



**HIS
LAST
NERVE**

CASSIE MINT

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One

Georgie



When Levi Laurent moves through the building, we sense him coming from floors away. Papers rustle in people's hands, quivering with anticipation; drawers slam and desk chairs squeak.

The air changes, somehow, like everyone's holding their breath, just waiting for a glimpse of the boss. Hair is patted down, lipstick blotted, and ties are yanked straight. And when the elevator dings and *he* walks out, moody eyes scanning from left to right, the whole room fizzes with excitement.

Today is a prime example. I press myself back against the break room door, watching the boss get mobbed on his walk across the office, the clump of his admirers jostling the cubicle walls. He doesn't come to this floor too often—a detail which, had I known, might have changed my internship application.

I want to be near Mr Laurent as much as possible. But not for the same reason as these weirdos—no. It's so much easier to ruin someone's life from up close.

My palms are clammy, and I spread my fingers over the break room door behind me, leaning against the cool surface.

Now that the boss is here, walking among us mere mortals, I can't tear my eyes away. Can't blink. Hot rage churns in my belly and tightens my chest, and my breaths come quicker.

Just the sight of him makes me want to scream like a banshee.

This asshole. This malevolent jerk.

Someone hands him a clipboard and Mr Laurent stops, frowning at the top page. His sensual mouth twists, and his frown deepens. Those sculpted shoulders are tense under his crisp white shirt, and he's several inches taller than the crowd.

I hate that he's so freaking attractive. I *hate* it.

He doesn't deserve that thick, wavy hair, sometimes brown or dark blonde, depending on the light. If there were justice in the world, this man would have only the thinnest strands of hair left—and he wouldn't be allowed to go bald with dignity. He'd have to comb those strands over every morning, staring into his own dead eyes in the bathroom mirror, wondering who he was trying to kid.

Is there a way to make a person go bald deliberately? Huh. I chew on my thumb knuckle, teeth digging in hard, and watch as he peels another page off the clipboard. It's a soothing thought.

Amid the cubicles, someone presses closer to the boss, like some of his talent might rub off on them. Gross. I roll my eyes and scoff under my breath.

You know, the people here worship Levi Laurent. It's completely genuine. They'd kiss the ground he walks on—hell, a few of them would probably lay flat and smooch it with tongue.

Why? As if I know. As far as I'm concerned, Levi Laurent crawled out of the smokiest depths of hell.

But it was startling on the first day of my internship, when I turned up in the smartest blouse I could find at the thrift store, all ready to rock and roll. I wanted vengeance, gossip, and one of those donuts in the break room for lunch. In that order.

I got my donut, at least. Vanilla icing with pink sprinkles.

But as for the rest? These people are disgustingly loyal, all staring after their evil boss like he hung the moon. Sure, he barks at them sometimes and they scuttle out of his way, but he's a *genius*, as they sigh to me during our lunchtime gab sessions.

Don't I know that Levi Laurent will save the world with his clean energy tech? Who wouldn't forgive a little grouchiness for that? And isn't he so *dreamy* with that faint French accent?

Vom. I want to learn his deepest fears, not that Angelica from legal is desperate to drop to her knees. She winked at me when she whispered that at Friday night drinks last week, like I must dream of crawling under his desk too.

Listen: the only thing I want to give that man is an ulcer.

I want him miserable, and I want to look into his tortured eyes so he knows it was me. That *I* did this... whatever ‘this’ turns out to be. The details of my vengeance are still hazy.

“These figures are wrong.” Mr Laurent’s deep voice cuts through the hum of conversation, and a few admirers step back, suddenly pale. The people in their cubicles turn back to their computer screens, and the sound of hurried typing rattles through the room.

Yeah, this is what happens when you worship a cruel, exacting god. You get your math wrong, and then bam! He smites you.

“We used the numbers your assistant Danny provided,” a young man in a gray shirt says. He gives a sickly smile, but he’s sweating. There are dark half-moons under his arms.

Levi’s mouth purses as he frowns at the clipboard again. God, a man with a full mouth like that shouldn’t go around pouting. No wonder these idiots all want to nibble his bottom lip.

“Daniel gave you these figures?” he asks quietly. His voice is lowered, but it still carries.

Fevered nods all around. Poor Danny.

The boss mutters something under his breath, but I’m staring at his lips, so I mostly make it out. Something about *the third time this week*.

Yeesh. The clock is ticking on Danny.

A bolt of sympathy goes through me—I'm not a monster, okay?—but then I straighten against the break room door, my heart lurching faster. My teeth dig into my thumb knuckle, hard enough to sting.

Levi Laurent's assistant is about to get fired. There will be an opening on the top floor, up there with *him*.

Wrenching my hand away from my mouth, I tug my skirt straight. A plan forms in the back of my mind.

The clipboard is shoved back, the boss's path resumed. He cuts between a row of cubicles, calling: "Do it again. And check the figures this time." His crowd of admirers scatter like geese, feathers ruffled and eyes wide, but they won't blame him for any harsh words. Because he's such a dreamy genius, remember?

Bleurgh.

Why is he here? There's not much on this floor except admin staff, a row of copiers, and a water cooler. A few potted plants sag against the walls, their leaves pale with lack of sunshine. Sometimes I take pity on them, dragging them to the nearest window, but some asshole keeps moving them back.

Mr Laurent's path brings him past the break room. I paste a polite smile on my face as he gets closer, trying to wipe away my rage and loathing. But I'm not sure I do a great job, because as he passes, the boss glances up—and our eyes meet.

He frowns.

And... *heat*. Searing heat crawls up my throat and cheeks. My heart pounds harder. My belly flutters, and my hands are slick as the room fades away. There's no shrill beep of copiers; no rattle of keyboards. Only the rasp of my breath. I'm woozy.

This is what hate feels like.

He's still staring as he draws level. I'm trapped, pinned by his gaze like a butterfly to a cork board. Or no, screw that, like something more dangerous...

Pinned like a scorpion with a dagger. Yeah.

Mr Laurent finally looks away, and I sag against the wood, light-headed. His broad shoulders slip through the doorway to a lawyer's office, and the whole room can breathe again.

God, I hate this guy.

"You get the figures!" A pair of accountants bicker in the middle of the room, shoving the clipboard back and forth like they're not grown-ass men. "Or better yet, wait until Mr Laurent hires an assistant with half a brain—"

I've heard enough. My back is damp under my blouse as I peel myself off the door. Time to write a flawless letter about how much I *love* Ignis Innovations and how I'd simply *die* for a permanent role. How it's my life's purpose to fetch a grumpy man coffee. Etc, etc, barf, barf.

Sorry, Danny. But I promise: I'll make him suffer for both of us.

Two

Levi



I don't enjoy firing staff, but it does come with a rush. That fresh, spring-cleaning feeling. Most of my work with Ignis will take years to complete, and our forecasts stretch over decades rather than days, so being able to wrap a task up in minutes is a rare treat.

Goodbye, useless employee.

I'm pleased with this week's progress. Fire Daniel: check. Hire a new assistant: check. Hide my double take when she steps into my office on her first morning: check... ish.

According to HR, Georgina came here as an intern two weeks ago, then wrote a letter begging for a more permanent role. They used the words 'hero worship' when they explained who they'd hired, but if she does worship me, I've yet to see it.

If anything, she's... terse.

"Good morning, Mr Laurent. I've brought your coffee."

My new assistant sidles through my office doorway, and just like the last two days, the words are all correct, but something is off. I frown, the schematics for a new design

briefly forgotten. The papers are spread over my desk, their corners curling, but my eyes are fixed on the young woman strolling across the room.

There's plenty of time to look. My office covers the whole top floor—except for her desk, tucked out there by the elevator.

Fabric swishes around her thighs as she walks. She's wearing a moss green dress: knee length, nipped in at the waist. Appropriate for the office, but... distracting. With that long blonde hair braided over one shoulder and her crimson pout, I may need to rethink the Ignis dress code.

We need everyone's blood to stay firmly in their brains.

And she's beautiful, no doubt about it, but that's not why I'm unsettled. Georgina's jaw is tight, like she's gritting her teeth behind that pretty smile, and her eyes are hard as she draws near.

The back of my neck prickles.

Is she nervous, perhaps? Is that why her shoulders are so tense? There's no need for her to be afraid: as long as she's competent, her new job is safe.

“Thank you,” I say when she places a coffee mug by my left wrist. The quiet thump echoes through the large office: a reminder that we're up here all alone. Even the faint sounds of traffic far below in the street are muted.

It's early morning—so early I thought I'd be the only person here. Huge windows look out on the city rooftops, and

the sky out there is dusky pink. A few last-minute stars pulse between tufts of cloud.

Georgina grunts, then seems to remember herself. Her hundred watt smile is dazzling, and she breathes: “You’re so welcome, Mr Laurent.”

I am? It’s just coffee. This woman is rather intense.

But... perhaps it’s a crush, then? I shift in my desk chair, the leather creaking.

That won’t do. She’s distracting enough without the extra temptation. And I don’t mingle with Ignis staff, nor anyone else, for that matter. There’s too much work to do, and the clock is ticking. I’ll socialize once our tech is flawless.

The first sip makes me wince. I frown down at my coffee mug in dismay, burnt bitterness on my tongue.

“Is everything alright?” *Merde*, she’s perky first thing in the morning. Her bright voice seems extra loud, battering my sleep-deprived brain, and I sigh, rubbing at my temple.

“Ah. Yes.” I could tell her the coffee is awful—of course I could. In fact, I *should*. This is part of her job after all, and only a simpleton could get it wrong. But when I glance over, she’s watching me so eagerly, her blue eyes gleaming, and the harsh words shrivel and die in my throat.

It’s one coffee. I’m sure she’ll learn to make it better.

“Get me the quarter two reports, please. Then call Dr Thacker over at the lab, and tell him I’ll be there by midday...”

My mouth moves independently, reeling off the list of instructions. Georgina whips out a small notepad from a dress pocket and scribbles notes as I talk. This is an improvement on Daniel. He seemed to think his memory was flawless, and believe me, it was not.

The morning sunshine is golden where it spills through the windows. It glitters against the strands of her fair hair. Georgina chews on her bottom lip as she writes, frowning in concentration, and her bare arms look smooth and tanned.

Does she spend much time outside? It *is* summer. Tilting my head, I try to picture her riding a bicycle through one of the city parks, or stretched on a towel in a bikini, sunbathing on the grass. Flicking through a dog-eared paperback, maybe, or sitting up with a lazy sigh, her toned stomach crunching, to drink from a water flask.

Stop that.

I shake myself, then give her the last few instructions. What the hell is wrong with me? She's my assistant. I am at work. If I'm not thinking about clean tech, I'm wasting precious time.

"...And push my 4pm meeting back by an hour," I finish. There's a beat of silence, her pen scratching over her notebook, but when Georgina lifts her chin, she doesn't leave like she should. Blue eyes bore into me, her gaze hard.

My gut sinks as she stares at me, unblinking. A muscle leaps in her temple. If it weren't ridiculous, I'd think this woman hated me.

“Yes?” I clip at last, irritated beyond all reason. My neck itches, and my foul coffee is going cold. “Why are you still here?”

I have things to do. Always so many things to do, and so many people relying on me. Even this rude girl, who apparently never learned not to stare, needs me to focus if she wants a future paycheck. So I know I’m being an ass, but I still wave her away like a little child. “Run along, please.”

Her laugh is strangled. Like she can’t believe how awful I am—but that makes no sense. *Hero worship*, they said. Everyone else in this company admires me, so why shouldn’t she?

I wait until she’s gone, the door swinging shut behind her. Then I gulp down another burned mouthful of coffee... and splutter, thumping my chest.

Three

Georgie



It's quiet when I get home. I drop my keys into the bowl by the door and toe off my shoes, eyes and ears all assessing. Is he here? The apartment is messy, with shoes abandoned by the entrance and a teetering pile of mail on a stool, but it's our usual low-grade clutter rather than the bombsite I've walked into a few times before.

“Dad?” My voice echoes in the quiet. This is an old building and the walls are thick—thank god. Else we'd have been kicked out a long time ago.

Blowing out a long breath, I wander through the familiar rooms, my fingertips brushing over the furniture: the bookcase that needs dusting; the cracked leather sofa with a crocheted throw; the scrubbed kitchen table that we sit at for dinner when we're Making An Effort. No signs of life—but no wreckage either.

So. That's good.

And I know it's harsh, since my dad must be working a late cleaning shift, but I'm glad for a few moments alone. I still glance over my shoulder, guilt churning in my stomach, as

I lift the kitchen trash bag out of its can and shake it gently. No clink of glass bottles.

“Oh.” I’m lighter already as I put the bag back. “Sweet.” And as I wash my hands in the sink, I’m cheerful enough to whistle. Seriously, woodland creatures should be braiding my hair right now.

It’s been a good day. Dad’s still on the wagon, even with me gone a lot with my new job, and I made Levi Laurent drink horrible burned coffee. His handsome face scrunched up with disgust and everything.

It’s small potatoes compared to the ultimate vengeance that I crave, but it’s still a thrill. What shall I do to him tomorrow?

A key scrapes in the front door, and my shoulders bunch around my ears—but I force them down and gust out a sigh.

Dad’s trying. He’s making such an effort, and he needs Happy Georgie. Supportive Georgie. The daughter who dances around him like a manic cheerleader, then force feeds him vegetables and makes him go to bed early.

“You home, Georgie?”

“Yeah!” I smack the faucet off and peer around for a hand towel, but it’s wandered off. Add laundry to the never-ending list of things to do in my brain.

Flicking the water off my fingers, I wander back through the rooms to the front door, where Dad’s bent over to unlace his work boots. His cheeks are ruddy, but that could easily be from all the blood rushing to his head.

God, please let it be gravity and not booze.

“How was work?” My voice is chirpy, but while he’s focused on his boots, I don’t have to force a smile. Seeing my genius scientist father in an ill-fitting janitor’s jumpsuit always punches me square in the chest. His blond hair’s thinning on top, the red of his scalp shining through.

When I was little, he always wore pressed shirts and ties to work, and often came home in a lab coat, talking about inventions and formulas. Back in the day, Nils Olsen was the shit.

“Oh, you know.” Dad heaves upright with a grunt, kicking off his boots and leaving them scattered by the door. “I scraped a thousand wads of chewing gum off the underside of classroom tables today. So that was fun.” He sounds bitter, but when he catches my eye, he grins. “Fajitas for dinner?”

I smile back. “Sure.”

When he heads for the kitchen, I follow slowly. No one told me this side effect of your dad getting sober: that it’s like meeting a stranger. I’m shy in my own home.

We settle into an awkward rhythm: I chop veggies at the kitchen table, shooting sidelong glances at my father as he gathers all the fixings at the counter. And though I’m desperate to cut the tension, he asks the one question I don’t want to hear.

“So. How are things at Ignis?”

My fingers tighten on the knife, and I breathe slowly. Count backward from five. They don't deserve my dad's support; his genuine love of the company that tossed him out like week-old trash. I still can't believe how freaking thrilled he was about my internship—I was all set to manage a meltdown, but nada.

“Fine,” I manage at last. “I got promoted, actually. I’m Mr Laurent’s assistant now.”

Dad whistles and shoots me a wide smile over his shoulder. “Already? Look at you! That man is saving the world, honey.”

That man is going to wish he was never born.

“He ruined your career,” I point out, even though it’s shitty of me. But why can’t Dad hate Levi Laurent too?

It’s so invigorating to loathe a man like that. Easy, too. Because Mr Laurent has everything: the brains, the looks, the money, the acclaim. Even the stupid sexy accent. And what does my dad have these days? A hole in the elbow of his navy jumpsuit.

“Georgie,” Dad says. It’s his *we’ve been over this* voice.

“Forget it. Is this enough mushroom?”

He sighs. “Yes.”

So, okay. I’ll admit it. My quest for vengeance is a solo one, because the man I’m avenging is trying to be a better person. I’m not there yet.

Maybe once Levi Laurent is a tormented shell of a man, begging for mercy... maybe I'll move on then.

Can't wait.

* * *

I bring up the Ignis website on my laptop later that night in bed, clicking idly through the tabs. I've read every single word a hundred times, but this is my routine now. It soothes me.

Mostly, though, I'm killing time until I click to the page about the boss. Levi Laurent frowns from his profile photo, so grouchy and stern even on his own website. His eyes pierce through the screen, and I shift against the bed sheets, cheeks warming. The laptop cooks against my lap.

Loathing. This is what loathing feels like. That's why I'm so hot and bothered by this man.

You can't tell from this photo, but his eyes are green. Bottle green. Oh, the irony.

"Hello, spawn of Satan." I scan Mr Laurent's bio for the millionth time, but obviously there's nothing interesting there. Nothing useful. It's sanitized PR, but what am I hoping for? That overnight, someone might have changed it to list all his secret phobias? "I'm going to make you suffer. You have no idea what's coming for you."

Neither do I, to be honest, but... details. I'll figure something out.

Because I'm close to him now. In his office every day, bringing him drinks and controlling his calendar, with an inside peek into his business affairs. Surely I can ruin his life somehow.

And as I glare at Mr Laurent with his tailored shirt and sharp jaw, my chest simmers—with anger, not guilt. In my belly are the hot snakes of rage.

I can do this. I can.

Revenge will be mine.

Four

Levi



I lean back in my desk chair with a groan, massaging my temples. This week has been awful—just one disaster after another—and if I were a superstitious man, I’d think I was cursed.

The canceled meetings and the broken elevator. The faulty fire alarm that keeps going off at the worst possible moments. Even the vile coffee that my assistant brings... and what does she do, stew it in an old boot?

It’s all put me weeks behind schedule, with pissed off contacts and extra-harried employees. My shoulders are so tense, my bones should crack.

“Coffee, sir.”

Georgina’s blonde head pokes around the office door, then the rest of her body follows. She’s in a burgundy dress today, with long sleeves and a little black collar. I watch her bring a steaming mug across the room, held aloft like she’s awarding me a prize and not assaulting my taste buds.

“Ah. Thank you.”

Tell her. Tell her she makes the worst coffee you've ever tasted. Tell her to bring you drinks from the cafe across the street from now on.

“You don’t need to stay late,” I say instead. “There’s not much you can do.”

As the boss, it’s all on me. It’s always on me. Besides, the worse things get around here, the happier my assistant seems to be. Must be some bizarre coping mechanism.

Sure enough, Georgina beams as she places the mug on my desk. “I don’t mind. You seem stressed, Mr Laurent.”

I bet I do. The way she stands there, waiting expectantly for me to drink her awful coffee—that doesn’t help, either. She always lingers until I take the first sip, and I have to force my lips into a smile. Like she’s a toddler bringing me a macaroni picture frame.

“It’s been a long week.” Maybe for once she’ll take the hint and leave.

Georgina hums. “Oh, I forgot to tell you earlier. Someone saw a rat on the third floor. I called pest control, but they need to shut down the whole building for a day while they deal with it.”

Shut... the whole...

“Mr Laurent?” Her voice sounds tinny. Like it’s coming from far away. Slender hands grip the back of my chair, and she spins me to face her.

Blue eyes gleam as she stares down at me. Is that... triumph?

“You look terrible,” my assistant says, her lips moving out of sync with her voice. What is wrong with my brain? And why does she seem so pleased with my misery? Her mouth curves up into a smile, and fuck, she’s so close. So kissable. *That* would help me burn off some stress, I’m sure. “Maybe you should stop for the night. Come back rested.”

I wave her away, suddenly irritated. I don’t need help, nor a witness to my failures. And I don’t need advice, especially from the likes of her.

The air in the room changes. Goes shivery and cool. Did I...

Did I say that out loud?

My assistant’s cheeks are bright pink before she turns away. “Noted, sir.” I did. Oh god, I did. How unforgivably rude.

Pushing to my feet, I clear my throat. “Georgina, wait a moment—”

“No, I don’t think I will,” she calls from halfway to the door, sing-songy and so furious. “The likes of me should be home in bed by now.”

My eyes skate to the clock on the wall. Nearly midnight. Christ, I’m such an ass. “Georgina—”

“Night, Mr Laurent. Remember, the elevator’s broken. Enjoy the stairs.”

“Wait.”

The door slams, echoing in the quiet. My breaths are labored. Everything aches.

It takes a long time for me to get back to work, but I do.

It’s just one more disaster for the list, after all. This really is the week from hell.

* * *

Was I always like this? Driven and joyless. Obsessive and stressed. So fucking tired that it feels like the weight of the world is pushing down on my bones.

I swear I remember lazy summer days and nights spent laughing, not working, but they’re a hazy memory. Maybe even a dream. When I play them in my mind on late nights when I can’t sleep, it’s like watching an actor in a movie.

Tonight, I can’t sleep, but for a brand new reason. Usually it’s my greatest hits: my Ignis tech will never work; my father died without ever respecting me; I’m going to die alone, etc, etc.

Predictable woes. Almost soothing with how cliched they are. But tonight...

I flip my pillow to the cool side, burying my face in it with a groan. Tonight, it’s *her*:

Georgina. My bubbly assistant. The woman who makes the world’s worst coffee then stands over me as I drink it; the woman with a front row seat to my many failures. She’s barely

been my assistant for a month, and already she's seen so many disasters. I've never had such a terrible quarter.

It's humiliating.

So why, when everything goes wrong at every turn, do I so desperately want her there?

Something about her... soothes me. Whenever Georgina is near, my racing heartbeat calms and my muscles relax. Just for a moment, I'm looser and lighter. Free.

The likes of me should be home in bed by now.

Fuck.

If she quits, I deserve nothing less. Maybe I'll offer her a raise.

My bedroom is cool and dark and quiet. Stars glitter through the open drapes, and up here high above the city, the sounds of traffic and bars and sirens are muffled. Where does Georgina sleep? Does she go to bed alone?

There's no ring on her finger. Believe me, I've checked.

"Ass," I mutter to myself, flopping onto my back and scrubbing both hands down my face.

It's late. So late, it's practically early. And I'm dizzyingly tired, my brain still whirling with a thousand thoughts, and sometimes I think I'd give anything for eight straight hours of deep sleep.

My hand drifts to my cock. Would I give my dignity? For the chance to drift off before dawn? Right now, I certainly

would.

I'm already hard, the shaft throbbing in my grip. My thumb circles the head, spreading a bead of moisture, and the sheets are too hot, too stifling as I toss them down to my knees, committed to this now. I'll hate myself for it later.

It takes a few harsh pumps, that's all. Teeth gritted, head thrown back, thinking of *her*.

These days, I'm always thinking of her. No wonder I'm falling behind.

But in my fevered brain, Georgina is on her knees, tucked beneath my desk, her golden head bobbing in my lap—or, no, *I'm* under there and she's sprawled in my chair with that sharp little smile, her dress rucked up her thighs and legs spread. That blush spreads over her cheeks, and she tugs on my hair as my teeth scrape over her panties—

“*Fuck.*” I come hard, hissing through my teeth, body curling up like I've been punched in the gut. It feels that way too, with the ache throbbing through my insides. I'm one big bruise.

The dark room spins as I come, and come, and come.

Finally I flop back, chest heaving.

Lord. Fumbling on my nightstand for a Kleenex, my cheeks are hot. If I'm exhausted tomorrow, this is why: because I spent my precious moments in bed jerking off like a teenager who's seen his first breast.

But I can't regret it, not as sleep finally clouds my tired brain, and not as my flushed skin cools. Her gleaming blue eyes are my last thought before I slip away.

Georgina.

Five

Georgie



It's happening. I'm torturing the man who ruined my dad's career; the man who stole his purpose away and left him in that threadbare janitor's jumpsuit.

Levi Laurent is my arch nemesis, the source of all evil in my world, and I'm enjoying this. *I am.*

Gusting out a heavy sigh, I flick a paperclip. For once, Mr Laurent is not here yet, and I'm eager to make him miserable.

That's what this weird longing is. I'm sure of it.

Inside that office, the boss's desk is huge and clean and obsessively orderly. Everything is in its proper place, and when he spreads papers out on his desk, he keeps them perfectly parallel to the desk's edge.

I've taken great care to make my own desk as chaotic as possible. There's a Venus flytrap in a bright pink pot; a smattering of colored sharpies; a squeaky stress ball in the shape of the little green one from Monsters Inc. Post-its curl against my computer monitor, and I've made tiny heaps of jumbled paperclips.

My jacket dangles off the back of my chair, one sleeve brushing against the floor. It's a mess. It's beautiful.

This morning as he strides through the entrance from the stairwell, Mr Laurent glances at my desk and grimaces, like clockwork.

Works like a charm. This man is very easy to torment. Almost too easy, but I can't let myself think like that.

If I admit that he's human... that there are sides to him that I like...

Well. Vengeance is paramount.

Besides, he's not even breathless after climbing all those stairs, and that is obnoxious. A man like that *should* suffer.

The elevator is fine, by the way. And yes, this way I have to climb all those stairs too, but I'm choosing to see it as a fun workout. There's no rat on the third floor, either. The coffee maker works, and the fire alarm going off at all hours is not random. I. Am. Devious.

But it's still not enough—especially after yesterday.

The likes of you. What a jerk.

“About last night.” Did he read it on my face? Mr Laurent steps up to my desk, ignoring the colorful mess with heroic effort. He pins me with those stern green eyes, and I swallow hard, because that white shirt is working hard to contain those shoulders. “I was rude to you. Forgive me.”

The laugh blurts out of me. I stare up at my boss, his wavy hair ruffled by the breeze outside. Did he walk here? I bet if I sniffed his throat, he'd smell fresh.

“It doesn't work like that, Mr Laurent. You can't just order someone to forgive you.”

His jaw works, but he doesn't leave. He looms over me, the silence thick all around us.

Tick, tick, tick, goes the clock on the wall. The elevator hums to life as someone rides it on another floor, and I wince—but he doesn't notice.

He's too busy staring at me, like he wants to crack open my skull and read my thoughts. “What would you like to hear, Georgina?”

Oof. In that voice? Deep and rich, with that accent? I'd like this man to read me the phone book, please, from A to Z.

“I'd like to hear the magic word.” My pulse flutters, and I can't help smirking. His eyes glitter, and he's amused too. I squeeze the edge of my desk, hardly breathing.

“Employee,” he says.

“Nope.” My desk chair squeaks as I lean forward. “Try again.”

“A raise.”

Ha. “We'll circle back to that. Keep trying.”

He looks younger like this—when he's teasing me back, eyes crinkling at the corners. He's not quite smiling, but he's

not wearing his usual unhappy frown either.

Most mornings, this man marches straight past my desk, hellbent on his work. He goes to that office like a doomed man to the gallows.

Not today. Today, he's lingering. "I see. Would you like me to grovel, Georgina?"

And just like that, the image slams into my brain—unwanted but so freaking appealing.

Mr Laurent on his knees, nudging my legs apart. Leaning forward to nibble my inner thigh, bottle green eyes flicking up to me as if to ask: *There. Are you happy?* Trailing closer and closer to my panties, pushing my dress out of his way, his breath hot and panting—

"Um." I shake my head, trying to dislodge the porn reel playing in my brain. My face is hot. "It—it starts with 's'."

"Sushi for lunch."

Ooh, yeah. My stomach growls. "No."

"Sorrow. Great sorrow."

I snort—I can't help it. And god, I wish I didn't like this man, but here we are. Sometimes the things that are bad for us are the most delicious.

I reach out, catching his hand in the air above my desk. The boss frowns at our joined hands like he's not quite in control of his limbs either.

“You’re *sorry*.” I squeeze his fingers, secretly thrilled by how long and strong and warm they are. His grip is firm. “Did you miss this day in kindergarten? No, don’t tell me. You were probably getting your doctorate by then.”

A flash of embarrassment. I’m not far off. “I am sorry, Georgina.” His thumb skates over the backs of my knuckles, and I shiver.

Now that we’re joined, it’s like my blood rushes faster. My pulse throbs in my wrists, my throat, and... other places.

But what am I doing, touching him? Teasing my arch nemesis boss, like we’re becoming friends? I’m here for one reason alone: to make this man feel like a steaming pile of horse shit.

So I yank my hand back, and I should feel good about the flicker of hurt across his handsome face.

I don’t. I don’t feel good.

Snatching up Mike Wazowski, I squeeze him until his giant eye bulges. He lets out a long, tortured squeak.

“Your three o’clock canceled.” Courtesy of my meddling. “And pest control needs a date to shut the building. Does Thursday work?”

Right before my eyes, Levi Laurent ages a decade. He pushes back his shoulders; scrubs a palm over his face. “Yes,” he says against his hand. “That works.”

And that’s Levi all over: tumbling into exhaustion and despair, but never thinking to blame anyone else. You know, I

don't think it's even occurred to him yet that someone might be doing all this to him. Doing it on purpose. That *I* might be the reason he's so freaking tired and miserable.

My stomach hurts, and I curl forward in my chair.

When he finds out...

Dad. Think of Dad.

And I do, the familiar hot rush of anger tightening my chest—but it's not enough. Not today. Regret tastes sour in my mouth.

When Levi's office door closes, I'm still curled over, tired and miserable too.

* * *

By lunchtime, I'm furious. This is bullshit. Kill Bill lied to me.

Because vengeance is not fun, and seeing Levi Laurent suffer brings me zero joy. It just makes me feel bitter and gross and small.

The real kicker is that I haven't even done anything big yet. You know, something life-ruining like I planned. I've been about as much trouble as the imaginary rat on the third floor, and already my resolve is crumbling.

Is this it? What about Dad?

Crap. I'm the world's most disloyal daughter.

The elevator hums, rattling its treacherous way through the floors. A pipe gurgles in the wall. My desk chair squeaks as I move, blouse rustling.

Dad.

It makes no sense. How could Levi do that to him?

And suddenly, I'm too hot. Too stifled. My clothes are itchy and tight, the waistband of my skirt digging into my stomach, and everything's wrong, *I'm* wrong, so restless and *angry*—

Lurching up from my desk with a snarl, I burst into the boss's office, pushing the door so hard that it bounces off the wall.

“Georgina?” Levi blinks at me from behind his desk. There are contracts spread in front of him, and his tie is loosened. Black-framed reading glasses perch on his nose. “Are you alright?”

Am I *alright*?

This motherfucker. How dare he.

“No,” I growl, stomping across the endless miles of open office. He watches me coming, bemused. “I am a giant ball of rage right now.”

“Oh.” Green eyes flick to my uterine region. “Are you...?”

“Oh my god, shut up. That's so offensive!” And accurate. Ugh. How did he know?! When I reach him, I spread my palms on the desk. “Don't push me, Mr Laurent. I will flip this table, I swear to god.”

My boss puffs out a strained laugh, leaning back in his chair, and even though I've marched in here uninvited to

threaten him, his mouth curves up. Like he's pleased to see me, even in my period rage. He looks so fond.

Although... I do feel better now I'm here. My chest feels looser, and I can breathe better. Turns out this man is soothing as hell.

Would he rub my lower back? Chase away the cramps?

Wow, I hate that he guessed that right. So obnoxious.

"I'm fucking this up anyway," Levi declares, capping a pen and tossing it on the contracts. "All the words are blurring together. Want to get lunch in the park?"

Um. What?

Levi never stops working for lunch. Once he's here, he works flat out for ten, twelve, fourteen hours. If I didn't hate his guts, I'd really worry about him.

"The park," I repeat, staring dumbly as my boss stands, plucking off his reading glasses and setting them on the papers. "Outside. Away from Ignis."

"Yes." Levi's mouth twitches as he rounds the desk. "Who can say? Maybe there will be coffee."

"...Coffee in the park."

"It's complex, I know." Strong hands take my shoulders, steering me back toward the door. I let him, but I do not—I repeat, do *not*—go all gooey about his hands on me. Even if there are a million butterflies crashing around my stomach

right now. “But you’ll get there, Georgina. I have faith in you.”

“Ass,” I say, without heat.

“There she is.” Levi’s deep voice comes so close to my ear. “My rudest employee. Be honest: do you secretly hate me, Georgina? Just a little?”

“Who doesn’t?” I grind out, but the words taste bad. They’re not true for me anymore, and I don’t even want to pretend. It feels all wrong.

Levi chuckles, still marching me to the doorway, and I swallow hard.

Uma Thurman would think I’m so weak.

I’m falling for my nemesis.

Six

Levi



There are dozens of urgent tasks waiting for me back at the office, but out here in the sunshine, I'm struggling to care. It's the height of summer, and the city park is full of laughing kids and sunbathing students spread out on picnic blankets. The trill of bicycle bells cuts through the hum of the crowd, and businessmen with loosened ties and rolled sleeves chat together on wooden benches.

Nearby, a cluster of food trucks scent the air with garlic and spice. Sitting with Georgina on the stone lip of a fountain, I think this might be paradise.

"Oh my god." Her eyes flutter closed with each huge bite of falafel. There's a glob of hummus on her chin. "Holy shit. I want to die like this, Levi. I'm serious. Bury me in a falafel wrap."

It's the first time she's called me by my first name. I shift against the curved stone wall, trying to convince myself that it's not a big deal.

Cool mist from the fountain tickles the back of my neck. The sun beats down, hot and harsh, but the breeze flaps our

clothes like sails. Long, golden tendrils of hair have escaped from Georgina's braid, and every passing minute is a battle not to pinch one; to run the length of it between my finger and thumb.

Better not. "You have some hummus—let me—"

She smacks my hand away before I can get it. I blink down at my assistant, but she's smirking. Playful. There's none of the antsy rage from before.

"Mine," she warns, swiping the glob away with her thumb, and heat coils in my gut. Would she be that possessive with a lover? Would she ever bare her teeth over *me*? "You've got your own, boss."

"Yours looks better." Maybe it's the way she's holding it. Maybe it's her.

My assistant scoffs. "We got exactly the same thing."

She crosses her legs then uncrosses them, her blue skirt riding an inch up her thighs. Is she uncomfortable? Should I fetch her a tampon or a painkiller or something? On the walk over here, Georgina quietly admitted that my guess about her period had been right, and now I keep trying to think of ways to make her feel better.

I'm a cutting edge engineer and the leader of my own company, and I've never felt more useless.

But I never had sisters growing up to learn this stuff. Barely had time for friends either, especially since I went to college young, always out of step with my peers. And I've

been so single-minded for so long, hellbent on clean energy tech, that I never learned some of the basics.

Like: how to help with period pain.

Like: how to hide your attraction to your assistant.

Like: don't guess that a woman might be menstruating when she storms into your office filled with rage. Noted.

“My dad used to work in clean energy.” Georgina’s statement comes out of nowhere, and it takes me a few seconds to catch up. When I do, she’s frowning at her lap, her carefree smile drained away.

“Oh?” Well, this is good, right? If I ever meet her father, we’ll have lots to talk about. Besides how heart-stopping his daughter is, I mean.

Listen, I know I’m Georgina’s boss. I *know* it’s wrong to imagine dating her. But obstacles can be overcome, can’t they?

“Nils Olsen.” She’s looking at me now, staring hard, and I desperately want to recognize the name, but... I’ve got nothing. The mist on my neck is cold, the stone wall suddenly hard and uncomfortable.

“I don’t recognize the name,” I confess, and when Georgina’s eyes dim, I hurry to add, “but I’ll look him up when we get back, I promise.”

“Don’t bother.” My assistant scowls as she tears off scraps of her wrap, tossing bread to the pigeons pecking near our feet. “He does something else these days. In education.”

“That’s great.” Isn’t it?

She shrugs.

And just like that, our lunch in the sun has gone cold. We’re both stiff and tired, and there are a million things to do waiting for us back at Ignis. Even the kids whooping with laughter over on the grass are suddenly too loud, too shrill.

“Come on.” My back aches as I push to my feet, scrunching my lunch wrapper into a ball. “Let’s go see what else has imploded since we left the office. Bet the fire alarm’s rung again.”

“I’ll take that bet,” Georgina says, and though she smiles, it looks wobbly. I take her hand and pull her gently to her feet.

“You could take the day off,” I say as we weave between pigeons. Two of them are scrapping over a big piece of Georgina’s flatbread, yanking with their beaks and letting out angry coos. “For the cramps, I mean. Go home and try an ice pack or whatever.”

“*Or whatever,*” she repeats, shaking her head. But as we walk along the stone path, the backs of our wrists brush, and without a word, we each move closer—then tangle our hands together, like two people on a date and *not* an assistant and boss. “Tell me, Levi. Why are smart men always so clueless about women?”

Lord. I wish I knew.

* * *

For once, nothing has broken or gone horribly wrong all morning. There have been no rat sightings; no meetings canceled at the last minute. No lost paperwork or phone calls from irate suppliers. When we arrive back in the Ignis lobby, the elevator even pings and slides open. Yes! Finally, a win! I could cheer.

“Oh, look.” I nudge my silent assistant. We stopped holding hands two blocks ago, unlacing our fingers by tacit agreement as we got closer to the office. “They must have fixed it already. Good job.”

Georgina grunts. She trails me into the mirrored elevator, and she doesn't say a single word as we rise through the building. At least we're not panting up those stairs.

And it's odd, seeing our reflections side by side. We look... good. Like a matched pair. My brown hair beside her blonde; my tall, angular frame next to her curves.

“You really can go home,” I say when the doors slide open and Georgina stomps to her desk. “I won't mark it as a sick day. Take it as a freebie.”

“I don't need your pity, Mr Laurent.” I pause at my own office door, taken aback by her cold tone. Have I done something wrong? Georgina throws herself down into the chair with a sigh, and she won't look at me.

Fuck. I've made her uncomfortable.

Why did I take her hand like that? Did she hate it the whole time? If she let me touch her for that whole walk from

the park, secretly wishing I'd back off...

I swallow hard. I couldn't bear that.

"Georgina..."

"You have a phone call from the Tribune at two fifteen. Better prepare, Mr Laurent."

Okay, okay. She wants me to leave. And it may be my company, my office, my whole damn building, but I can give her that much.

My office is cool and empty, and every sound I make as I get settled behind my desk echoes in my ears. My lips are numb. What is this phone call about? What are these contracts for? Christ, I can't think. There's a buzzing sound in my brain.

Tick... tock...

The clock on the wall counts down the seconds, and it's like time has slowed. My blood is thick and soupy in my veins.

This is torture. Where did I go wrong?

The door opens softly, and I suck in a harsh breath as Georgina slips inside. She begins walking slowly, then strides faster, then runs, her wind-tousled braid streaming behind her.

"*Oof.*" My assistant barrels into my chest, wrapping her arms around my neck, my desk chair rolling back with a clatter. What the hell? I snatch her onto my lap, and I have no idea what just happened, but as long as she's with me, it's okay. "You're alright. You're alright."

There's a damp patch on my shirt. She's crying? Fuck.

I really am clueless about women.

“Talk to me, sweetheart. Tell me how to fix this.” Her blonde hair is so soft beneath my palm, still warm from our time in the sun. “Was it the ice pack thing? Because I can learn more about periods. I'll go on web MD right now.”

Georgina laughs wetly, shaking her head. It's worth playing the fool when it makes her laugh.

“I'm the worst,” she says with a sniff. “That's the problem. Not you.”

And I stiffen against the chair, back straight, offended on her behalf. “You are *not* the worst. You are perfect, Georgina, my personal miracle—”

She sits back, wipes her face, then grabs my tie like she's hanging on for dear life. Gives it a terse yank. “You talk such shit, Mr Laurent. Did you know that?”

Then her lips are on mine, and I don't care that my heartfelt confession fell so flat; don't care that she's my assistant and kissing her could end my whole career in disgrace. Don't even care that she's kind of sticky.

All that matters is the warmth and weight of her in my lap. Her mouth moving against mine. The way she tugs on my tie, squirming closer, her breath quickening.

“*Georgina.*” Her name wrenches out of me in a tortured groan, and she whimpers in response. Kisses me harder, the chair creaking beneath our shared weight.

I'm—god. When did I put my hands on her? I'm squeezing her waist, kneading her hips. Stroking up to cup her breasts, the mounds so soft and pliable under her thin cream blouse. The fabric is tucked beneath her skirt waistband, and I tug it out without thinking, then spread my palms over her hot, bare stomach.

We shouldn't do this. Not here. Not now.

But can I stop? Not for anything.

Not when our tongues move together, breaths mingling in the quiet air, and she's all I've thought about for the last month. Not when I'm soaring, giddy, light-headed with triumph, and nothing else exists except her mouth against mine.

I worried that she hated me, honestly, but *this* doesn't feel like hate. Even when she bites my bottom lip, she's gentle.

“Shit,” Georgina gasps, tearing her mouth away to stare up at the ceiling. She's rocking in my lap, the rhythmic squeak of the chair so loud in this empty room, still clinging to my tie. I trail kisses down her throat, and god. Can't believe I get to touch her this way.

What else would she let me do? Could I—would she let me taste her?

Period. The word clangs into my brain and I huff against her throat.

Right. Not today, then, but maybe... soon.

“You’re mine,” I growl. My heart thunders as we kiss again, hard and desperate, and when she sucks on my tongue my whole body turns rock hard.

Mine, mine, mine.

Nothing else matters. Nothing at all. But when the phone rings, loud and shrill, we both jolt like we’ve been electrified.

That interview. The Tribune. Shit.

“Ignore it.” I’m already cupping her neck, guiding her lips back to mine. And Georgina sighs into the kiss, rocking one more time over the hard bulge in my lap, before she breaks away and sits back.

“No, wait. Levi. You can’t fall behind again.”

It’s true—the last month has been disastrous. Georgina has had a front row seat to the worst weeks of my career. Am I really going to mess up this interview? By choice?

“Answer it,” she says softly, smoothing down my ruined tie as if the journalist could see it through the phone. Her blonde hair is wrecked, her eyes bright. “I’ll be here when you’re done.”

Merde. Okay.

“Wait.” One arm wraps around Georgina’s waist, holding her in place. “This will take fifteen minutes. Twenty, tops. Stay with me? You can nap on my shoulder, or make a mess of my desk. Whatever you like.”

The sweetest smile passes over her face, and Georgina snuggles down. Gets comfy in my arms. My hand shakes as I reach for the trilling phone.

“Ignis Innovations. Yes, this is Levi Laurent.”

Seven

Georgie



So. I'm sneaking around with the boss.

Over the last week, we've made out against every flat surface in the penthouse office, and dragged each other into a few supply cupboards on the lower floors too. Levi's desk chair has stopped squeaking every time I climb onto his lap, the poor thing squished into submission, and we've fogged up the elevator mirrors most days.

It's delicious. He's so freaking hot and stern with everyone else, but he goes all melty just for me. When he tells me to close his office door and get over there, arms already spread as he bosses me around in that deep voice—I just about die.

And despite being a literal genius, he thinks the sun shines out of my ass. Seriously, if I drew Levi a wobbly stick figure, he'd probably display it on the staff refrigerator. It's awesome.

No one's noticed the new tension simmering between us as we walk through the Ignis halls. They're not the tiniest bit suspicious—not even Angelica from legal. Should I be offended by that?

It's not *so* unthinkable, surely. Levi and me. I mean, yeah, he's a wealthy genius engineer who's saving the world, and I'm...

I'm the lying gremlin who's here to sabotage him. Yikes.

Whenever I walk home after work, the sparkly pink fog of new love that's clouding my brain—that slowly drifts away, until all I'm left with is sickening guilt.

Guilt that I haven't come clean to Levi yet.

Guilt that I never really avenged my dad.

Hell, even guilt that I'm messing around with my boss. Before I set out on the world's weakest revenge spree, I was always such a rule follower. A good girl.

My key slides into the lock, and I force my shoulders down before I push the door open. The apartment is bright and warm, with distant clattering noises in the kitchen. Dad must be cooking already.

Dad.

Gah. What will he say when he finds out that I'm hooking up with the man who ruined his career? Levi doesn't even remember him. That's how small the situation was to him—how insignificant.

“Georgie?” Dad's voice floats through the apartment. Kicking off my shoes, I drop my bag with a sigh. “Did you have a good day, honey?”

Hmm. Chewing on the inside of my cheek, I wander to the kitchen. Did I have a good day? Yes and no.

On the one hand: I dry-humped Levi against his desk until his reading glasses steamed over.

On the other hand: one day soon I'll have to give him up, so every kiss from him slices my heart like a knife.

Plus the lies, the deceit, the general shitty feelings. You know how it goes.

“It was okay,” I hedge when I reach the kitchen, leaning in the doorway. The counters look like a bomb hit them, but I hide my wince. Who cares about a ton of washing up? If Dad's happy, I'm happy. “Ignis has that product launch next month, so it's kind of crazy at the moment.”

Crazy stressful. If I could, I'd march Levi home at 6pm and *force* him to take a bubble bath and have an early night. Seeing him shoulder that strain kills me. He shouldn't feel responsible for the whole damn planet.

Can't believe I added to that stress. Made his life so much harder.

Ugh. I'm a bug.

“I remember,” Dad says lightly, knocking a wooden spoon against the pot as lumps of glossy red chili drip down. Steam billows into the humming oven hood. “When I was at Ignis, some weeks I thought I'd explode from the stress. Still, we were working on projects that really mattered, and that's a heady feeling. Those were wonderful days.”

The chili spits. The air tastes like tomato and spice. I tip my head back against the door frame, my temples throbbing.

Nils Olsen is not bitter. Not anymore; not since getting sober and going to all those meetings. And I don't get how Dad can shrug off losing his precious career, his *purpose*.

“Why don't you hate Mr Laurent?”

My question is quiet, but I know Dad hears me. His shoulders slump, and he stares down into the chili, stirring counter-clockwise.

He's still wearing his janitor's jumpsuit from work, the sleeves tied around his hips beneath a faded blue t-shirt.

“I did hate him for a while,” he says at last, aiming his words at a lump of mushroom. “But the only way to move forward is to take responsibility—and I turned up drunk to work. I failed everyone at Ignis, Georgie,” he looks back and pierces me with those blue eyes, “just like I failed you.”

Oh, crap. My eyes blur, and the kitchen swims into a muddle. I can't hear this stuff. It hurts too much. When Dad first got sober, he wrote me a long apology letter, and it's still in my nightstand. Unopened.

I'll get to it one day. I will.

But not today. Everything is still so raw, and it's been easier to push all this anger and bitterness onto my dad's cold-hearted boss. Onto a stranger; a man with so much wealth and power and success that someone like me could never *really* hurt him.

But Levi's not a stranger anymore.

And I could hurt him so badly. Maybe I already have.

I sway against the door frame, woozy with exhaustion. "Actually, I might go to bed early. Save me a plate for tomorrow?"

"Alright." Dad doesn't look happy about it, his ruddy face creased with worry, but he doesn't push. He's very big on boundaries these days. "Sleep well, Georgie."

"Night, Dad."

My heart aches all the way down the hall; as I brush my teeth; as I climb into bed with a groan. I keep waiting for the throbbing to subside, but it doesn't.

Well. Of course it doesn't.

Levi.

* * *

By 11pm, I've had enough. Tossing the covers back, I sit up with a groan.

Can't sleep. Too much guilt. Too many tangled thoughts. I swipe the phone off my nightstand and call quickly, before common sense can butt in.

"Come on, come on."

Levi answers after the fifth ring. He sounds fuzzy, like he's in another country and not a twenty minute walk away. "Ignis Innovations. This is Levi Laurent."

“Obviously,” I say flatly. “Who else would be in your office at 11pm on a Wednesday?”

“Georgina.” You can hear the smile in his voice. My eyes blur again, and I slam them closed before tears spill down my cheeks.

He’s such a good man. I’ve done him so dirty. “Everyone else calls me Georgie, you know.”

“Well, yes. That’s why I like to call you Georgina. There’s a whole extra syllable just for me.”

I laugh and rub at my aching chest. “Why are you still there?”

“Why aren’t you asleep?” he returns. “You said you were tired earlier.”

Fair point. “My head’s all buzzy.”

Levi hums. “I know that feeling. Sometimes I can tell hours before I go to bed that there’s no hope, and tonight the static will be too loud.”

Is that why he works so late? Trying to exhaust himself? Maybe it’s part of it.

An idea winks at me, and I sit up straighter, bed covers rustling. “How much longer do you think you’ll be at Ignis?”

Levi makes a noncommittal noise. “An hour, maybe. Why?”

“Because I live twenty minutes away,” I say in a rush. “If I come over, will you still be there?”

There's a beat of silence. My pulse rattles in my throat, heat already prickling over my skin, because we've messed around at work so many times, but we've never been *alone* there. Truly alone, with no risk of someone walking in.

"Come quickly," Levi rasps. I hang up the phone, tossing it to the mattress.

* * *

I want him. God, I want him. Need to get my ass to one of Dad's meetings, because Levi Laurent is a drug to me, and I'm desperate for another hit.

My flip flops smack against the sidewalk as I charge across town. It's late, the navy blue night sky speckled with stars, but the city is as lively as ever. Vendors call from street carts; cars roar past in the road. Lights throb and music thumps.

It's hot. Sticky. A perfect night for bad decisions.

I weave around a dog walker chatting on her phone, five yappy dogs tangling her legs in their leashes. Don't dogs need shut-eye too?

Come quickly, Levi said. Is he wound as tightly as I am? I'd sell my grubby little soul for the chance to kiss him again.

Want to crinkle his shirt. Want to rumple up his hair. Want to climb on the boss's lap and make him forget all about deadlines and investors and product launches.

The walk normally takes twenty minutes but I do it in twelve, bursting into the Ignis lobby with red cheeks and a heaving chest. My reflections march past on all the shiny surfaces.

Ping. Stupid elevator. I pile on board, trying not to think about how I faked it breaking down with a crappy handmade sign; how that lie gave Levi such a headache. So many lies. So many times I've failed him already.

Tonight, it's all about him. I already decided on the walk over: Levi Laurent needs to relax, and I'm gonna help him. On my knees.

The elevator hums all around me, the vibrations tickling through my bones, and I stare at my wide-eyed reflection, then fan my flushed face and smooth down my hair.

Honestly, the least I could have done is dress up for the occasion—worn a sexy lingerie set and a trench coat or whatever. But I was so frazzled after our phone call, so desperate to see Levi again, that I threw on the first rumpled sweatpants and t-shirt I found.

He won't mind, will he?

Whelp. Too late now. The elevator pings again, the doors sliding open to the shadowy top floor.

Even in the gloom, my desk is such a mess. I should clean it, right? It would cause him less stress each time he walks by, so yes. I definitely will. But for now, I kick my flip flops off beside my desk chair and break into a jog.

Later, later. Everything else can wait, and when I burst into Levi's office, he's already pushing to his feet, eyes dark and hungry.

God, I love it when he goes all intense. My legs move faster, my arms pumping by my sides, and this office always seems so huge, but now I cross it in a flash. Levi steps around the desk to meet me, his arms spreading wide, and I smack against him with a thump.

"Georgina." Face buried in my hair, Levi grabs me closer, squeezing the air from my lungs. Don't care. Never want him to let go. "Are you..." His voice changes. Sounds bemused. "Did you come here barefoot?"

I shake my head, grinning against his strong throat. He shaved this morning, but now he's all coarse and bristly. So manly. "Flip flops."

"Ah. Good."

And now we kiss hard, mouths hungry, hands roaming over clothes. Levi slips one big palm beneath my t-shirt, spreading over the small of my back, and I arch closer with a small noise. I could purr.

"I shouldn't—have asked you—to come." He grits the words between kisses.

"You didn't." I yank on his tie, working it loose, then pull it over his head. His collar stays folded up on one side, the top button undone. "I offered. I wanted to come, Levi. If I stayed at home, I couldn't do this."

His breath stops when I sink to my knees. My all-powerful boss looms over me, so tall and broad, but there's something vulnerable behind those green eyes. A flicker of uncertainty.

“If you like,” I finish lamely. My hands rest against his thighs, so well muscled beneath his tailored dark pants, but I go no further. He needs to want this too.

But: “If I like?” Levi scowls, widening his legs and leaning back against the desk. The metal frame creaks beneath his weight, and I bite my lip as strong hands plunge into my hair. I'm already grinning as he guides me closer to his belt. “If I *like*? Are you serious, Georgina? I'm a flesh and blood male. Of course I'd *like*.”

I shrug, the belt buckle clinking as I work it open. Maybe if I act all worldly and casual, I'll hide how nervous I am.

Nervous but excited. Man, I've thought about this so many times: what he might taste like; his clean, musky scent; the solid, warm weight of him against my tongue...

“Well, you've never asked me for this before.”

His zipper scratches down, and Levi scoffs. “Because I'm a gentleman. Of course I want to fuck your pretty little mouth.”

Oof. A wave of heat crackles through me, singing my insides, and my hand trembles as I draw his cock out into the air. The thought of it—my handsome, stern boss turning me into a red-faced mess on his office floor, using me for his own pleasure—

“You like this already.” His deep voice is rich with approval, his thumbs stroking through my hair. “Oh, Georgina, you look so perfect on your knees.” Humor lightens his tone. “Maybe you should crawl when you bring me my coffee.”

“Shut up, Mr Laurent.” But I’m too distracted to get mad. His shaft is long and thick and impressive, weighing heavily against my palm, and my jaw aches just looking at it. When I grip him gently, dragging my hand down his length, Levi lets out a soft hiss.

“Harder.”

Ooh-kay. I squeeze him tighter; make my grip a little mean. Levi’s hips buck an inch off the desk.

“Yeah. *Christ*. Just like that.” His whole body is tense, his thighs rock hard beneath his dark pants. I stroke him again, reveling in the way he jerks and curses, muttering in French under his breath.

“You’ll have to tell me what to do.” I wet my lips; bring the flushed head of his cock closer. There’s a bead of moisture on the slit, and I lick it away.

Mm. Salty.

“It’s the blind leading the blind,” Levi mutters, his grip harsh in my hair. Then, louder: “I’m hardly a lothario, Georgina. If you want tips, you should read a magazine.”

I roll my eyes, inordinately pleased that he’s not some rich guy player. “Don’t be an ass. Just tell me what feels good.”

The way Levi looms over me, so tall and strong and intense—it's like the rest of the world doesn't exist. His jaw works, and his eyes are dark.

“*You* feel good. Christ, okay. Okay. Open up, Georgina. Show me that tongue.”

It should feel goofy, kneeling for my boss with my mouth open, his grip in my hair, but it doesn't. I'm so turned on, I'm panting for air. The penthouse windows are dark, the city skyline glittering, and here we are, tucked away from it all. Doing something we shouldn't.

Levi's shaft hovers half an inch above my tongue. It's so freaking close, and I whimper, shifting on my knees. Far above, his mouth quirks, and he's darkly pleased.

“Do you want it, sweet girl? Do you want a taste?”

I nod, mouth still open, my whole body molten.

“Beg for it.”

“Please.” I surge up on my knees, but he holds me back by the hair. “Please, Levi.” My tongue sneaks out, stealing a single lick, and I'm squirming and needy. Desperate.

Want to please him. Want to help him relax. Want to forget all the mistakes I've made, with him and with everything else too.

No, I don't want to think about *anything* except Levi Laurent and the way he fills my mouth. How he smells, sounds and tastes. Is that too much to ask?

“Use me,” I whisper, barely registering my own words. “I want to make you feel good. I’m yours, so *use* me—”

Levi yanks me forward with a groan, his grip in my hair so rough it stings. I don’t care. It’s perfect. And as his shaft fills my mouth, the hard length of him stroking over my tongue, I close my eyes and suckle.

...Damn.

I’m in heaven.

He’s salty and musky. Clean but with the unmistakable scent of *man*, and I’d roll around in it if I could. I’d dab it on my neck like perfume. The intrusion is so thick, my jaw aching as my tongue works the underside, but I love it.

I love it.

And I know, I know. He’s the one getting off; the one grunting and cursing and thrusting, holding my head exactly where he wants it. This is about him, it’s *supposed* to be about him, but it’s so easy to forget that and get wrapped up in my own pleasure.

I’m so floaty and light, so relaxed for the first time in so long. Drifting somewhere far above the building, bobbing between the stars.

Levi.

For a horrible second, my eyes burn with tears.

Not because it hurts—because I love this so much. Because I love *him*. And if this is all we’ll ever have, if this is

the only time I'll get to touch him this way, I don't want to waste it sniffing like a weirdo.

But Levi pulls out of my mouth, and he's breathing hard. A line of spit links the glossy head of his cock to my lip.

"Are you alright?" he grits out. "We can stop, Georgina. Did I hurt you?"

"No." I'm already shaking my head, already tugging him close again. "Keep going. This is the best."

Levi's spluttered laugh fills the quiet office. "You're not real," he says softly, even as he grips my hair again, possessive and rough. "Georgina, you're too good to be true."

And he won't feel like that for much longer, not when the truth inevitably comes out, so I breathe in through my nose and try to enjoy it. Try to let his words seep into my bones, my mouth stuffed too full to reply.

I'm too good to be true?

This man should look in the elevator mirror.

Eight

Levi



I'm in love with my assistant. How predictable of me.

Should I buy a red sports car next? Start a collection of expensive cuff links? Take up skydiving to pretend that I'm not getting older every day?

A sex scandal will be sufficient, I grumble inwardly as I prowl through the Ignis floors, harried workers scattering in my wake. We're close to the launch now, and the air in this building seems to vibrate with tension. Every minute counts.

So close. We're nearly there—then, disaster or not, we can breathe again for a while. My workers can take some vacation days, go and make up for lost time with their families, and I'll...

I guess I'll do my usual thing. Get right back to work.

Or... maybe not. Because as I stroll through the finance department, hands in my pockets and a scowl fixed on my face, an image flickers through my brain: Georgina in that bikini I imagined so long ago, stretched out on a towel in the sunny city park. One arm tossed over her eyes, a secretive smile curving her lips as I—yes, as I rub sunscreen into her

stomach, my hand roaming up over her tanned body. Would she chat to me as I did it? Would she let out one of those breathy moans, shifting against the towel?

“Mr Laurent?”

I blink, drifting slowly back to earth. One of the Ignis accountants blocks my path, his smile pained. How many times has he said my name?

Caught daydreaming about my crush like a teenager. Wonderful.

“Yes?” Shaking off the embarrassment, I peer at the nervous man in his polka-dotted tie. It screams Father’s Day gift, that tie. “What is it?”

“We need you to sign off last quarter’s figures. And there are departmental budgets that need approval, and expense reports...”

On and on he goes. I suck on my teeth, fighting to listen.

This used to come so easily to me, back when work was the only thing in my life. I had no trouble focusing on all the low level bullshit of running a company, because what else was there to think about? But now...

“Fine,” I interrupt at last, my voice more clipped than it needs to be. “Send it all up to my assistant.”

My assistant, who I love.

My assistant, who dropped to her knees for me last night and sucked my cock like it was her god given purpose in life.

My assistant, who lives rent-free in my brain.

You know, that assistant.

“Yes, Mr Laurent.” The accountant hurries off, and I change course for the elevator. Who am I kidding? I don’t want to be down here, barking instructions and putting out fires. I want to be on the top floor with her.

Maybe it’s cliched, or a midlife crisis, or whatever.

I don’t care.

All I want is Georgina.

* * *

She’s not at her desk. How irritating. I flick one of the sharpies she keeps scattered over the table, the pen clattering against the wood. Where is she?

This is such a Georgina desk. A riot of color and chaos; bright and loud and unapologetic. I used to hate walking past an employee’s messy area, but with Georgina, it warms my chest.

Her Mike Wazowski stress ball squeaks softly as I pick it up. I squeeze hard until he’s a misshapen lump, then put him back feeling weirdly guilty. It’s not like I can actually hurt him. So ridiculous.

The top floor is quiet, the Ignis bustle far below on other floors, and I wait for several long minutes, breathing softly.

She probably ran out to make a personal call—or to stew more disgusting coffee. Georgina will be back any minute, and

I don't need to turn into a possessive asshole every time she's out of my eye line. Plucking a baby pink post-it note from her stack, I scribble *Come find me*, then press it to her monitor before striding away.

My own office is cool. Quiet and empty. There's no chaos in here; no bright colors or carnivorous potted plants. No abandoned jacket on the back of my chair.

I should read over those expense reports. Should do some work on the product launch. Instead, I sink down behind my desk and bring up the employee records on my screen.

Olsen. I type it out, smiling. It's a nice name. Would she keep it if we got married, or would she take Laurent? I shake my head, huffing in disgust. For god's sake, I'm thirty five years old, and I'm a heartbeat away from doodling Georgina's name in my planner.

Her name comes up quickly—one of only two records. I move my cursor, but I don't click.

It feels wrong somehow. Christ, this woman is my employee, and I have every right to look at her file, but now that I'm doing it, it feels horribly like snooping. Like going through her nightstand or reading her journal.

She works for me. What am I going to do, pretend I don't pay my girlfriend's wages?

This is a mess. And I'm spiraling, my neck tight and my face hot, so I distract myself with the first thing I see. The second record: Nils Olsen.

...Hmm.

Nils Olsen.

An alarm bell sounds at the back of my brain, faint but insistent. Nils Olsen. Georgina's father's name. Coincidence?

Pinching the bridge of my nose, I count three slow breaths and replay our conversation in the park that day. She said he used to work in clean energy, yes, but not at Ignis. So why would she leave that part out?

She stared at me so hard when she mentioned his name. Like she was willing me to react.

...Nils Olsen.

It's a coincidence. It must be. Perhaps it's not the most common name, but it can't be that rare either. I bet there are thousands of Nils Olsens in the world.

Chest tight, I click on the record. A man's face peers out at me, red-cheeked and blond-haired, his jowls soft. He's in his late fifties, maybe, and he has Georgina's piercing blue eyes.

Okay, it wouldn't stand up in court, but I *know* those eyes. I think about them all the fucking time.

"I don't understand." My declaration breaks the silence of my office, and my voice sounds strange. Hoarse. But as I scan Nils Olsen's employee file—*reason for termination: intoxicated at work*—my gut drops.

No. She wouldn't... would she?

Head pounding, I check Georgina's joining date, then run through a mental tally of everything that has gone wrong lately. The small disasters, throwing us off course every day; the rat sightings and broken elevator. The way it felt like she hated me at first, her teeth clenched behind every smile. Even the damn coffee.

Christ, I... I feel sick. And as the room spins around me, my heartbeat loud in my ears, the office door swings open.

"Got your note," Georgina calls, her steps bouncy as she heads for me. She's in that green dress again, the same one from her first day, and her wide smile seems real. Is everything between us a lie?

No. *No.*

I'm jumping to conclusions. I'm—I'm overtired and paranoid, and there will be an explanation for this. There must be.

She's my Georgina. She is.

"You look like shit," my assistant says when she reaches my side, tousling my hair with a frown. Her touch is so soft, her concern so real, and I want nothing more than to bury my face in her stomach. For her to wrap her arms around my neck and never let go. "Maybe you should go home, Levi. Or call a doctor, even. Did you not sleep again last night?"

Actually, I slept like the dead. She sucked all my usual worries out through my cock.

Mutely, I turn the monitor to face her. Georgina will be confused, or she'll deny this. Everything will make sense. The woman I love is not here to make my life a living hell, and she did not pretend to want me to ruin my life.

“Oh,” Georgina says quietly. “Crap.”

My eyes slam closed. My head feels like it could explode.

“I can explain,” she begs, and I roll my stiff neck, inhaling sharply. Can't look at her. Can't open my eyes. Can't face *any* of this.

“Please do.”

“I was going to tell you Levi, I swear. Today, actually. I've been writing you a letter all morning, but it's not ready yet and—shit. Okay. Okay.”

It's funny: I can *feel* her panicking beside me, the tension shuddering through her limbs, but it doesn't move me like before. I'm distant. Separate.

I haven't been numb like this since before she worked here. It's relaxing. I almost missed it.

“My dad used to work for Ignis,” she says. “Obviously. I mean, you've figured that out. But it was—it was his *dream*, his whole purpose in life, and he worked for your company for nine years. He loved the work here so much. Then a year ago, he went through a... a rough patch.”

Reason for termination: intoxicated at work.

“Go on.” The words scrape out of me, cold and aloof. Georgina lets out a shaky exhale, then pushes on.

“He was fired.” She sounds so miserable, but there’s anger there too. It’s easier to hear it with my eyes closed. “After all those years, after being so dedicated, you fired him just like that. No one offered help. No one suggested sick leave. You just let him go.”

I did nothing of the sort, because that is what middle managers are for.

“I cannot babysit each Ignis employee, Georgina. Not even the drunken ones.”

She gasps like she’s been punched.

“So you came here for revenge,” I say quickly, pushing on, because I cannot let guilt seep in. Cannot let her get under my skin. If I do, I’ll fall apart and she’ll *see*. She’ll know that she’s won.

“Yes,” she whispers. The floor creaks as she inches closer, but I roll my chair away. My eyes are still screwed shut, and it’s so blissfully dark inside my own head. Each damning word she speaks lands with a clang. “I didn’t have exact plans, but I wanted you to suffer for what you did.”

“The canceled meetings? The fire alarm?”

“Yes.”

“The elevator? Pest control?”

“I’m so sorry, Levi—”

“*Don’t* call me that.” Finally, I open my eyes, and the whole world seems grayer than before. When I turn to my treacherous assistant, the only spots of color in the world are those blue eyes, brimming with tears.

Fake, obviously. Or frustration at being caught. Thank god I realized before the launch—how much havoc might she have wreaked then?

“Well, I applaud your commitment. Not many people would whore themselves out for revenge.”

I see the exact moment my words land: a red flush creeps up her neck, and Georgina flinches. “It wasn’t like that,” she whispers. “Those parts weren’t fake.”

“Of course they were.” My back aches like an old man’s as I push to my feet. She scuttles back like she’s scared of me, and I’m glad about that. I *want* her to be afraid. Better afraid than coming closer, trying to touch me, wearing down my walls. “But the restraining order will be very real.”

Her chin wobbles. “Restraining order? Levi, wait, just listen for a moment—”

“I told you not to call me that, and I have listened. I’ve heard plenty.”

What else is there to know? It was all a lie, and now she has everything she needs to ruin me. Does she have photos of us together somehow? Video of last night? The PR department will lose their minds over this. Christ.

“Take your things and go.” My strides eat up the office floor, and it feels good to be moving, all this burning hot energy coursing around my body. “And if you come near me again, then *I* will ruin *you*. Believe me, Miss Olsen, I have the resources to do a much better job of it.”

“Levi...”

I leave her there by my desk, looking so lost and alone.

Good riddance.

* * *

I don't find Georgina's letter until three days have passed, and I'm roaming around the top floor after 6pm, too restless to settle. It's on her chaotic desk—the desk she didn't stop to clean out before she fled the building. Even the jacket is still there, one sleeve dangling against the floor.

I brush my fingertips against the fabric, then stuff my fist in my pocket.

Ridiculous. Georgina Olsen is a curse, not someone to mourn.

But... the letter is right there, her keyboard pushed out of the way so she could write by hand. The paper is covered in scratched out lines and notes in the margins, an absent minded doodle of a rabbit in the top corner.

I was never meant to see this version, clearly. Well, secrets are our thing. Flicking on the lamp, I pluck the letter off the desk, my jaw clenched so hard my teeth ache.

Three days.

God, I miss her.

But let's see what fresh lies she had in store. Let's see the PR spin Georgina planned to give her own actions. Lord knows I could use the reminder that she's better off gone.

I read the whole thing, face etched in a scowl. Then read it a second time, a lump lodged in my throat. By my third read-through, my chest is a hollowed out crater, because it's not what I expected. Not at all.

In the letter, she confesses everything. *Everything*. Even things I hadn't realized were her. And she begs me to forgive her so that we can move forward... together. A fresh start.

Before she signs off, she says she loves me. The paper crinkles as I clench my fist.

Lie, my brain shouts.

But my heart and body say otherwise, because of the way she kissed me so hungrily, groaning against my lips; the way she fussed over me, trying to get me to sleep more.

Why do those things as part of her revenge plan? It makes no sense, and after a few days to cool down, I can see things more clearly. One kiss, maybe—that would be enough to ruin me. But dozens of heated encounters, far away from prying eyes? Dragging each other into supply cupboards and alcoves; pressing each other against tree trunks in the city park?

Georgina had nothing to gain from those things. Nothing except me.

“Fuck,” I say, my voice so loud in the silent office.

Georgina.

I’ve messed up.

Nine

Georgie



Ah, rock bottom. My old friend. It's been a while since I've found myself here—not since Dad's rough patch, in fact—but I'd be lying if I said there wasn't something comforting about it.

These ice cream cone-printed jammies. The unending stream of cooking shows blaring from my laptop. The open peanut butter jar on the coffee table, spoon sticking straight up, and the dancing pizza logo on my phone, counting down the minutes until dinner arrives.

Home sweet home. And okay—this is a pity party for one. I get it. I'm in a hell of my own making, and I have no one to blame but myself.

Seriously, what was I thinking? Taking all my bitterness and pain out on another person—so gross. And damn, I wasn't even good at it.

I'm just not the vengeful type. Dad always teases me because I tear up at cheesy commercials, and I feel crippling guilt when my houseplants die. Who was I kidding?

“It’s fucking raw!” I yell from flat on my back, glaring at the cooking show from where I’m wedged between sofa cushions. If I focus one hundred percent of my brain power on these kitchen nightmares, if I keep up a constant stream of distractions, I won’t have to think about my broken heart. Gordon will save me.

Arguments break out on the screen, and I rub my chest absentmindedly as I watch, breathing slowly through pursed lips. In... and out.

It’s been three days since Levi sent me away. Three whole days of feeling like my soul’s been torn down the middle.

But it’s fine. I’m fine.

The Ignis product launch is soon. He’s probably working flat out, barely coming up for air, grinding his precious life force away on schematics and deadlines and all that crap. If I was there, I could bring him dinner—something hot with vegetables. I could make sure he drinks enough water.

Ow, my heart.

Ow, ow, ow.

These idiot cooks had better claw it back with dessert, I swear to god. I am at the end of my freaking rope.

The knock rattles the front door, and I glance at my phone before rolling off the sofa with a grunt. The pizza has beaten its own countdown. It’s a small win, but I’ll take it.

“Coming!” I call when the knock comes again, an impatient rap on the front door. Hope the delivery guy is ready

for a cranky girl in ice cream cone pajamas, because that's what he's getting. Snatching up the fistful of bills I left out ready, I weave dizzily between the furniture.

Damn. I know I'm heartbroken and everything, but I really need to stand up more. Maybe after dinner I'll go outside, get some fresh air, take a walk through the park. After all, I can't wallow for the rest of my life, can I? And if one day I bump into Levi Laurent again, I want him to see the put-together Georgina Olsen, not this hot mess.

The door swings open. I blink at the gorgeous man staring down at me.

"You're not the pizza guy," I blurt.

"I could be," Levi says, and his deep, rich voice makes my insides quiver. God, I've missed that voice. His eyes flick over my shoulder. "If I brought you pizza, would you let me in?"

Oh. Right.

Stumbling back, I wave an arm at the living room. Levi squeezes past, and he's so much bigger in this environment. Tall and broad-shouldered, brown hair pushed back from his forehead, stubble shading his firm jaw. He looks like he belongs on a red carpet, not in our hallway with its scattered shoes and the pink bobble hat dangling from a coat hook.

Is he really here? Have I finally cracked?

I poke his arm to check. Nope, he's flesh and blood alright, his crisp white shirt sleeves rolled up to bare his toned

forearms. A thin tie draws a dark line down his trim body, and now I've swallowed my own tongue. What are words?

“Georgina,” Levi says quietly, and having him close again... hearing him say my name... it hurts so much more than all my distractions. Wrapping both arms around my waist, I squeeze tight, trying to hold myself together. “We need to talk.”

“Okay,” I say, then clear my throat and try again. “Okay.” My voice is stronger the second time, louder and less strangled. “Do you want to go through? It's a little messy, but there's a sofa and some chairs. We could—”

A loud knock makes me jump, and I almost hit the ceiling. Levi turns and answers the door; he thanks the delivery man and pays from his own wallet. When he turns back, pizza box in hand, I thrust my own handful of bills at him. He ignores them.

“I interrupted your dinner. Forgive me, Georgina.”

The memory comes swiftly, so painful in its sweetness: taking Levi's hand for the first time and squeezing his strong fingers. Saying, *I'd like to hear the magic word*. The way he gazed down at me, green eyes playful and so intense.

“It's fine,” I rasp, because this man owes me zero apologies. Even the harsh things he said in his office, the words that cut me to the marrow, I deserved. So. Yeah. “Come through, Mr Laurent.”

Old shame squirms in my belly as I lead my ex boss into our living room, to our sagging sofa and scratched coffee table, but I push those feelings away. Of all the things I'm ashamed of when it comes to this man, the fact that we have less money than him is not one of them.

He sets the pizza box down on a side table, then turns to face me, his face solemn. A horrible thought pops into my head.

“Wait. I'm not breaking the restraining order if you come to me, am I?” I scratch at my forearm, suddenly agitated, because we can *not* afford legal fees right now. “Maybe we should go outside—talk in public? I can put a coat over my pajamas. Sorry, I'm not trying to be difficult, I just, I don't want to get in trouble, and I don't know how these things work and...”

I trail off, because Levi is staring at me, and he looks...

Devastated.

“There's no restraining order,” he scrapes out when I've fallen quiet. “I never got one. Never should have threatened one at all, and—Georgina.” He steps forward, floorboards creaking. “I'm so sorry, sweet girl.”

He's sorry? *He's* sorry? My head spins, and I lean over to smack my laptop shut on the coffee table. The steady stream of curses and kitchen noises cuts off, and we're left in the quiet of an empty apartment. In the bathroom, the leaky faucet drips.

“There’s nothing for you to be sorry about. Is there?” I fiddle with the hem of my pajama top, and man, what I’d give to catch a break. Why couldn’t I be wearing a blazer or something when he came? Or jeans and a t-shirt at the very least. “Has something else happened?”

Maybe this is his way of warning me. Maybe I’m about to get arrested for corporate sabotage or something. Is that a crime? Probably.

“I read your letter.”

My letter?

...Oh, *that* letter. Well, this is humiliating.

“It was an early draft.” The fabric of my top twists between my fingers. “I was going to make it better.”

Levi steps forward again, and now there’s half a rug between us. If I stretched out an arm, I could brush his chest with my fingertips. “It was good already.”

“It was a mess. With ink everywhere, and that stupid bunny doodle—”

“I liked the doodle.”

He did? What about the rest of it? For the first time in three days, an ember of hope sparks to life in my chest—but I press my fist against it, like I’m trying to smush it out.

It hurt so badly, being sent away. Even though I deserved it, even though I don’t blame Levi at all... I’m not sure I could bear that again.

Because I'm not Uma Thurman in Kill Bill. I'm squishy and vulnerable, and my heart is already a sore lump in my chest. It's fucking raw, as Gordon would say.

"I should have listened to you." Levi's words make the tiny hairs stand up on my arms, and when he comes to stand close, when he wraps his arms around me, I can't breathe. Can't breathe. I bury my face in his chest, panting against his fancy shirt; I grip his waist hard enough to leave fingerprint bruises. "You tried to explain everything, but I didn't listen. I said I would, but I didn't. And I said such cruel things to you in return."

My tongue is thick in my mouth. His shirt button jabs into my nose. "That's okay. It's fine."

"It's *not* fine," Levi growls, and his face rubs against my hair. His hands roam over my back, warm and greedy, and I'm home. Oh god, I was exiled and now I'm home. "I always want to listen to you, and I never want to be cruel. Just like I always want you to tell me the truth. We can be better, Georgina." He squeezes me tightly, then eases off. "We can be better for each other. Tell me you agree."

Is he kidding? Over the last three days, I've thought of nothing *but* all the things I should have done differently. All those chances I had to come clean when I kept silent. All my worst mistakes.

Levi's right: he deserved better, and I did too. From ourselves and from each other. "I agree."

He pulls back, green eyes bright with triumph, and the kiss he plants on me is strong. Decisive. It brooks no argument. It says: this is happening, and this time, we won't be idiots about it.

I sigh against his mouth, all my troubles lifting away. *So good. So right.*

And my feet scuff over the rug as he steers me back, past the coffee table, all the way to the sofa. Levi is all-boss at this moment, taking control, guiding my dazed, flushed body to sit.

“Open,” he says, kneeling in front of me and nudging my knees apart. I slide my legs wide with a muffled squeak, my bare thighs trembling. “These pajamas are fucking fantastic, by the way. I want you to wear ice cream cones on everything from now on. Want to lick mint choc chip out of your belly button, Georgina. Christ, you're too sweet to be believed.”

I'm too sweet? The girl who infiltrated his company for vengeance? Levi must see my raised eyebrow, the doubt on my face, because he squeezes my knees firmly.

“You are. Fresh start, remember?”

... Yeah. Okay, if he's in this, then so am I. And Fresh Start Georgina wants her ex boss's mouth on her body right this freaking second, so I grab his tie and tug him forward three inches.

Levi's smile is sinful, his big hands stroking up my thighs. When he reaches the hem of my pajama shorts, his fingertips slide beneath, mapping new territory.

I shiver, wriggling closer on the sofa cushions. My knees flop wider, and I must look so shameless sprawled here like this, but I don't care. So long as he keeps touching me, keeps staring down at me like *that*, all hot and stern and possessive, I don't care.

A neighbor walks through their apartment above, the ceiling creaking. There's the muffled blare of someone's television next door, and the rumble of traffic outside. We're part of this busy city, surrounded by people at all times, but right now, it doesn't feel that way.

Right now, there's just Levi. His fingers hook into my shorts and drag them down my legs. He stares between my legs, a muscle leaping in his jaw, and I pant for air, thighs spreading wider, still clinging to his tie.

"Do it. Please. Oh, please touch me, Levi."

He sucks on his teeth, considering. He loves when I beg.

"*Please*. I'll be so good." My hips lift an inch off the sofa, and my stomach is knotted with anticipation. And maybe it's degrading, offering up all the control like this, but I don't care. I love it. I'm so tired of fighting against the world, getting slowly worn down by pressures and decisions, but when Levi takes control, all that other stuff spins away.

Besides, he's so big and strong and sturdy. Here I am, practically dangling from his tie like a rope off a cliff side, and he's completely unbothered.

“Don’t you want to?” Wiggling my hips, I choke back a giggle at Levi’s glare. He’s so grouchy and intense, looming over where I’m sprawled on the sofa, but there’s a softness behind his scowl.

“Brat,” he mutters, then he slides both hands under my ass cheeks. He grips me; tugs me closer to the edge; holds me tilted up for his mouth.

One breath...

Two breaths...

Three...

“Levi!” I wail, head tossing, desperate for his tongue. Somehow my hands have moved to scrabble at the sofa, and he’s just holding me there, helpless as he breathes me in, each puff of warm air from his mouth making my slick flesh tingle. “Do it! Oh my god, please just do it!”

“So impatient,” Levi murmurs, and his mouth is so close that the words vibrate my clit. I huff, belly twisting. “I’ve waited thirty five years for you, Georgina. You can wait five minutes for my tongue.”

Five minutes?

Uh. *Five minutes?*

I don’t freaking think so, and I open my mouth to curse him out—but Levi’s mouth covers my clit, and all thoughts leave my brain.

So hot.

So wet.

Levi sucks on my flesh, his cheeks hollowing, and the scrape of his teeth makes me choke back a howl. I'm writhing and bucking in his hold, fighting to get him closer, fighting for more, and I've never felt sensations like these.

His tongue slides along my seam, dipping inside my body, and I groan, teeth clenched. He's so warm and wet and merciless, devouring me with quiet snarls, and every noise he makes, every lick and bite and touch, makes me levitate another inch off the sofa.

There's a finger inside me, stroking my inner walls. *Two* fingers.

My spine bows, and I'm yanking on his hair. When did I grab his hair?

"So fucking sweet," Levi growls against my slit, and I hiss in reply.

And if my muscles tense any harder, I'm gonna snap bones. If I can't breathe soon, I'll pass clean out. So when the orgasm hits me, buffeting my body like a violent storm, I cling to Levi's hair and sob with relief.

So good. So intense.

Thank. Freaking. God.

Will it be like that every time? I won't survive it. And I'm addled and sweaty, lying in a limp pile of limbs, but Levi offers no time to recover.

His belt clinks; his zipper scratches down. He pushes me to lay length-ways on the sofa, then climbs on top of me, his big body dwarfing mine, and his hard shaft prods at my soaking entrance.

My ex boss is on top of me. Fully clothed. There's something delicious about that, even if it means his tie tickles the base of my throat.

“Oh my god.” Grabbing two handfuls of white shirt, I scrunch the fabric in my trembling fists. In my daydreams, I was always so sassy and cool in these moments, but in real life, I can't think. Can't do anything except hook my legs around Levi's waist and groan when he rubs against me. My eyelids flutter.

“Yes?” He reaches between us and lines us up properly. His whole body thrums with the effort of restraint.

“Yes! Hurry, come on. Levi, be quick.”

His pained laugh ruffles the hair by my ear. “No problem.”

We each hold our breath as he enters me. He slides inside, almost painfully slowly, stopping every few inches to let me adjust. And it *stings*, my body burning faintly where his thick length presses inside, but... it's a good kind of burn. Huh.

Biting my lip, I rock my hips. Pleasure ripples through me, and I let out a throaty groan.

Oh, yeah. Now we're talking.

“Christ. When you squirm like that—Georgina—”

The sofa shunts across the floor, and we're both thrusting together, grinding closer. Our breaths are ragged, and there's no finesse to this, no fancy moves or practiced style, nothing but two people desperate to cling together, chasing the pleasure building where our bodies meet.

So. Good.

If I could wedge him up there, I would. Keep him there forever, my body so blissfully full and slick, all my nerve endings blazing like a Vegas light show every time he moves against me. Yanking on Levi's shirt, I pant against his throat, and my ankles hitch higher, crossing behind his back.

He's *mine*. And I'm his.

This is really happening—we're okay. Better than okay, we're...

We're...

"You're close," Levi grunts, bending down to suck on my neck. His stubble rasps against my fevered skin, and I whimper, bending my head to the side to give him better access. Whatever he wants to do to me, that's what I need. I'm his to play with.

All his.

Ten

Levi



Christ, she's delicious. Georgina is tight and slick and warm around my cock, her perfect body squirming beneath me as I ride her into a whimpering mess. The sofa creaks and the cushions slide, a cell phone clattering to the floor, but I don't give a damn—all I care about is the throaty little noises she makes when I hit the right spot inside her.

My back is damp, my shirt sticking to my skin. If my heart thumps any harder, I'll crack a rib. Nothing about this is comfortable, but I couldn't stop now if a hurricane hit, and when I grind the heel of my palm against Georgina's clit, she cries out in desperation. The sweetest music.

"Such a perfect girl," I rasp. So good for me."

Her groan is dredged from the depths of her body.

We're moving faster, harder. Grinding deeper. My pulse throbs in my ears, and she's so slick against my hand, so tight around my shaft. I'm caught up in her, and nothing else exists in the whole goddamn world, nothing but this girl.

"Levi," she moans, then bites down on my collarbone. I choke out a laugh, because what kind of fever dream is this?

“That’s right,” I mutter, pinching her clit and grinning when she bites harder. “Remember who’s fucking you.”

As if *I* could forget. I’ve dreamed about this moment so many times, jerked my cock raw thinking about Georgina spread under me like this, but now that it’s happening, it’s so much better than I believed possible.

A tingling sensation starts at the base of my spine. My gut tightens, and sweat beads on my upper lip.

“Fuck.” I grind my hand against her again, changing the angle of our bodies until she cries out. “Alright, sweet girl. You’re going to come for me. You’re going to show me what that’s like.”

If it’s the last thing I do, I’m going to chase her off the precipice.

And then Georgina stiffens beneath me, her breath seizing against my neck, and I *feel* it. The pulsing of her muscles; the rush of slickness and her trembling thighs. I feel her come for me.

She’s magnificent.

Groaning low and rough, I grab her legs and fold them back, then plunge as deep as I can go and pant against her hair. I’m quivering, balanced on a knife edge.

“Not pulling out.” My eyes are screwed shut, my temples throbbing, my whole body screaming at me to let go. “Georgina, let me come inside you. Say it. Right now.”

She sighs, blissed out and sated, completely relaxed against my tense frame, and rolls her body against mine. “Do it. Do it, Levi.”

Thank. Fuck.

Squeezing a fistful of her hair, I let go with a muttered stream of curses, my shaft throbbing and pulsing inside my girl. And it wrings me out, I come so hard—feels like my whole damn body turns inside out. She’s suctioning out my soul.

When I collapse on top of her, shaken and spent, I barely remember to catch my weight on my elbows.

Two arms wind around my back. Smiling lips press against my neck, and I grin into her hair, shaking my head, because I can’t believe how good this is.

“Hope you like cold pizza,” I say at last, pulling out with a wince.

Georgina snorts, and I squeeze her leg before getting up.

This is it.

The perfect fresh start.

* * *

Two years later

The park is crowded, buzzing with laughter and the sizzle of food trucks, but we find a quiet patch of grass over by a copse

of trees. Georgina leans against a trunk, braiding her hair and peering around us as I set up.

I spread out a picnic blanket, two foil-wrapped falafel wraps, and a large glass bottle of apple juice. The sun is bright and warm, and the breeze is fresh.

“How long do you have?” Georgina murmurs, nudging me with her toe. She’s barefoot already, her sandals kicked off in the grass, her sundress cleaving to her curves. It’s a day off from her own job—and when I found out two years ago that Georgina is a talented barista, I cursed loud enough that she burst out laughing.

She doesn’t need to work anymore. Not if she doesn’t want to. But she insists because, and I quote: *If I have nothing to do all day, I’ll burst into your office at all hours for blow jobs.* Apparently that would be a problem.

“An hour or so.” We’re busy back at Ignis, preparing for an industry conference, but I always have time for my wife. Besides, I left Nils in charge. He can handle it.

And... blanket: spread. Wife: stretched out. Dress: tossed somewhere over her shoulder. The perfect summer’s day.

I flick the cap open on a bottle of sunscreen, shifting close to lie beside her. She’s already tanned from this little tradition, her skin golden and smooth against her yellow bikini. Georgina watches me through heavy-lidded eyes, smiling lazily as I spread cream over her growing bump.

“Not long now,” she murmurs. “Only a few months.”

No. Not long at all. Georgina's maternity leave starts soon, and then the countdown *really* begins. I squirt more sunscreen into my palm, then rub it down her nearest thigh.

"Boy or girl?" she asks, one arm tossed over her eyes. This is her new favorite game, but I don't mind. I like playing too.

"A litter of kittens."

She scoffs. "Shut up. Okay, what about names? I bet you want to call our baby Ignis Innovations 2.0. Bet you already filed a trademark."

I grin, glancing up from my work. "You've got me."

She's so beautiful when she smiles. Georgina shifts around with a pleased sigh, and this moment is everything. Everything.

"Don't eat my falafel wrap," she says, before drifting off to sleep, and I flop onto my own back, grinning up at the branches.

Eat her wrap? I wouldn't dare.

After all, my wife is a vengeful little thing.

* * *

Thanks for reading His Last Nerve! I hope you liked it. :)

For another stern man with no idea what's going on, check out [Pit Stop](#). *This grumpy billionaire has mistaken my house for a hotel. But hey, who am I to correct him?*

And for a bonus instalove story, grab your copy of [Ride or Die](#). *She's sweet and innocent—and that's like catnip in this strip club. It's okay, though. I won't let the pretty bartender out of my sight.*

Happy reading!

xxx

Teaser: Pit Stop

“That is unacceptable.”

I think I’ve found Mr Rockwell’s favorite phrase. He’s said it about a dozen times in the last two minutes, and every time he does, I snort a little louder. He glares at me from his spot by the phone, the wire coiled around his tense hand.

I grin back from my seat on the kitchen counter, my heels kicking at the cupboard below. The full glass of water I poured myself sits beside me, sweating in the heat, and every time he stares longingly at it, I get a mean little thrill.

I’ll fetch him his own glass in a second. But waiting a few minutes for once in his life won’t kill him, will it? It’s character-building. Good for his soul.

“Marcel. Listen to me: that is *unacceptable*.”

Whoever this Marcel is, he’s having a rough day. I stare openly at Mr Rockwell as he lectures the poor man at the other end of the phone, and I can’t help noticing how wildly different we look.

He’s tailored and clean cut. Impeccably dressed and stern, his broad shoulders filling up his corner of the kitchen.

Meanwhile, my lilac shorts are frayed at the hem, and my white t-shirt has a bee embroidered on it. I must seem like an alien to him.

“No. No, I need it fixed *today*. I am in the desert, Marcel. The desert. The place with venomous snakes and cattle skulls.

Did you watch cartoons as a child? Are you familiar with the concept?”

Ha. I grin wider, and when our eyes meet, a flash of reluctant humor passes through Mr Rockwell’s expression. I slip down off the counter, bare feet slapping against the tiles, then dig out a glass for him from the cupboard. The faucet creaks, its stream of cool water glittering in the sunshine, and then I cross to him and push the drink into his hand.

The billionaire’s fingertips brush against mine.

He holds my gaze again, green eyes warmer now.

Muffled words crackle through the handset. “I’m listening,” Mr Rockwell murmurs. He raises the glass to his lips, his eyes still on me.

Is it supposed to be sensual, watching someone drink water? Because suddenly I’m flushed under my t-shirt, warm and fidgety on the kitchen tiles. The strong column of Mr Rockwell’s throat bobs with every swallow, and still he watches me. Curious and intense. Like he’d rather drink a nice, tall glass of Keya Patel.

Whew.

He lowers the glass.

His bottom lip is wet.

“Thank you,” he says, and it takes me way too long to realize he’s talking to me. Mr Rockwell nudges the empty glass back into my hand, and I take it, nodding like an idiot. I turn back to the kitchen, dazed.

Jeez Louise. I've been out in the wilderness alone for way too long. I'm reading into things—seeing signals that aren't there. Lusting after a man who's been nothing but a jerk to me. A man who rich, beautiful women across the world fight over, then come away still single.

How humiliating.

“Fine,” Mr Rockwell clips out, then hangs up with a bit too much force. He turns to me. “How much for a room here?”

“...A room?”

“Yes.” He speaks carefully, like I'm slow. “I can't get a mechanic out here until tomorrow. I need a room in your hotel.”

...Hotel?

I blink around the kitchen, doubtful. Did he get sunstroke out on the road? No one in their right mind would pay to stay here. The Honeycomb Hideaway is held together with cobwebs and prayers. We're a honey business, not a vacation spot.

“We're closed for the season,” I manage, my mind racing ahead. It's sort of true. The bees have definitely downed tools. And I'm thinking about that pile of overdue bills. About the fact that this man has no better options out here, except maybe the nudist colony halfway up the nearest mountain.

“Yes. I can tell.”

“But I could set up a room...” He's already nodding, so I go for broke. “For triple the usual rate.”

Why not? Rhett Rockwell can afford it.

Sure enough, he whips out his wallet. He doesn't even ask how much I'm charging him as I dig in the drawer for the ancient card reader we keep for festivals.

Three hundred dollars, for the record. I make sure to print him a receipt. Maybe he can expense it.

Three hundred dollars for fresh sheets on my bed, and homemade honey waffles in the morning. And in return, I'll spend a night on the sofa with Winston and get to wipe out some of those bills.

What a great deal. Everybody wins.

* * *

Check out [Pit Stop!](#)

xxx



Cassie Mint

About the Author

Cassie writes outrageous, OTT instalove with tons of sugar and spice. She loves cookie dough, summer barbecues, and her gorgeous cat Missy.

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