on the beach where the winner is announced—Ellen and I are the winners—I sit next to Ellen, feeling the warmth of the fire on my face as we all talk and laugh, and I am at ease and comfort in her presence. I catch Calvin staring at us a few times but ignore it. I did not invite him to the resort to check on my love life.

As the night winds down, I know I don't want it to end. I look at Ellen, and I can tell the feeling is mutual.

“Hey, do you want to walk along the beach?” I ask, my heart rate picking up a little.

She smiles and nods, and we get up from our spots by the fire. As we walk along the beach, the moonlight casting a silvery glow over everything, I feel a sense of calm settle over me.

As the cold waves lap at the shore, we talk about everything and nothing. I could tell her anything, knowing she felt the same way. We talk about our pasts, families, hopes, and dreams for the future.

As we walk, I can't help control my attraction toward Ellen. I have always thought she was beautiful, but now I see her in a new light. I notice how her hair glimmers in the moonlight, and her eyes shine excitedly as she talks about her passions.

Our walk is brief because we have to get back to the others, and I have another appointment early the following day, but we linger as much as we can, and I kiss her deeply this time before we go back to meet the rest of the team.

Calvin and I agreed to discuss his progress at the hotel resort restaurant for breakfast. Walking through the lobby this morning, I notice some other hotel guests staring at me. It is no secret, of course, that being the CEO of Malcolm Graff Realty, I have been in the news, so it doesn't surprise me that my presence causes quite a stir. I try to ignore the stares and focus on the task at hand.

I arrive at the restaurant to see Calvin sitting at a table near the back. He looks up as I approach, and I nod in greeting. I take a seat across from him and order a cup of coffee.

“Good morning, Malcolm,” Calvin says. “How did you sleep?”

“Not very well,” I admit. “I’ve got a lot on my plate.”

“I can imagine,” Calvin says sympathetically. “I’ve been progressing on the case, but it’s slow. These things take time.”

“I understand that,” I say. “But we don’t have much time. We need to find the mole before any more damage is done. Seeing how the retreat is almost over.”

“I know,” Calvin says. “And I’m doing everything I can to get to the bottom of this.”

Calvin pulls a file from his briefcase and lays out the collected evidence. It is a lot of information, and soon, my

head begins to spin as he goes through it all.

“I have narrowed it down to a few key suspects,” Calvin says. “But I still need to do more digging to be sure.”

I nod, feeling a bit overwhelmed. “What can I do to help?” I ask him.

“Well, there are a few things,” Calvin says. “First, I need you to watch for any suspicious behavior among your employees. And I may need you to provide me with some access to your company’s systems and databases. I’ll need to look closer at the data to see if I can find any clues. I’ll also need the file containing your Governor’s Contract plans. I have a plan.”

I take a deep breath and nod. “I can do all of that,” I assure him. “Just tell me what you need, and I’ll make it happen.”

“Good,” Calvin says, leaning back in his chair. “Now, let’s talk about what we know so far.”

Calvin spends the next hour going over the evidence he has collected. He has spoken to several employees and reviewed many data, but nothing stands out as definitive proof of who the mole might be.

“Right now, it’s all circumstantial,” Calvin tells me. “But I’m starting to understand who might be involved. There are a few employees who have been acting suspiciously, and I’m going to keep a close eye on them.”

“I trust your judgment,” I say simply. “Just keep me in the loop.”

“Of course,” Calvin says. “I’ll be in touch if anything comes up. In the meantime, I suggest you go about your business as usual. The more we blend in, the better.”

“Thank you, Calvin. Is there anything else?”

“Yes. I’ve wanted to tell you this, not as an investigator but as a friend.”

“What is it?”

“Your growing relationship with Ellen Hunt.”

“Don’t you approve?”

I watch Calvin wrinkle his nose. “That’s not what I mean. I don’t think it’s the best time to forge a romantic relationship. Especially with your employees, knowing the state, you’re in.”

I brush his concerns aside. “I have known Ellen for a long time. She is safe.”

“But how sure are you? Don’t you think it’s a little convenient that you suddenly booted up with her? While I’m tracking the spy?”

I hastily drink my remaining coffee and thank Calvin for his time. “If that will be all, I want to head back. I’ll see you for our next meeting.”

“Malcolm! I’m telling you, that girl is dangerous.”

I stand up, intending to leave. “She’s just Ellen Hunt. The woman I may be falling in love with.”

As I walk back to my room, I can’t help but feel a sense of unease that he might be right.

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Chapter Thirteen

Ellen

I have been at the resort for two days, and things are going well. I am even a pretend bartender for the rest of the team, and we play this charade where they walk in and ask for a drink, and I make them fascinating beverages with a twist.

Malcolm, on the one hand, has been nothing short of charming, successful, and handsome. He has a way of making me feel special, and I find myself drawn to him. We have spent much time together over the past two days, and I can tell there is some spark between us. But there is also something else—a sense of unease because I am getting too attached to the mark, which is never a good sign.

Malcolm is hiding something about the Governor's Contract, and I have no idea what it might be. At first, I thought it was just my imagination, but the more time I spend with him, the more confident I become that he is intentionally keeping a secret from me.

I push the thought out of my mind and focus on the present. Malcolm is taking me out to dinner tonight, and I am excited

to see where the evening will lead.

I can feel the tension between us as we sit down to dinner. Malcolm is quieter than usual, and there is a sense of distance that hasn't been there before.

"Is everything okay?" I ask him, breaking the silence.

"Yes, why would you ask that?" he responds as he cuts through his steak.

"Well, maybe because you have been acting off lately. I know this will take some time, but if you regret this...you can tell me."

"No, never. Why would you even think such a thing?"

I shrug to let him know I have no answer to that.

Malcolm looks up at me, his expression serious. "I need to be honest with you, Ellen," he says. "There's something I haven't told you."

My heart skips a beat as he speaks. I have been dreading this moment but have always known it would come.

"What is it?" I ask my voice barely above a whisper.

Malcolm takes a deep breath and looks me in the eye. "I'm not just here for the retreat. I'm here on business too," he said. "There's a mole in our company, and I'm trying to find out who it is."

I feel a wave of relief wash over me. This is it? This is what he has been hiding?

“That’s it?” I say, laughing nervously. “Here I was, thinking you were a secret spy and you had been pretending to be a CEO.”

Malcolm smiles, but his expression is still severe. “I’m sorry if I worried you,” he says. “But this is important. We must find out who’s been leaking information to our competitors.”

I nod, still feeling slightly uneasy. “Do you have any leads?” I ask, careful to maintain a casual tone.

Malcolm shakes his head. “Not yet. But I’m working on it.”

I take his hand from across the table and look him in the eyes. “Don’t worry; I’m sure everything will work out fine. You will find this infiltrator and bring them to justice.”

I give him a big smile and cheer him up.

We continue our meal, but the mood has shifted again. There is a tension between us now that wasn’t there before. I still cannot shake the feeling that there is something more that Malcolm isn’t telling me.

I can’t resist asking him as we return to my room after dinner.

“Malcolm, is there something else?” I inquire.

Malcolm stops in his tracks and turns to face me. “What do you mean?” he asks.

“I don’t know,” I admit. “I just feel like there’s something else you’re not telling me.”

Malcolm pauses and looks down at the floor. “Ellen, there is something else,” he finally admits, his voice cracking. “But I can’t tell you what it is. Not yet, anyway.”

I feel a sinking feeling in my stomach. I was right—there is more. But now I am even more curious and concerned.

“Why not?” I ask.

Malcolm stares at me, his eyes filled with emotion. “Because I just can’t,” he says. “I need you to trust me.”

I reach out to hold his hand. “Malcolm, you need to trust me. I can help you. Is it about the Governor’s Contract? Let me help you with it if you’re stuck. I know how important that is to you.”

“Ellen—”

“I mean it, Malcolm. I want to help,” I say, moving closer to him.

“I wish I could ask for your help, Ellen, but I vowed to do this myself. It’s more than just a job to me.”

“I understand,” I say finally. “But please be careful. I don’t want you breaking down or losing yourself.”

Malcolm smiles thinly at me, his hand touching my cheek. “Don’t worry,” he says. “I’ll be fine. And I promise I’ll tell you everything as soon as I can.”

I try to be composed, but I am still worried inside. I am genuinely falling for him and have gotten nowhere in securing the information Gary wants.

The next morning, I walk into the dimly lit bar and scan the room for him. My heart is racing as I spot him sitting at the end of the bar, sipping on a glass of scotch. I make my way over to him, my heels clicking on the hardwood floor.

“Hello, Malcolm,” I say as I sit beside him.

He turns around to look at me and offers a hug. “Hello, Ellen. You look stunning. What brings you here? I mean, how did you know I was here?”

“Lucky guess,” I say, trying to sound as casual as possible.

Malcolm’s eyebrows furrowed. “Hmm.”

I lean closer to him, showing my cleavage and lowering my voice. “How are you feeling?”

Malcolm’s eyes narrow as he looks at me. “I’m doing okay.”

I let out a small sigh. This is going to be more complex than I thought.

“Please, Malcolm, you don’t have to lie to me; I know you,” I said, pleading. “I want to help.”

Malcolm studies me for a moment before nodding. “All right, if you insist.”

I feel a sense of relief engulf me. “Where are you stuck?”

Malcolm’s eyes widen in surprise. “I don’t understand.”

I hesitate for a moment, not wanting to reveal too much. “In the Governor’s Contract, isn’t that what’s making you sulky?”

Malcolm looks thoughtful for a moment before nodding. “No, actually, I’m done with that. It’s this task of finding the traitor since the retreat will soon end in a few more days....”

I swallow, feeling a sense of unease. “Ohh.”

Malcolm nods understandingly. “I feel the same way. Hopefully, Calvin has something good for me soon.”

I feel an acute sense of disappointment. I had hoped he would have more information than that.

“Thank you,” I say, getting up from my seat. “I appreciate it.” I have to leave here fast. I need to call Gary.

Malcolm reaches out and grabs my arm instantly, stopping me from leaving. “Ellen, wait.”

I turn to look at him, my heart racing. What is he going to say?

“I know this... us... is new, but you’re the only thing that makes sense in this place,” Malcolm says, his eyes meeting mine. “Have dinner with me tonight. Meet me at the beach by six.”

I am taken aback by his sudden offer. I have come here for a specific purpose, and this could be a trap.

“I don’t know,” I say hesitantly, trying to buy time.

Malcolm leans in closer to me, his eyes intense. “Please, Ellen. Don’t you feel it too?” His lips brush mine in a silent plea; my insides quiver. “Don’t you want to know where it leads? All the things we could do.” He moves closer, his

fingers tangled between mine. I feel a rush of heat between my legs and sigh aloud, but I can't let my guard down; not yet.

"I don't know," I repeat, my voice raspy. "I need to think about it."

Malcolm looks disappointed, but he doesn't push the issue. "I'll be waiting for you by the beach at six."

I nod, feeling confused as I make my way out of the bar. I have come here with a task in mind, but now I am more focused on Malcolm than anything else.



Malcolm

I am standing on the beach, setting up the perfect dinner date. I have chosen the best spot; it has a view of the ocean and the setting sun. The table is set, with a white tablecloth, candles, and a bottle of wine. Everything is perfect, except for one thing—Ellen isn't here yet.

I check my phone for the hundredth time, hoping to see a message from her. Nothing. I can't help but feel a sense of nervousness and crippling anxiety. What if she doesn't show up? What if I have gone through all this trouble for nothing?

I try to push those thoughts aside and focus on the present. The sun is setting, casting a warm glow on the beach. The sound of the waves crashing against the shore provides a calming backdrop to my nerves.

As I wait, I try to distract myself by going over our past conversations in my head. We talked about everything from our favorite movies to our childhood dreams. We have shared our hopes, fears, and everything in between.

As the sun dips below the horizon, I check my phone one last time. Still nothing. I feel a sense of disappointment and frustration, but I don't want to give up just yet.

I decide to wait a little longer, hoping that maybe she is just running late. I pour myself a glass of wine and try to relax, enjoying the view of the ocean as I wait.

After what feels like an eternity, I see a figure in the distance, walking towards me. As the figure gets closer, I see that it is Ellen. My heart leaps with excitement and nervousness.

Ellen

I have spent hours preparing for this dinner date with Malcolm, and I want to ensure everything is perfect. I have chosen a simple yet elegant black dress that hugs my curves in all the right places. My hair is styled in loose waves, and I have applied soft, natural-looking makeup on my face.

I slip on my black high heels and then, on second thought, replace them with simple black slippers. I can't help but feel a sense of excitement and nervousness at the same time. I have been thinking about Malcolm constantly, and I like it.

I grab my purse and make my way to the beach. Malcolm had suggested a secluded spot he knew about, and I am eager to see where it is.

Walking along the beach, the sand squished between my toes, and the ocean breeze ruffled my hair. It is a beautiful evening, and the sun is just starting to set.

As I approach the spot Malcolm mentioned, I can see a small table on the beach with a candle and a bottle of wine. Malcolm is already there, standing up as he sees me approaching.

“Ellen,” he says, a smile on his face. “You look stunning.”

I feel the warmth rise to my cheeks as I blush. “Thank you,” I say, feeling slightly embarrassed.

Malcolm takes my hand and leads me to the table, pulling out my chair for me to sit down. I can’t help but feel admiration for his chivalry and gentlemanly behavior. I have always known him to be a gentleman, but he has outdone himself this time.

As we sit down, Malcolm pours us each a glass of wine, and we begin to chat. I open up to him more than usual, feeling comfort and ease in his presence.

As the sun sets, the sky turns into a beautiful array of pink and orange hues. The sound of the ocean waves crashing against the shore provides a peaceful backdrop to our conversation.

As the evening progresses, I can't help but feel a tingling sensation toward Malcolm. The way he speaks, laughs, and looks at me when he thinks I'm not looking makes me hot and bothered.

As we finish our meal and Malcolm pours us another glass of wine, he leans closer to me, his eyes intense.

"Ellen, I have to tell you, it's taking all my willpower not to ravish you," he says, his voice low and husky.

I feel a sense of excitement and nervousness all at once. This is the moment I have been waiting for, and yet I still felt unsure.

"I feel the same way," I say, my voice barely above a whisper.

Malcolm smiles, a twinkle in his eye. "Good," he says. "Because I have something I want to show you."

He stands up from the table, offers me his hand, and leads me down the beach towards a small cliff. As we reach the top, he turns to face me, the moonlight casting a soft glow on his features.

"Close your eyes," he says, his voice gentle.

I do as he instructs, feeling his hand on my back as he guides me toward the cliff's edge.

"Okay, you can open them now."

As I open my eyes, I gasp at the breathtaking view in front of me. The ocean stretches as far as the eye can see, the

moonlight casting a silver glow on the waves. It is one of the most beautiful things I have ever witnessed.

“It’s beautiful!” I whisper.

Malcolm stands behind me with his arms wrapped around me. “Not as beautiful as you,” he whispers into my ear.

I turn to face him, feeling the heat rising within me. He leans closer to me, his lips hovering just inches from mine.

Without thinking, I close the distance between us, kissing him softly. It is a gentle, tentative kiss, but as our desire grows, it becomes more powerful and ardent. We break apart after a minute, both of us panting and breathless.

“I want you, Ellen,” Malcolm says, his voice husky. “I want to make love to you right now.”

I feel the heat rising, my body responding to his touch and words.

“I want that too,” I confess. Gary be *damned*.

Chapter Fourteen

Malcolm

Minutes later, as we return to the shore, I gaze into Ellen's deep, dark eyes, and a shiver runs through my body. The heat between us is palpable, igniting an inferno that we can no longer contain. The beach is our playground, and we've been the only two inhabitants for hours away from the crowd in a private area. Our laughter, stories, and connection have kept us company, but now it's time to let our bodies talk. As we lie on the sand, our breath mingling, I can't resist the pull any longer. I lean in, and our lips touch. It's electric, magnetic, and all-consuming. The fire between us grows, our tongues entwining, and our bodies pressing against each other. The kiss becomes insatiable, and our hands roam everywhere, exploring each other's curves, every inch of flesh. I want her more than anything, and it's clear that she wants me too.

Breaking the kiss, I whisper her name, "Ellen," and she responds with a longing, "Malcolm." We are lost in each other's embrace, and I can feel the heat radiating from her

body as I hold her close. With the ocean as our witness, I lean in for another kiss, and our bodies entwine.

She moans softly, and I know that she's ready. I pick her up and lay her down on the sand. As I trail kisses down her neck, my hands explore her body, reveling in her curves, and her moans spur me on. I slip off her dress slowly, unraveling her naked body, and I can't believe how lucky I am to be with her. She reciprocates, taking off my clothes, and I feel the hunger in her eyes as she takes in every inch of me. The sizzling chemistry between us is undeniable, and we both know what's coming next.

Taking her hand in mine, I slowly kiss each of her fingers, teasing her, before I trail down to her center, where I nibble, lick, and stroke. Her moans grow louder and heavier, and I know she wants more. As I slowly enter her, I feel a bar and pause for a moment. But I can't hold back; I need to slide inside her.

With one firm thrust, I'm in, and her body responds to mine with an intensity that leaves us both gasping for breath. We move together, creating nothing short of perfect friction, and I feel her heat envelop me. I lose myself in her, every movement, sound, and touch driving me wild. I can feel her body tighten around mine, knowing she's close to the edge. I push her over it, and she screams out my name as she reaches her climax. I continue to move inside her, feeling my release building.

As we both reach our peak, our bodies convulse, and we cry out each other's names. The pleasure is so intense that it feels like we're floating on a cloud. Lying beside her, our bodies still joined; I can feel the sizzling hotness between us starting to dissipate. We're both panting heavily, our hearts racing, and know we've shared something magical. As I slowly pull out of her, I know I'm in trouble. I've fallen hopelessly in love with Ellen Hunt and can't imagine ever wanting anyone else.



I wake up on the beach, the sound of the waves crashing against the shore. It is a beautiful morning, and I can feel the sun beating on my face. I turn to my side, and there she is, lying next to me, Ellen. I smile and lean in for a kiss, but something is off. She isn't kissing me back with the same energy as the night before.

"Is everything okay?" I ask, sitting up and looking at her.

Ellen sighs and sits up, rubbing her eyes. "I don't know. I just feel weird, I guess."

"Weird? What do you mean?" I ask, still confused.

"It's just that... last night... I don't know if I was ready for that."

"For what?" I ask, my heart starting to race. "Are you okay?"

“It’s that I’ve never done it before,” she says, looking down at her hands.

I am stunned. “Wait, what? You’ve never had sex before?”

Ellen shakes her head, and I can tell she is embarrassed. “I know, I know. I should have told you.”

I am silent for a moment, trying to process this information. I have never been with a virgin before and don’t know how to react. But then I realize that this doesn’t change how I felt about her.

“Ellen, it’s okay. It doesn’t change anything,” I assure her, taking her hand.

“I just feel like I should have told you,” she says, still looking down.

“No, not at all; I should have been more careful. I should have paid more attention,” I say, pulling her in for a hug.

We sit there for a while, just watching the waves and talking. I tell her I love her, and she says she loves me too.

“Really? I thought I would say it with a bit more drama. I’m sorry I blurted it out like that.”

She laughs and touches me tenderly. “I love you too, Boss.”

“I would need that cup of coffee now,” I say, bringing her face upwards and kissing her tenderly.

After a while, we decide to go for a swim in the pool. The water is cool and refreshing, and we splash around for a bit,

laughing and having fun. It is a perfect day, and I don't want it to end.

I walk back to my hotel room with a light heart. My mind is preoccupied with the events of the day.

As I walk into my room, I see Calvin sitting on the couch, looking tense and anxious. "What's the news, Calvin?" I ask, hoping for something positive.

Calvin takes a deep breath and said, "Malcolm, I've found out who the mole is."

I burst into a cheer. "Finally! Well, then, what are you waiting for? Who is the bastard? Who is he?"

"I think you might want to sit down for this one, Malcolm."

I chuckle; Calvin is such a dramatic person. "Come out with it. Who is he?"

"Not a he Malcolm... she."

"It's a woman?" I can count on one hand the number of women among my employees. I brace myself.

"Who's she?"

"Malcolm, it's Ellen."

I can hear a sudden ringing in my head, and the universe starts to go blank. I feel a surge of disbelief and anger rising in me. Ellen is the love of my life. How could she betray me like this? I could feel my world falling apart as Calvin explained how he had discovered the truth.

“Are you sure, Calvin? You better not be lying to me right now,” I tell him as I grab his shirt.

“I followed her for a few days, Malcolm,” Calvin said. “She’s been in contact with Gary Foster. In fact, according to my research, they have been friends for some time now. I have the proof here.”

He hands me a file that contains photographs and documents that leave no doubt about Ellen’s treachery. I feel sick to my stomach as I look through them. How could I have been so blind? I had trusted her with everything, and she betrayed me.

Calvin is still talking, but I can’t focus on his words. My mind is filled with questions, doubts, and hopelessness. How could I have been so stupid? How could I have let her get so close to me? What did she stand to gain by betraying me?

“Malcolm, are you okay?” Calvin’s voice breaks through my thoughts.

I stare at him and shake my head. “No, Calvin, I’m not okay. How could she do this to me? I trusted her with everything.”

“I’m sorry, Malcolm,” Calvin says. “I know this is hard for you. But we have to act fast. We can’t let her get away with this.”

I know he is correct, but I can’t face Ellen. The thought of confronting her is too much to bear. I feel like I have lost everything that matters to me.

“What...what do you want me to do? I can't look her in the eyes. Not now.”

“I'm afraid you're going to have to, Malcolm. We have to catch her in the act itself. You have to keep going along like all is fine.” Calvin must have sensed my reluctance, for he adds, “Malcolm, it will only be for a short while. I promise.”

I nod, “I would like to be alone now if you don't mind, please,” I tell him, and he nods before quietly leaving.

I collapse on the couch after Calvin leaves, staring blankly at the wall. The silence in the room is suffocating, and I feel like I am drowning in a sea of despair. My mind is filled with memories of Ellen, and I wonder how I could have been so wrong about her.

With each thought, I feel a fresh surge of anger and betrayal run through my nerves. How could she be so selfish? How could she throw away everything we had? For what? A few dollars more? I know I will never be able to forgive her for this. Ellen Hunt will pay for her betrayal. I swear!

Chapter Fifteen

Ellen

I have known Malcolm for a long time. Long enough to know when something isn't quite right. Something has been different about him. At first, I couldn't quite put my finger on it. He seems quieter than usual and more withdrawn. He doesn't laugh as much, and it looks forced when he does.

I sit at the restaurant, a cup of orange juice in front of me, staring at Malcolm now across the room. He's on the phone, speaking to one of our clients in hushed tones. I watch him and can't help but think about how different he is from the man I know. Something's changed and. Malcolm has started to act differently. He has become more reserved, cautious, more guarded during conversations.

At first, I thought it was just the stress of running Malcolm Graff Realty while the team is on retreat, but lately, I have noticed other things too. He avoids eye contact with me, or would get flustered when I am around. He seems nervous, almost skittish, like he is afraid of something. And then there is the way he looks at me. It used to be intense, almost

smoldering, like he couldn't take his eyes off me. But now, it is different. It is like he is trying to keep his distance and is afraid of getting too close. It's like he's completely shut down, emotionally. Maybe he's just stressed out, I think to myself. Running a company can; perhaps he's just going through a rough patch. But then again, maybe it's something more. Maybe there's behind-the-scenes that I'm unaware of.

I try to shake off my thoughts and focus on my work, but my mind keeps drifting back to Malcolm. I can't help but wonder what is going on with him. I have tried not to worry too much about it because he is still as attentive as always. But as he continues to act like this, I can't help but feel concerned. So, I decide to ask him about it.

"Hey, Malcolm," I say as I approach him. "Can I talk to you?"

"Sure, what's up?" he asks, looking up from his laptop screen.

"I've noticed that you've been acting a bit differently lately," I say, chuckling, trying to keep my tone light. "Is everything okay?"

Malcolm's face tenses momentarily, and I can tell he is pondering how to respond. So, I was right. There's indeed something on his mind. "Yeah, everything's fine," he finally says. "Just a lot on my mind."

"Is it work stuff?" I ask him. "We've all been feeling the pressure lately with that big pitch coming up."

Malcolm nods. “Yeah, that’s part of it,” he replies. “I’ve been feeling much stress about the pitch.”

I can understand that. We are all feeling the pinch. The pitch is in less than two weeks now. “Is there anything I can do to help?” I ask.

Malcolm shakes his head. “No, it’s not that,” he says. “I just need to figure out how to manage my stress better.”

I can see the worry in his eyes, and I wish I could do something to ease his burden. “Well, you know you can always talk to me if you like to.”

Malcolm gives me a small smile. “Thanks, Ellen,” he says. “I know I can always count on you.”

“You got that right, Boss.” I smile mischievously.

“I just wanted to say thank you. You have been one of the few people left in my life that I can trust wholeheartedly and know won’t betray me. In fact, I’m willing to stake my life on it.”

I chuckle uneasily. “Of course. I truly believe in your work and what you stand for.”

Malcolm does something strange then; he holds my hands in a clasp and looks into my eyes as if he is daring me to shift them.

“It’s truly a blessing, then, that I have someone like you on my team.”

I give him a slight grin. “Thank you, Boss. If you don’t mind, I have to take my leave now. I’ll see you down at the beach later.”

Malcolm nods, but I don’t even wait for his answer as I hurry back to my room and break down in tears.



It started as a vague feeling in the pit of my stomach. A sense that something is off, that the atmosphere around the resort has shifted. I can’t quite put my finger on it, but I know it is there. As the activities go by, the feeling grows stronger. It isn’t just that something is off and wrong. I can feel it in how Malcolm and Calvin look at me and how they talk to me. It is a subtle hostility that I can’t ignore. I try to tell myself that I am being paranoid and imagining things. But I can’t shake the feeling that something else is happening and has to do with me.

It isn’t until I catch Malcolm staring at me during a bonding activity that I suspect he knows I’m the spy. His eyes, which have always warmed me even when he doesn’t realize it himself, are intimidating. Now, I see something different. Something cold and calculating.

I try to play it off to act like everything is normal. But the tension between us grows. Most of all, I can always feel Calvin’s eyes on me, and whenever I speak up in team meetings, I can see the subtle sneer on Calvin’s face. Like he knows something, I don’t know.

So, I decide to confront Malcolm. I can't take it anymore. I walk up to his room, where he is with Calvin; my heart pounding.

"Can I talk to you for a second?" I plead silently, trying to keep my voice calm.

Malcolm looks me up and down, his expression blank. "That's twice in a day, Ellen. Can't keep your hands off me, can you?" he whispers to just my hearing.

"I'm serious, Malcolm," I say.

His gaze hardens. "Of course. What's up?"

"Alone, please," I tell him, glancing toward Calvin.

Calvin looks like he isn't going to budge until Malcolm signals to him to give us some space.

I can feel the tension in the air, like a coiled spring ready to snap. "Is there something going on between us?" I ask him, my voice shaking.

Malcolm's eyes narrow. "What do you mean?"

"I don't know," I say, feeling like a fool. "It just seems like there's some tension between us."

Malcolm leans back in his chair, his arms folded across his chest. "I don't know what you're talking about, Ellen. Maybe you imagine things."

I know he is lying. I can feel it in my bones. But I don't know what else to do. I nod, trying to keep my face neutral. "Okay," I tell him, turning to walk away.

“Ellen.”

I turn back to him, relieved that he will finally say something.

“Come with me.” Malcolm grasps my hands, grabs my shoulders, and begins kissing me all over my body. I feel my senses flee with his touch. Malcolm pulls off my clothes, and soon, I’m naked before him; I try to pull off his clothes, but he holds my hands behind and ties them with a piece of cloth attached to his bedside.

He flips me over so that my hands are securely tied to my back, and my back is arched towards him with my butt raised in the air. My head is pressed against his pillow, and before I can protest, he places a piece of cloth in my mouth to cut me off.

I twist and turn, but he holds me steady, kisses my center, displayed right in the open like a feast, and devours me. I’m squealing from such a rush of pleasure, and before I can gather my thoughts, he slams into me with his huge cock, and I gasp. He keeps thrusting in and out in some silent fury, and I quiver and shake until I can’t take it anymore, and I combust.

He unties me when he explodes deep inside and kisses me aggressively on the lips, and then leaves me lying there. A woman thoroughly fucked in every sense of the word.

Chapter Sixteen

Ellen

It is a warm summer evening, and I am sitting outside my hotel room, sipping a glass of wine and trying to forget about last night. But I can't shake the feeling, no matter how hard I try. I am on the verge of a breakdown, like everything is too much to handle.

And then it hits me—the reason for all the tension, anxiety, and fear. I have fallen hopelessly in love with my boss, Malcolm.

I try to deny it, to push the thought away. But the more I think about it, the more it makes sense. All this time, I had supposed I was trying to capture his heart; I forgot that mine was in danger too. It wasn't anger I was feeling; it was desire.

I sit there for what feels like hours, my mind racing, my heart pounding. I don't know what to do. I can't keep living like this, hiding my feelings, pretending everything is okay.

Finally, I make a decision. I can't be Gary's spy anymore. I can't keep putting myself in danger, risking everything for a

job that is slowly killing me. I need to get out, start fresh and find a way to be with Malcolm, if that is even possible.

I pick up the phone and call Gary.

“Gary, it’s Ellen,” I say, my voice shaking.

“Hey, Ellen. What’s up?” he responds, sounding surprised.

“I can’t do this anymore,” I say, my voice breaking. “I can’t be your spy any longer. I’m sorry.”

There is a long pause on the other end of the line. “Ellen, what’s going on?” Gary replies, his voice hardening.

“I can’t talk about it,” I say, tears streaming down my face. “I just can’t do this anymore.”

There is another long pause, and then Gary sighs. “Okay, Ellen. Just know that you can’t back out now. You’re in way too deep. We need you to see this through.”

“I know,” I tell him, my voice barely above a whisper. “But I can’t do it anymore. I can’t keep lying, sneaking around, and risking everything. I’m sorry.”

“Calm the fuck down, Ellen! This is a serious breach of our agreement. You cannot leave now. Not when you’re so close.”

“That’s the thing, Gary. I don’t care anymore. I don’t care about the Governor’s Contract, your selfish ass; I don’t care about your threats, my job, or anything else!”

“How dare you?” Gary grinds his teeth, but I ignore him. “I will ruin you. You hear me; if you return without the

information I need, you better flee from New York City. You will become a pariah!”

“I know,” I said, wiping away my tears. “Thank you, Gary. So long.”

I hang up the phone, my mind racing. I realize I have dug my grave, but I don’t care. I can’t keep living a lie. I need to be true to myself, no matter what the cost.

The next morning, I walk towards the restaurant where I’ll find Malcolm. Now with a new sense of purpose. I know what I want and will do everything I can to get it. But I also know I need to be careful not to let anyone know what I am thinking or feeling.

Malcolm is right where I expect him to be when I walk in; his eyes focused on his laptop screen. I can feel my heart racing as I walk up to him, my palms sweating.

“Can we talk?” I ask him nervously.

Malcolm looks up at me, his eyes narrowing. “Sure,” he says.

I take a deep breath, trying to steady myself. “I need to tell you something,” I begin, my voice shaking.

Malcolm leans back in his chair, his eyes darting toward his screen and my face. “Okay. What’s going on?”

I sit across from Malcolm, my heart racing as I try to summon the courage to tell him the truth. How do I say to the man I love that I’ve been living a lie, posing as a loyal

employee while secretly working as a mole for his rival? I can't keep it bottled up any longer.

"I want you to know I forgive you for last night," I begin.

He looks up from his computer screen then; his brow furrowed with concern. "What is it, Ellen? Is everything okay?"

I take a deep breath and steel myself for what I'm about to say. "I've been working as a mole for Gary Foster. I've been feeding him information about our operations and strategy. I was the one who informed him about the Governor's Contract."

Malcolm's expression darkens, and I can see the hurt and anger in his eyes. "I know," he says, his voice barely more than a growl. "I've known for a while."

I'm shocked, and then it suddenly dawns on me. That explains his change in attitude towards me.

"Ellen, how could you do this? How could you betray us like that? How could you hurt me?"

I lower my gaze, unable to meet his accusing stare. "I know it was wrong. I don't have any excuses. I just... I'm sorry. "

Malcolm shakes his head, his eyes flashing with anger. "You're sorry? Is that all you've got to say? You're sorry doesn't excuse the fact that you're a liar and a traitor! What about you has been real? Huh? Were we even real? Was it all a game when you confessed your love for me? Trying to figure

out my pitch to give to Gary. Is Gary your lover? Tell me, Ellen!”

I jump, frightened. I have never seen Malcolm this angry. “No, Malcolm, I swear I never had that kind of relationship with Gary Foster.”

“But how am I supposed to believe you, Ellen? You’ve already proven that you’re a big-time liar.”

“I know,” I sob. “I’m sorry. I never meant for things to get out of control like this. But I swear to you, the only thing I did for Gary was, give him information. That’s all.”

“Humor me, Ellen. How did Gary then manage to sink his hooks into you?”

I swallow hard. “He helped me out of some financial difficulties when my father was seriously ill, and we didn’t have the money to cover his bills to keep him alive. And that is when Gary helped me financially in return for spying on you, and I’ve been indebted ever since.” I say, looking him in the eyes until the gravity of what I have said finally dawns on him.

“My God! It only gets worse. Is your name even Ellen Hunt?”

I smile sadly. “I’m afraid that much is true.”

Malcolm sighs, his anger dissipating as he looks at me with something approaching pity. “Ellen, For the sake of your dignity, I won’t say a word until the retreat is over, but as soon as we get to New York City, I want you to never show your

lying face in the office again, and as for whatever you think we had, it's over. Am I clear?"

"Malcolm, I beg of you. I came to tell you because I couldn't go through with it. I might have started on a bad note, but when I told you I loved you, I meant it. I love you so much, Malcolm. Please, I beg you, please don't do this."

Malcolm nods his head at me; his expression is serious. "Do not cause a scene. Take your leave now."

I take in the scenario, and he is right. It would not do to cause a scene at this time. "I'll leave, but I'll be waiting outside, Malcolm. I'll be waiting all night, if I have to, to prove to you that I truly love you and I didn't mean to cause you any harm."

"Good luck with that," Malcolm says, returning to his laptop, completely shutting me out. With each step I take, I feel my heart shattering into a million pieces.

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Chapter Seventeen

Malcolm

I stumble through the hallway, my vision blurred and my thoughts muddled. The empty bottle of whiskey in my hand sways back and forth as I try to maintain my balance. I'm not sure how I made it to Ellen's door, but here I am, pounding on it with all the force I can muster.

"Ellen! Open up! It's me, Malcolm."

My words are slurred, and I lean against the wall, waiting for her to answer. After what feels like an eternity, the door opens a crack, revealing a sliver of Ellen's face.

"What do you want, Malcolm?" she asks, her voice tight. She stares frantically towards the hallway, checking to see if my noise has awakened any of my employees, but I don't care.

"I need to talk to you," I say, pushing the door open farther. "It's important."

Ellen hesitates, then steps back to allow me entry. I stumble into the room, my eyes scanning the space. Everything is in its

place, just as it always is. But something is different tonight. I can feel it in the air.

I turn to face Ellen, my whiskey-laden breath washing over her. “Tell me everything,” I demand.

“Everything about what?” she asks, her eyes narrowing.

“About you being a mole,” I say, the words tumbling out of my mouth. I am suddenly disgusted.

Ellen’s expression darkens, and she takes a step back. “Why are you drunk, Malcolm? I don’t think this is the best time for this conversation.”

I grab her by the arms suddenly, my grip tight. “Don’t you play with me, Ellen! I’ve seen the files myself; I need to hear your truth.”

Ellen’s eyes widen in shock, and she struggles to free herself from my grasp. “What files? What are you talking about?”

I release her, taking a step back. “Calvin, my investigator made a file on you. The ones on my desk. The ones that prove you’ve been working for Gary Foster all these months.”

Ellen shakes her head, her voice trembling. “Malcolm, this is too much for me, please. You’re drunk and need to lie down for a moment so we can talk things out.”

I stagger towards her, my hand reaching out to grab her again. “No, Ellen. You’re the one lying. You’re the one drunk with lies and deceit. You’re working for my enemy, and I need to know why. I need to know why you hurt me, damn it!”

Ellen backs away from me, fear etched on her face.
“Malcolm, please. I feel scared. I’ve never seen you like this.”

I take another step forward, closing the distance between us.
“Tell me the truth, Ellen. I need to know. Just tell me what I need to know and I’ll leave, I promise. I’ll never reach out to you again if that’s what you want,” I sigh. “I just need to know.”

Tears well up in Ellen’s eyes, and she shakes her head. “I can’t, Malcolm. I can’t tell you. It’s too dangerous.”

I grab her by the shoulders, shaking her. “Damn it, Ellen. I need to know. Tell me everything.”

Ellen sobs, her body shaking in my grasp. “Okay, okay. Just let me go, please.”

I release her, and she steps back, wiping her tears away with the back of her hand. “I’ll tell you only because I desperately want your forgiveness. Only because I love you.”

I nod, my heart racing. “Just tell me what’s going on.”

Ellen takes a deep breath, composing herself. “I’ve been a mole for Gary Foster for the past few months. My father was a lowlife who constantly cheated and beat on my mother. One day, my father left the house and never returned. Two years later, we get a call from this woman, who we learned was his second wife. She needed our help paying my father’s hospital bills. He had cancer and needed surgery. My mother took all of our savings to the hospital without blinking twice, and it still wasn’t enough. I met Gary Foster at the hospital lobby.”

I breathe in sharply. This is what I have been waiting for.

“Gary found me in the hospital lobby crying my eyes out; I don’t know what it was that attracted him to me; maybe it was my posture of dejection, maybe it was the anger simmering on the surface at my father showing up just when things were getting good to ruin it again. It didn’t matter. He was kind and attentive, and he made me a proposition. He had just taken over his father’s business and needed help. He would foot my father’s bills, help me with my student loan, and make sure my mother was comfortable, and all I had to do was give him some insight into how his competitor worked. It seemed simple enough, so I agreed.”

“But I never knew I was falling into this rabbit hole until I felt the pressure from Gary, who always wanted more from me, and I never had enough. Malcolm, to me, it was always just a job until I fell in love with your mind, work, and everything you had built. And With you.”

My mind reels, trying to process what she’s saying. “Why didn’t you tell me? Why did you keep it a secret?”

Ellen looks away, shame evident in her eyes. “I couldn’t. It was too much. And I was afraid. Afraid of what you would think of me if you found out. Afraid of what would happen if anyone else found out.”

She reaches out to touch my arm, but I pull away. What was she doing? “Don’t, Ellen. It’s too late for that now. You know that, and I don’t know what will happen next.” I take a step back, my mind racing. “We’ll be leaving the resort in a day.”

Ellen shakes her head, her eyes pleading with me. “I know, Malcolm. I want your forgiveness. That’s all I want.”

I rub my forehead, trying to think. “You don’t have it, Ellen. Not now, not anytime soon.”



I wake up with a pounding headache and a vague sense of unease. The sheets are tangled around my legs, and as I sit up, I notice I’m not alone in the bed. Ellen is lying next to me, fast asleep.

My stomach drops as I remember the events of last night—the endless rounds of drinks, the partying with the rest of the employees, and the anger. And then, the hazy, drunken memories of me walking to Ellen’s room and demanding answers. I can’t believe I slept with her.

The thought makes me feel sick to my stomach. Ellen is a traitor who gathered information and sabotaged our operations. I trusted her, gave her access to sensitive information, and now she’s betrayed me in the worst possible way. How could I sleep with her?

I can’t even bare to look at her, so I get out of bed and get dressed. Ellen stirs, and I hear her mumble something, but I don’t respond. I need to get out of here to clear my head and figure out what to do next.

As I leave the room, I feel a sense of shame and disgust fill my mind. How could I have been so foolish? How could I

have let my guard down and slept with someone actively working against my company and me? I try to shake off these feelings as I return to my room. I need to focus on what needs to be done. Ellen needs to be dealt with quickly.

I spend the next few hours trying to piece together what happened the night before. I talk to Calvin, trying to understand how much Ellen had revealed about our company. It's clear that she's been gathering information for some time and has already shared some of it with Gary.

I feel rage and betrayal. How could I have been so unsighted? I trusted her, relied on her, and she's been using me all along.

As the day progressed, I start to feel more and more agitated. I can't be in the same room as Ellen or even look at her without feeling sick.

When I return to her room, she's packing her bags. I don't even acknowledge her presence; I tell her to be ready to leave the resort with the rest of us by the next day.

Ellen looks surprised, hurt even. She tries to speak, but I cut her off. "Save it," I say. "I don't want to hear it. You've betrayed our organization, and I can't even stand to look at you. I'm just paying you a courtesy call to inform you about the departure since Heidi is occupied."

With that, I turn on my heel and leave the room. As I walk away, I feel a sense of relief and satisfaction. It's over. I've cut ties with someone actively working against me and can focus on rebuilding our company's security measures.

But even as I try to put the incident behind me, I can't shake off the feeling of shame and disgust. How could I have let my desires override my better judgment? It's a hard lesson but an important one. I know that I need to be more careful in the future, always be on the lookout for potential threats and never let my guard down.

As I return to my room, I make a note to speak to our security team about increasing our safeguards against such safety threats. It won't be easy, but it's a necessity. I decide to take one final stroll on the beach at night.

I'm rambling along the beach, trying to relax, enjoy the night, and feel the breeze on my skin. It's been a long minute since the incident with Ellen, and I'm doing my best to put it behind me.

But just as I'm starting to feel calm, I hear someone calling my name. I turn around to see Ellen walking towards me with a look of desperation.

"Malcolm," she says, her voice trembling. "Please, can we talk?"

I hesitate, but something in her expression makes me stop. Despite everything that's happened between us, I can't help feeling a sense of sympathy for her. She looks so lost and alone like she's carrying the weight of the world on her shoulders.

Reluctantly, I nod and motion for her to join me. We find a quiet spot on the beach, away from the crowds, away from where we made love, and sit down on a bench.

“I just wanted to say,” Ellen begins, her voice barely above a whisper. “I’m so sorry, Malcolm. I never meant to hurt you or your company.”

I stare at her, unsure of how to respond. On the one hand, I still feel intense anger and anguish toward her. But on the other hand, something in her expression makes me want to give her a chance to explain herself.

“I’m listening,” I say, my voice cold and distant.

Ellen takes a deep breath and begins to speak. She tells me again about how she was forced into working for Gary as a way to pay off a debt. She talks about her pressure, constant threats, and intimidation.

“I didn’t have a choice, Malcolm,” she says, her voice shaking. “I was desperate, or else I would have been homeless. And then, when I got to know more of you, for the first time, I felt there was a way out. I started to see a future for myself, one where I didn’t have to be constantly looking over my shoulder.”

I listen to her words, still feeling a sense of skepticism. But as she continues to speak, something in her tone changes. She becomes more animated and passionate as she talks about the work she did for my company and the people she met.

“I started to care about the work we were doing, Malcolm,” she says, her eyes bright with emotion. “I started to believe that maybe, just maybe, I could make a difference. And that’s when I knew I couldn’t keep working for Gary anymore. I had to get out, and I had to tell you the truth.”

She looks at me with pleading eyes, begging me to understand her motives. And for a moment, I feel a flicker of sympathy. Maybe, just maybe, she's telling the truth.

"I don't know what to say, Ellen," I say finally, my voice uncertain. "I want to believe you, but after everything that's happened—"

"I know," she says, nodding her head. "I know I messed up, Malcolm. And I know that I hurt you. But I swear to you, I'm not working for Gary anymore. I quit everything with him, and I've been trying to make things right ever since. It's why I came to you at the bar; I've been trying to speak with you ever since."

There's a sense of earnestness in her voice that I can't ignore. Maybe she is telling the truth. Perhaps she has changed.

"I need some time to think," I say, standing up from the bench. "I don't know if I'll forgive you just yet, Ellen. But I can listen."

She nods, her eyes downcast. "Thank you, Malcolm. That's all I can ask for."

"Can I ask you a question?"

"Yes, go ahead."

"Last night, I don't remember passing out when I came to your room drunk. Did we, did we have sex?"

I watch a smile spread on her face, and I mentally groan. "What do you think?" she teases.

“I have no idea what to believe. I completely blanked out,” I say truthfully.

“Nothing happened. After our conversation, you dozed off and would have hit your head if I didn’t get a hold of you. I helped you to bed, and you were gone when I woke up.”

I ignore the feeling of hurt I can detect in her tone. “That’s all I need to know. Thank you,” I tell her.

My mind is filled with conflicting thoughts and emotions as I walk away from her. Part of me wants to believe her, to give her a second chance. But another part of me is still filled with anger and betrayal.

I’m not sure what the right choice is, but I know that I need to take some time to figure it out. For now, all I can do is keep moving forward and hope that, eventually, I’ll find the answers I’m looking for.

Chapter Eighteen

Ellen

I keep to myself in the van, staring out the window as the scenery whizzes by. The retreat was a success. I can't help but feel like an outsider like I didn't quite fit in with the team. And I know why. Malcolm is disgusted by me.

I shift in my seat, trying to find a comfortable position. But my mind is too busy racing with thoughts of Malcolm, of our last conversation before we left the retreat. He had been upset with me then, and I can't shake the feeling that he still is. I turn my attention to the other members of the team, who are laughing and chatting with each other. They seem so at ease with each other, so comfortable. But I feel like an interloper who is not part of their group. I close my eyes and take a deep breath, trying to calm myself down. But the image of Malcolm's face, twisted in anger and frustration, keeps flashing in my mind. I know I messed up, but I don't know how to make it right.

The van hits a bump in the road, jolting me out of my thoughts. I look around at my colleagues, wondering if they

noticed my unease. But they're all too busy enjoying each other's company to pay me attention. I try to focus on the scenery outside, the trees and fields rushing by. But my mind keeps drifting back to Malcolm. We had been working together for years, and I thought we shared a good working relationship. But then I made a mistake, more than a mistake to be honest and he has been furious with me. I open my eyes and look out the window again. The sun sets in the distance, casting a warm orange glow over the landscape. It's a beautiful sight, but I can't appreciate it fully.

Instead, my mind is filled with images of Malcolm. I wonder what he's doing right now, whether he's still angry with me or even thinking about me. I try to push the thoughts away, but they keep coming back. I remember how his voice sounded and how he gazed at me. It's like a weight pressing down on me, suffocating me. I try to take deep breaths to calm myself down. But it's no use. The thoughts keep swirling around in my head like a never-ending cycle.

The van hits another bump in the road, and I jolt in my seat again. I look around at my colleagues, who are still having a chill time. They all seem so carefree, so happy. I wonder what it would be like to be in their shoes, to let go of my worries and enjoy the moment. But I can't seem to do it. I'm too immersed in my thoughts and fears. I close my eyes and try to focus on my breathing—inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale. I repeat the mantra over and over, trying to calm myself down. But then I hear a voice, and my eyes snap open.

“Hey, Ellen, you okay?”

It's one of my colleagues, Rachel. She's looking at me with concern, and I realize I must have been frowning or looking upset. I try to smile, to reassure her that I'm okay. But the words stick in my throat. "I'm fine. Thanks, Rachel."

She looks at me suspiciously but decides not to press; I am grateful for her gesture. I steal a glance at Malcolm, sitting two seats behind me next to Heidi, and when he catches my eyes, I flush, embarrassed to have been caught staring. I keep my face straight forward until we mercifully arrive in New York City.

We get to the office, and as everyone alights, saying their goodbyes and "see yous" in the office on Monday, I wait behind, hoping to have a word with Malcolm before I have to meet him at the office, but even before I get a chance to approach him, he stalks off to the parking lot where our cars are parked and drive away. I swallow my tears and make my way to my car. I can't wait to get back home and have a good cry.



On Monday morning, I step off the elevator and walk down the hallway to my cubicle. The retreat is over, and we're all back to work. I'm still disconnected from my colleagues but determined to do my best and do the right things.

As I approach my cubicle, I see the door to Malcolm's office is open. I hesitate for a moment. He is super early today, and I stand there wondering whether I should go in or not. But

then I see he's engrossed in work, hunched over his desk and scribbling furiously on a notepad.

I hurry to my cubicle, drop my work bag and head to the break room to brew a pot of coffee; I prepare Malcolm's just how he likes it and head back to his office.

I take a deep breath and step inside, trying not to disturb him. But as soon as I do, he looks up and notices me.

"Hey, Ellen," he says, his voice friendly but guarded.

"Hi, Boss," I say, trying to sound casual. I hand him the coffee and sigh gratefully when he accepts it.

I can't help but notice that piles of papers and folders surround him and that his computer screen is filled with charts and graphs. He's been working hard since we got back from the retreat.

"Working on the pitch?" I ask, nodding toward the piles of papers.

He nods, looking back down at his notepad. "Yeah, trying to get everything finalized before the meeting next week."

I can tell he's still holding a grudge against me, but try not to let it bother me. I step closer to his desk and peer over his shoulder at the notepad.

"What do you think?" he asks, showing me a sketch of a layout for the pitch deck.

I stand there, shocked that he asked, and for a moment, I forget that I'm supposed to study it. I take a look at it, trying to

offer some helpful feedback. “It looks good, but maybe you could add more visuals to make it engaging?”

He nods, considering my suggestion. “Yeah, that’s a good idea. Thanks.”

I can’t help but feel a little gratified of myself for offering something worthwhile. Maybe this is a step in the right direction, a way to make things right with Malcolm. Perhaps this is him opening up to me again; if he could show me the pitch, it means that he forgives me, or it could also be a trap to see if I would inform Gary about his pitch. Either way, I am determined to accept whatever he is offering.

But then he looks up at me, his expression serious. “Ellen, about the retreat...”

I feel a knot form in my stomach. *This is it*, I think. He’s going to sack me formally.

But then he surprises me by saying something unexpected. “I wanted to apologize,” he says, his tone softening. “I know I was pretty harsh with you, and even if I had the right to be, I should have known you better. I’m sorry.”

I feel a wave of relief mixed with a twinge of disbelief. Is Malcolm possibly letting me off that easily? Miracles did exist.

“It’s okay,” I say, trying to assure him everything is all right. “We both had a lot on our plates, and things got tense.”

He nods, looking grateful for my understanding. “Yeah, we did. But we can put it behind us and move on, right?”

I nod, feeling a light smile tugging at the corners of my mouth. Maybe things can get back to normal between us, I think. Perhaps we can work together like we used to.

We chat for a few more minutes, discussing some ideas for the pitch and bouncing ideas off each other. I feel a sense of camaraderie building between us, feeling we're in this together.

As I turn to leave, Malcolm stops me.

"Hey, Ellen," he says, his voice serious again. "There's something else I wanted to talk to you about."

I turn back to face him, my heart racing. What could it be now?

"This," he says as he leans in and brushes his lips against mine. At that moment, I feel my soul leave my body.

I'm surprised. Although the attraction between Malcolm and me has always been strong, even through the betrayal, I never imagined anything like this happening between us again. And yet, as his lips press against mine, I feel a gush of excitement and desire.

I kiss him eagerly, my hands reaching to tangle in his hair. We break apart briefly, both of us gasping for air, and then he pulls me up and places me on his desk. He hurries to ensure his door is locked securely and the curtains are pulled down. We are secluded in his office, and I find it so sexy as our hands roam all over each other, our bodies pressing together as we

kiss and touch and explore each other. It's like a fever dream, all-consuming and intensely erotic.

I've never felt anything like this before, this intense need and craving for someone else. Malcolm's hands on my body are electric, sending shivers down my spine and making me moan with pleasure.

I lay back on the desk, Malcolm hovering over me. He looks down at me with hunger in his eyes, and then he kisses me again, his hands wandering over my body. He parts my legs and pulls my skirt upwards to reveal my pantyhose, which he tears apart.

"I have always hated those. They drive me crazy with how sexy they look on you."

I can feel the heat building between us, the need for release almost unbearable.

"Please, Malcolm," I whimper. He knows what I need and somehow keeps holding it back.

He slips a finger inside my pussy, and I shiver slightly; he slips another and increases the pace. I watch with fascination as my juices trickle down on his fingers. He looks at me, his eyes twinkling as he licks it off, his eyes still on mine. I almost cum, and before I can say jack, he slips inside me, and I'm crying out with pleasure as his massive member devours me from the inside out as we move together in a frenzy of desire.

It's like nothing else exists in the world except for the two of us, lost in each other's bodies and the intensity of our

passion. We're both panting and moaning, lost in the moment's ecstasy.

As we finally come down from the heights of pleasure, Malcolm collapses onto me, gasping for air. We lay there on his table for a moment, tangled up in each other's arms, stunned by the intensity of what just happened.

Finally, he rolls off and sits up, looking down at me with a mix of desire and concern in his eyes. "Are you okay?" he asks.

I nod, still a little dazed by the experience. "Yeah," I manage to say. "That was amazing."

He smiles down at me, a warm, affectionate smile that makes my heart skip a beat. "I'm glad you enjoyed it," he says.

We sit there for a moment, catching our breath and coming down from the intensity of our passion. And then I realize we're still in the office, and anyone could walk in.

"Um, we should probably get dressed," I say, slightly embarrassed.

Malcolm nods, looking a little sheepish. "Right. Sorry about that."

We both quickly pull on our clothes, trying to regain some sense of decorum. I try to adjust whatever bit of clothing I still had and wondered if the rest of our workers wouldn't perceive the scent of sex on me.

"You realize they already know, right?"

I find Malcolm staring at me in amusement. “They know about... about what?” I stammer.

“About us. As private as you think we were, we failed,” he concludes with a grin, and I groan. “I have to go. Let me know if you need more help with the pitch and work in general.”

“I will,” he says and sees me off to the door.

At the door, as I turn to walk back to my cubicle. I feel Malcolm smack me on my butt right outside his office in front of my coworkers, who look at me in amusement.

I blush furiously and walk back with as much dignity as possible. I can almost swear I hear someone sniggering.

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Chapter Nineteen

Malcolm

I have been working with Ellen for days in and out, putting together the perfect pitch to win the Governor's Contract. She's brilliant, with a sharp mind and a keen eye for perfection that constantly impresses me. And as we spend long hours together in the office, pouring over spreadsheets and research, I find myself growing more and more attracted to her. Unable to keep my hands to myself. It's a wonder how we have not gotten together since the beginning.

I am glad that we get to work on this project together, which means staying late most evenings after work, and with each overnight, I find myself giving in to my desires. Ellen and I are alone in the office, and our tension is palpable. I want to fuck her in the office balcony overlooking the New York nights as the city swallows her screams, but I'll settle for anything I can now.

This night, she is pointing out something to me across the screen, and without even thinking, I reach out and slap her

butt, sending shivers down her back. I smile guiltily as she turns to me in shock.

“Malcolm, focus.”

“I know. I can’t help myself when you’re all serious like that.”

“The pitch is tomorrow.”

“Which is why I need every relaxation I can get,” I say as I pull her into my arms and peck her cheeks, face, nose, ears, and everything else until she giggles. I expertly capture her lips and pour all my frustration and lust into her.

“Wait, Malcolm, let me try something.”

I watch, confused, as she goes down on her knees, unzips my pants, and brings out my cock. I watch her, amused, as she takes it in, and I feel myself expand and throb in her hands, and before I know what’s happening, she gulps every inch of it in her mouth.

I gasp out loud as she licks and fingers my manhood. I hold her head as she finds a rhythm. I can’t control it anymore and cum inside her mouth. She looks at me, pleased at what I think is my facial expression. She licks off every drop of cum on my dick, and the pleasure is immeasurable. I lift and turn her so that she’s holding the edge firmly; I gently clasp her hair and tear her G-string, shifting her legs apart with my knee and then pounding into her. I keep thrusting in and out until I feel a rushing wind in my ears, my blood is scorching, and it is not until we both yell out, reaching climax, that I reduce my pace.

I am worn out, but this is precisely what I need.

I cradle Ellen in my arms and plant kisses on her forehead.

“Come home with me,” I tell her, sensing her reluctance before she says it.

“You have to rest, and I have to work.”

“That’s not a good excuse, and you know that, Ellen.”

“We have been working together, stealing kisses between work sessions; we steal moments of passion, giving in to our desires and fueling the fire between us. It’s like we can’t get enough of each other, the intensity of our yearning only growing stronger with every passing day. It scares me.”

“Why?”

“Because a part of me doesn’t believe in all this yet. That thinks it’s until the pitch is over.”

It’s a delicate balance, this dance between work and pleasure, but we manage to make it work. I know that I have forgiven Ellen, but if I’m being honest, I’m not sure what’s next. So, I give her the only thing I can right now.

“You’re right. How about we meet after the pitch and discuss the way forward?” I ask her.

“That would be great.”

I nod. I have to get back to work. I can’t afford to look stupid tomorrow, not when I have a score to settle with Gary Foster. I suddenly bumped into him once at a meeting with the governor. Our eyes met, and I could immediately sense the

hostility emanating from him. I try to remain calm, but I can feel my blood pressure rising.

Gary and I had never gotten along, and our rivalry has only intensified since he took over his father's company and I was named the most eligible bachelor in New York City, a title I didn't relish but accepted grudgingly as proof of my success. I can tell that he's savoring the opportunity to see me in a vulnerable state, and it takes all my willpower to resist the urge to lash out.

Instead, I forced a smile and offered a polite greeting. "Gary. How nice to see you," I lied through my teeth.

"Malcolm. I wish I could say the same. I have to go now but send my love to Ellen, would you?"

"It would be my pleasure," I replied. It would not do for him to see how his words affected me. I felt like bashing his head against the wall.

As I returned to my office, I shook off the encounter with Gary and refocused on my presentation. I wonder how much his animosity towards me would affect our chances of success.



I wake up to the sound of my alarm, feeling a mixture of nerves and excitement. Today is the biggest pitch of my life—the Governor's Contract. I've been working on this project for weeks, pouring my heart and soul into it, and now it all comes down to this.

I jump out of bed, eager to get started on the day. I shower quickly, shave, and dress in my best suit. I don't want to leave anything to chance. As I eat breakfast, I review my notes one last time. I've rehearsed my pitch countless times, but I want to ensure it's flawless.

I call my driver to take me to where the pitch event will occur. I make my way to the town hall. As I move, I can feel my heart racing faster and faster. I take deep breaths to calm myself, but it doesn't work. This is it—the moment of truth.

When I arrive, I meet up with some of my employees who are there to support me, and I'm grateful for their presence. I don't worry about Ellen showing up; I know she wouldn't miss it for the world. There are four of us pitching in total, and I bet we're all feeling the same mixture of nerves and excitement. I watch everyone, including Gary Foster, review their notes one last time, ensuring they don't forget any crucial points. I smile for the cameras, making a relaxed pose hoping to exude confidence.

As I wait for my turn to pitch, I feel the tension build in me. I pace back and forth, trying to relax, but my mind is racing with everything that could go wrong.

Finally, it's my turn to pitch. I walk up to the podium, and all eyes are on me. I spy Ellen entering the hall from my side eyes, and I take a deep breath and begin to speak. I start with an introduction, then move on to our proposal for real estate development in New York City.

I can feel my confidence growing with each word I speak. I've rehearsed this pitch so often that it feels like second nature. I'm no longer looking at my notes—I'm speaking from the heart.

“Real estate development in New York is essential for a multitude of reasons. Firstly, it provides housing and commercial spaces for the city's ever-growing population. With more and more people moving to New York, the demand for high-quality living and working spaces is only increasing.

Additionally, real estate development is a crucial driver of economic growth in the city. It creates jobs, stimulates local businesses, and attracts outside investment. We can ensure the city remains competitive and vibrant by developing new properties and renovating existing ones.

Finally, real estate expansion plays a crucial role in shaping the character and identity of the city. It allows us to preserve historic buildings while also embracing new, innovative designs. It creates neighborhoods and communities that reflect the diverse and dynamic culture of New York.

Overall, real estate growth in New York is vital to the continued growth and success of the city. It provides economic opportunities, housing, and community spaces for residents and visitors alike....”

As I continue to speak, I can feel the audience getting more and more engaged. They're nodding, asking questions, and showing genuine interest in my proposal. It's like all of my hard work is finally paying off.

When I finish my pitch, there's a round of applause. I've done it! I have made it through the biggest pitch of my life.

The rest of the day is a blur. I'm so exhausted from the adrenaline rush of the pitch and watching my competitors. It came as no surprise to me to watch Gary Foster pitch brilliantly. The bastard probably had a plan B if stealing my pitch didn't work out for him.

As the hours tick by, I become more anxious and walk around the town hall a few times while the judges deliberate on the results. I can't shake the feeling that something will go wrong and try to distract myself with a book, which I can't focus on. All I can think about is the pitch.

I'm standing in the town hall, surrounded by my employees, waiting for the announcement of the Governor's Contract. The tension in the air is palpable, and I can feel the anxiety building in my chest. We've worked so hard for this, and the thought of losing is almost unbearable.

Suddenly, the announcer takes the stage. My heart is pounding as he begins to speak. "And the Governor's Contract winner is... Malcolm Graff Realty!"

I can hardly believe my ears. I won! We won! I look around at my team, and their faces are all filled with the same sense of accomplishment and excitement. We've done it.

The room erupts in cheers and applause. People are shaking hands, patting me on the back, and congratulating me. It's like a dream come true. This project is daunting, but I know that

we can do it. We have the skills, passion, and determination to make this project successful.

I turn to find Ellen staring at me from the corner of the room with a beautiful smile. I wave at her, and she waves back at me. I am moving towards her when a crowd of well-wishers surrounds me, and I see Gary Foster pulling her towards another room. I bristle and force a smile on my face as I speak to people. I need to follow them. I need to be sure that Ellen is safe.

I finally manage to break free of the crowd and walk into the many rooms of the town hall; I can still hear the sound of applause ringing in my ears. I seethe. How dare Gary cut short my moment of triumph! I turn a corner and see Gary looming over Ellen. My heart sinks as I realize what's happening.

“Come on, Ellen,” he’s saying, “you know you owe me. Why don’t you give me some of that good pussy you gave Malcolm too.”

Ellen looks terrified, her back pressed against the wall as Gary advances. I can see the fear in her eyes, filling me with a fit of cold anger.

I step forward, my voice firm and commanding. “Gary, what the hell do you think you’re doing?”

He turns to face me; his expression is hostile. “This is none of your business, Malcolm. Ellen and I were having a conversation.”

I don't buy it for a second. I can see Gary's desperation and how he's trying to corner Ellen into doing something she doesn't want to do.

"This is my business," I say, stepping closer to him. "Now, back off and let her go."

Gary doesn't budge, and I can feel my frustration growing. But I don't let it show. Instead, I take a deep breath and keep my voice low.

"Gary, you know that behavior like this won't be tolerated. Especially when the Governor is so close by. Intimidating and threatening other employees is completely unacceptable."

But he sneers at me. "What are you going to do about it, Malcolm? You are no one to control me."

And then, without warning, he lunges at Ellen. She shrieks in terror, and I feel a surge of rage.

I step forward, my body moving without conscious thought. In one swift motion, I grab Gary's arm and twist it behind his back, just like before.

"You're done, Gary," I growl. "It's taking all I have not to render you armless. Now listen to me carefully because I'll only say this once. Ellen Hunt is my woman now. Do you hear that? She's mine. This means everything that concerns her is now my business. If I see you step the wrong way, you're dead, and you know I don't play."

He struggles against me, but I don't let go. I can feel the heat of his anger, the strength of his desperation. But I stand

my ground, determined to protect Ellen at all costs.

“Let her go,” I say, my voice hard. “Now.”

“She owes me, dammit! She owes me!”

“Send me a fucking bill.”

And to my surprise, Gary backs down. He knows he’s lost this battle and doesn’t want to make it any worse.

As he steps away, I feel the adrenaline pumping through my veins. But I don’t let it consume me. Instead, I turn to Ellen; concern etched on my face.

“Are you okay?” I ask her, my voice gentle.

She nods, her eyes wide and her body trembling. “Thank you, Malcolm. Thank you very much.”

I nod back, my focus still on her. “You don’t have to worry about him anymore. I’ll make sure he never bothers you again.”

I’ll make sure that Gary is gone from New York City if I have to, that he never has the chance to intimidate anyone else like this again.

But for now, my attention is on Ellen. I take her arm and lead her out of the town hall, my hand resting reassuringly on her shoulder.

“Ellen, if he ever tries to reach you again, let me know immediately, okay?”

She nods, flashing a blushing smile. “Thank you, Malcolm. I appreciate it. I do have one question, though.”

“What is it?” I ask her as we walk down the giant stairs, my hands twined in hers.

“What was that thing you said about me being your woman?”

I stop halfway and make sure she is facing me. “Exactly what I said. You’re mine, and I’m yours.”

“Does this mean that we’re dating?”

“Haven’t we always been?”

She squeals, and I laugh.

“Be sure to reach the office bright and early tomorrow. I hear your boss can be quite a difficult fellow to please,” I say as I draw her into my arms and kiss in the presence of anyone who cares to be watching.



I take a deep breath and lead Ellen into my family’s sprawling mansion in New Jersey. This is a big step for me—introducing her to my parents, my siblings, and all the other members of the family who will be gathering for tonight’s dinner.

Ellen looks stunning in a simple black dress that hugs her curves in all the right spots. Her hair is swept up in an elegant bun; her makeup is subtle and understated. She’s nervous, I can tell, but also excited.

“Malcolm, this is amazing,” she whispers as we walk through the grand foyer. “Your family’s home is beautiful.”

I nod, feeling a sense of pride and nostalgia wash over me. This is where I grew up and learned the values and principles that have guided me through life. It's also where I learned the importance of building a legacy.

As we go to the dining room, I feel my heart beating faster. This is a big moment. My family has always supported my career and achievements, but they've never met someone I've been serious about before.

I take a deep breath and push open the doors to the dining room. My parents are already seated at the head of the table, and my siblings and their spouses are scattered around the room. They all turn to look at us as we enter.

"Malcolm, darling," my mother exclaims, rising from her seat. "You're finally here. And who is this lovely young woman?"

I step forward, my arm around Ellen's waist. "Mom, Dad, everyone, this is Ellen. She's my girlfriend."

There's a moment of stunned silence as my family takes in this news. But then my mother's face breaks into a broad smile, and she rushes forward to embrace us both.

"Finally!" she exclaims. "We've been waiting for you to find someone special, Malcolm."

My father nods, his face serious. "We're happy for you, son. Ellen, it's a pleasure to meet you."

Ellen blushes, clearly overwhelmed by the warm welcome. "Thank you, it's an honor to meet all of you."

As we take our seats around the table, the conversation flows easily. My family is genuinely interested in Ellen—where she’s from, what she does for a living, and how we met. And as she answers their questions with grace and poise, I feel a sense of pride and contentment. This is where I belong, surrounded by love and support at the table with my family. And now , I feel even more at home with Ellen by my side.

As the night wears on, I see that Ellen fits in perfectly. She laughs at my sister’s jokes and engages in a lively discussion with my brother-in-law about politics, my niece Desire is smitten with her, and Ellen even charms my grandmother with stories about her childhood.

And as we leave the dinner, my family gathers around us to say goodbye.

“Malcolm, you’ve chosen well,” my mother says, warmly hugging Ellen. “She’s lovely, intelligent, and kind. You’re a lucky man.”

My father nods, his eyes twinkling. “And Ellen, maybe now that you’re in his life, you can convince him to visit the family. We know he’s a hotshot in New York but will always be Malcolm to us.”

Ellen smiles, clearly touched by their words. “Thank you so much. I feel incredibly blessed to be a part of this family, and don’t worry, I’ll do my best to make sure Malcolm comes home more often.”

“You have won my heart already,” my father says, and we all laugh.

As we walk hand in hand out of the mansion and into the cool night air, I can feel excitement and possibility bubbling inside me. Ellen is more than just my girlfriend—she's someone I can see building a life with and standing by my side through all the ups and downs the future may behold.

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Chapter Twenty

Ellen

I can feel the excitement as we walk into the office the following morning after winning the Governor's Contract. After months of hard work and countless hours of preparation, we're finally ready to start implementing the project on real estate development in New York.

Malcolm greets us with a smile and blows me a kiss that makes me blush before he begins. "Good morning, team. Are we ready to get started?"

We all nod eagerly, our minds buzzing with ideas and plans. Our team comprises some of the best and brightest in the business—architects, designers, engineers, and finance experts, all brought together by our shared passion for creating something out of the box. Malcolm leads us into the conference room, where we've already laid out the plans and sketches for our project. We gather around the table, ready to dive into the details.

"Okay, team," Malcolm begins, his voice steady and confident. "Here's the plan. We will take this piece of land in

downtown New York and turn it into a mixed-use development: residential, commercial, and retail space, all in one location. It's going to be a game-changer for the city, and we're the ones who will make it happen."

As he speaks, I can see the passion and anticipation in his eyes. This is what he lives for, the thrill of creating something from nothing, the joy of seeing his vision come to life. The rest of us listen eagerly, taking notes and offering our input and ideas. We know that this is a team effort and that every one of us has a role in making this project successful.

Over the next few weeks, we work tirelessly to bring our vision to life. We pore over blueprints and sketches, debate the merits of different materials and design elements, and work with contractors and suppliers to ensure everything is up to our standards. As we work, our camaraderie and collaboration grow stronger. Despite our different backgrounds and areas of expertise, we're all united by our shared goal—to create something that will change the face of New York forever.

And slowly but surely, our vision begins to take shape. The foundation is laid, the framework goes up, and soon enough, we're putting the finishing touches on the interiors and exteriors. It's hard work—long hours, tight deadlines, and a million tiny details to keep track of. But it's also exhilarating, the feeling of accomplishment that comes from building something mind-blowing that will stand the test of time.

And when the day finally comes to unveil our project to the world, I can feel my heart race with excitement and

anticipation. We gather in the development center, surrounded by reporters, investors, and curious onlookers. Malcolm stands at the group's center, his face glowing with pride.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he begins, his voice ringing across the crowd. “I am proud to present the future of New York - a mixed-use development that will change how we live, work, and play in this great city.”

The crowd cheers and I can sense the pride and satisfaction engulfing me. We've been working toward this, not just completing a project but conceiving something extraordinary.

As the reporters swarm around us, asking questions and snapping pictures, I can see the gleam of excitement in Malcolm's eyes. This is why he does what he does—to create something that will make a difference in people's lives and leave a lasting impact on the world.

And as we walk away from the development, surrounded by the hustle and bustle of the city, I am filled with joy, and I head back home to shower. Malcolm had earlier informed me that we would have a private celebratory dinner just the two of us to toast the project's success, and he hinted he had something important to say.

As I go through my wardrobe, trying to find something fitting for the occasion, I marvel at how much things have changed in less than a year. Malcolm is a fantastic boyfriend, lavish in his attention and resources; even when we were all tapped out from the project, he managed to disburse another

stash of energy to the rest of us. I am looking forward to tonight. Lord knows we can do with some unwinding.



I nervously knock on the door of Malcolm's apartment, filled with elation. We had just wrapped up the biggest project of our careers, and I genuinely believe I am about to take a significant step in our relationship.

Malcolm opens the door, his face lighting up as he sees me. "Hey, Ellen," he says warmly, pulling me into a tight embrace. "I'm so glad you're here." I feel his arms around me, his strong embrace grounding me and easing my nerves. This was the moment I had been waiting for, the chance to tell him how I truly felt. As we step into the apartment, I can't help but take in the beautiful surroundings. The living room is spacious and airy, with large windows offering a stunning view of the city below. The furniture is modern and tasteful, reflecting Malcolm's impeccable taste.

He leads me to the kitchen, where he's already preparing dinner. The aroma of roasted chicken and fresh vegetables fills the air, and I can't help but smile at his thoughtfulness. We sit at the table, a bottle of red wine between us. As we eat, we talk about the project, reminiscing about the challenges we faced and the successes we achieved.

But as the night wears on, the conversation turns more personal. We talk about our hopes and dreams, about where we

see ourselves in the future. And finally, after hours of talking, we come to the subject weighing both of our minds.

“Ellen,” Malcolm says, his voice soft and gentle. “I know we’ve been working together for a while now, but I need to tell you something.”

My heart races as he takes my hand across the table. I can feel the warmth of his skin against mine, and I know that this is it.

“I love you, Ellen, but you know that already. Hell! Everyone knows that,” he continues, his eyes locked on mine. “I planned this as a thank-you dinner. To appreciate you for being the best partner anyone could ever ask for.”

I feel a rush of emotion flush over me. This is going even better than I imagined.

“I love you too, Malcolm! Anyone within a five-mile radius from me knows that,” I say, my voice barely above a whisper. “You’re the best at everything you lay your hands on, and I’m so glad I get to feel those hands as I walk through life.”

A smile spreads across his face, and he leans across the table to brush his lips against mine. It’s a soft, gentle kiss, but it’s enough to set my heart racing.

The rest of the night passes in a blur of laughter and conversation, our connection growing stronger with each passing moment. As we sit on the couch, our bodies intertwined, I know this is where I belong—in his arms, by his side.

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Epilogue

One Year Later...

I walk into the brightly-lit room, feeling slightly nervous as I sit opposite the interviewer. It's been over a year since the real estate development project in New York City, but the impact of that experience is still fresh in my mind.

The interviewer begins with the usual pleasantries, but soon we are delving into the meat of the conversation. She asks about the challenges we faced during the project, and I can feel myself getting fired up as I remember all the obstacles we had to overcome.

I talk about the long hours of research, the new technology implemented, and the endless meetings with city officials and community members. I also talk about the sense of purpose that drove us forward, the belief that we were making a real difference in the lives of the people who would live in the buildings we were creating.

The tone becomes more reflective as we move into the interview's second half. The interviewer asks me to talk about

the project's impact on me, and I pause to consider the question.

I think about the people I worked with and the dedication and commitment they brought to the project every day. I reminisce about the accomplishment we all felt when the project was finally completed and how proud we were of what we had achieved.

But most of all, I think about the person who made it all possible: Ellen. Without her tireless efforts and unwavering support, I doubt we would have been able to succeed.

I talk about how Ellen inspired me to be a better leader and to push myself further than I ever thought possible. I talk about the moments when I felt like giving up and how she was always there to lift my spirits and keep me going.

And then the interviewer asks the question that catches me off guard: "So, Malcolm, what's next for you?"

I take a deep breath, feeling a mix of excitement and trepidation. I know what I want to say, but it feels like a big step to say it aloud.

"Well," I begin slowly, "I've been thinking much lately and realize something is missing in my life. Something I didn't know I needed but luckily found."

The interviewer leans forward, her eyes fixed on mine. "And what's that?"

I look down at my hands, then back up at her. "Love," I say simply. "I found someone to share my life with. Someone who

inspires and challenges me to bring out my best...someone like Ellen.”

The interviewer smiles, sensing the weight of what I’m saying. “So, you and Ellen are...?”

I nod, feeling a surge of happiness and nervousness all at once. “Yes, we’re together. And I couldn’t be happier. And on that note, I would like her to come in, please.”

I can hear the collective gasps in the studio room as I get down on one knee on national television and bring out a ring as Ellen approaches me.

I can tell that she’s a little shy and surprised and it makes me happy to find out that I have successfully surprised her.

“Ellen Hunt, you make me the happiest I have ever been. Our story is filled with ups and downs, pain, and tears, but I wouldn’t have it any other way. I’m glad you bumped into me, I’m glad I get to work alongside you at building Malcolm Graff Realty, and if you would do me the honor and say yes to being my wife, I would be the happiest man in New York City.”

I finish and pause, my heart beating loudly as I stare at Ellen. The entire studio also stares at her, waiting for a response.

“Yes, Malcolm Graff. I will marry you.”

The rest of the interview passes in a blur as Ellen and I, newly engaged, sit with the interviewer as we discuss my plans for the company and vision for the industry. But all I can

think about is the woman sitting next to me and the future we'll build together.

Ellen

I take a deep breath and push open the door to Malcolm's office. My hand trembles slightly as I hold a cup of his favorite coffee and a copy of the magazine that's about to make his day. It's been a week since the issue hit the newsstands, and I've been eager to deliver the news to him in person. I know this will make him happy, and I'm excited to see his reaction.

Malcolm looks up from his computer screen and smiles when he sees me. "Hey, fiancée! What's up?" he says, his voice warm and welcoming.

I smile back at him, feeling a sense of joy bubbling up inside me. "I brought you a cup of your favorite coffee and I also brought you a copy of the magazine," I say, holding out the publication. "The one where they named the new most eligible bachelor in New York City."

Malcolm takes the coffee first, blows me a thank-you kiss, then takes the magazine and slowly flips through the pages, his eyes scanning the article. I watch a smile slowly spread across his face, and his eyes light up with delight.

"Gary?" he says, his voice filled with laughter. "Gary Foster? Who did he screw over to get there?"

I laugh, “I wouldn’t know that but word on the street is, since you’re taken, Gary is up for pairing next.”

“I shiver at the thought of anyone being with him.”

“Don’t be so harsh, love. Everyone is redeemable,” I say as I go over to the table and sit on his lap. “If you ever doubt it, think about me. Our story.”

Ours is the perfect tale. And I hope it lasts forever.

The End.

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