



The

BILLIONAIRE'S

Game



A MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE ROMANCE

AVA GREENE

THE BILLIONAIRE'S GAME

OceanofPDF.com

A MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE ROMANCE

MY FAVORITE BILLIONAIRES SERIES

BOOK TWO

OceanofPDF.com

AVA GREENE

OceanofPDF.com

Copyright © 2023 by Ava Greene

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

✿ Created with Vellum

[OceanofPDF.com](https://www.oceanofpdf.com)

CONTENTS

[Newsletter Sign Up](#)

[Books by Ava Greene](#)

[A note from Ava Greene](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

[Chapter 28](#)

[Chapter 29](#)

[Chapter 30](#)

[Chapter 31](#)

[Chapter 32](#)

[Chapter 33](#)

[Chapter 34](#)

[Chapter 35](#)

[Chapter 36](#)

[Chapter 37](#)

[Chapter 38](#)

[Chapter 39](#)

[Chapter 40](#)

[Chapter 41](#)

[Chapter 42](#)

[Chapter 43](#)

[Chapter 44](#)

[Chapter 45](#)

[Chapter 46](#)

[Chapter 47](#)

[Chapter 48](#)

[Chapter 49](#)

[Chapter 50](#)

[Epilogue](#)

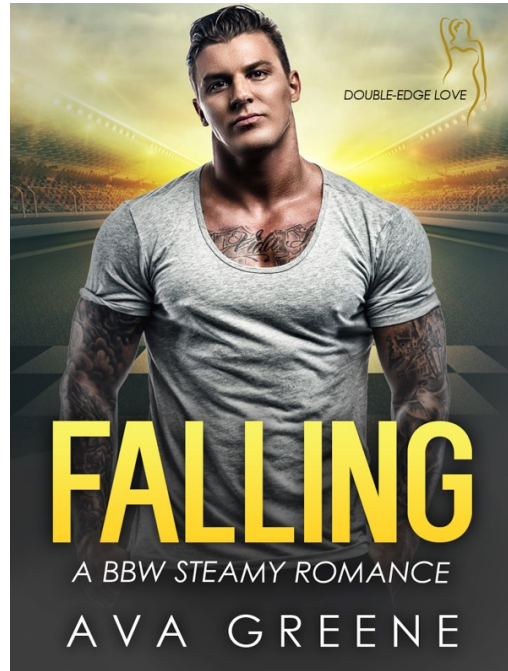
[Newsletter Sign Up](#)

[Books by Ava Greene](#)

[About the Author](#)

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

To be the first to know about upcoming releases, consider signing up to my newsletter. As a bonus, you get a free copy of my EXCLUSIVE standalone romance, Falling, plus lots of exciting content shared only to subscribers.



OceanofPDF.com

BOOKS BY AVA GREENE

[My Favorite Boss](#) (standalone office romance)

[Billionaire Boss Series](#) (office romance)

[Harbor Series](#) (medical romance)

[The Privileged Series](#) (billionaire romance)

[Double-edge Love Series](#) (bad boy romance)

[Doctor is IN Series](#) (medical romance)

[Evergreen Hotel Romance](#) (romance short stories)

OceanofPDF.com

A NOTE FROM AVA GREENE

Hey Darling.

Jessica is a bit of a hot mess and Matt Miller is her knight in a very shiny (billionaire) armor!

It is my pleasure entertaining you, dear reader. Thank you for sticking with me through these years.

I'd like to hear what you think about The Billionaire's Game by leaving a [review](#).

In the meantime, enjoy Matthew and Jessica. Can't wait for you to join them in their love adventure.

Love,

Ava Greene

OceanofPDF.com

Jessica looked out the window as the plane started to descend. The gigantic green and widespread mounds of the Alps came into view, which took her breath away. The night skyline was lit up from all the lights of the beautiful city. If Jessica looked closely, she could make out the Hotel De Paris and Monte Carlo. Her stomach started jumping with anticipation and excitement. It was as if this one image could erase all the pain and heartache she had experienced earlier that day, and it almost worked until she turned to her side to share her excitement with Spencer and remembered that he wasn't sitting next to her.

Her mind wandered back to that morning—a day she was hoping she could just forget. She felt so humiliated. Spencer was supposed to be her boyfriend, her best friend, and her everything. She thought she knew him like the back of her hand, but you never really know anyone...and that was what deeply hurt her. Today was supposed to be her wedding day, and instead of it being the best day of her life, it was actually the worst. She had stood up at the altar, in her curve-fitting white Vera Wang wedding dress, alone. Just like she was going on her honeymoon alone. Both events had taken months to prepare because it was something they had always dreamed of and wanted, except it wasn't what Spencer wanted anymore, but instead of telling her that he had concerns about the wedding, he just left her humiliated in front of all of their family and friends.

“Ladies and gentlemen, Welcome to Cote d’Azur Airport. Local time is 5 pm, and the temperature is 67 degrees. For

your safety and comfort, please remain seated with your seat belt fastened until the Captain turns off the Fasten Seat Belt sign. This will indicate that we have parked at the gate and that it is safe for you to move out of the cabin. At this time, you may use your cellular phones once the Fasten Seat belt sign has been turned off.

Please check around your seat for any personal belongings you may have brought on board with you and please use caution when opening the overhead bins, as heavy articles may have shifted around during the flight. If you require deplaning assistance, please remain in your seat until all other passengers have deplaned. One of our crew members will then be pleased to assist you.

On behalf of Air France Airlines and the entire crew, I'd like to thank you for joining us on this trip, and we are looking forward to seeing you on board again in the near future. Have a great evening," the flight attendant said over the intercom.

Jessica changed her phone setting from airplane mode to regular mode. She had 27 missed calls and about 50 text messages—all from her friends and family and Spencer's family, wondering where she was and if she was okay. She hadn't told anyone where she was going. Once the realization had hit her that Spencer was not coming, she fled the church before anyone could pull her aside and try to comfort her. What could they have said that would make her feel better? Nothing. She was thankful that the limo was still out front. She had jumped inside and had the driver take her back home, where she changed out of her wedding dress and picked up her packed suitcase. Before she knew it, she was on her way to Newark Airport and out of the country. She closed her phone without replying to any of her messages and dumped it back in her purse. She would answer all of them later because all she wanted to do right now was get to her hotel and relax. His parents had booked them a suite at the famous Hotel De Paris, and at this very moment, she wanted nothing more than to feel like royalty since her fairytale wedding was pulled out right from underneath her. She really needed to stop thinking about that.

Getting out of her seat, she grabbed her bag from the overhead bin and made her way to the front of the plane.

“If you’re going to Monaco, there is a shuttle bus waiting in front of the airport that will take you across the bridge from Nice,” the flight attendant at the airplane door informed her.

“Thank you,” Jessica replied. This was the first time she had walked through an airport on foreign soil, and everything was written in French. The feeling alone made her sigh with relief. She was across the world from home, where she wouldn’t run into anyone she knew and have to explain or talk about what happened this morning. For that, she was very thankful.

Following the group of people who were on the plane with her, Jessica found the exit and the bus that would take her across the 118 highway and onto a new adventure.

OceanofPDF.com

Matthew Miller stood inside the lobby of the Hotel De Paris and took in the sight that was right in front of him. It never ceased to amaze him how incredible this place was. After living in Las Vegas for the past three years, he thought that he could never be impressed by any casino again, but he was wrong. This was the most famous casino in the world, and nothing could compare to it. He respected its old-world feel and the fact that it was only open for certain hours a day. The people of Monaco really understood that there was more to life than gambling and left time alone during the day for people to relax and recuperate or to find a way to make more money to drop at the casino.

“Okay, Matt,” he said, pulling himself out of his daydream. He could stand here for hours if he let himself. It was so beautiful here. However, he was a professional and needed to remind himself that he was there for business, not vacation. Moving his legs into motion, he made his way to the reception desk. There was a slim blonde woman standing behind the desk with a smile painted on her face.

“Good evening, and welcome to the Hotel De Paris,” she said. “Are you here to check in?”

Matt put his overnight bag on the ground beside him and fumbled in his pocket for his wallet. “Yes, I am,” he cleared his throat. “Reservation under the name of Matthew Miller.”

The clerk checked her reservations and smiled when she must have found it. “Ah, here it is. I see that you have a King suite reserved for two nights.”

“Is there a fee if I need to check out early? He asked her.

“Not for our high rollers. We here at Hotel De Paris understand that business calls at inopportune times.”

“Great, thanks,” he finished checking in and walked the long blue and white marbled hallway to the elevator that took him to the 10th floor and the same room he booked every time he stayed here. He held the key over the door until it turned green, then turned the handle. The door opened up into a bright living room area adorned with two cream-colored couches, a matching room rug, and a coffee table. There was a tiered plate on the table covered with assorted snacks an ice bucket, and a plate with water bottles and ginger ale that filled it. Big wide cream-colored curtains opened up the view of the sky outside his balcony. A big screen TV was attached to the wall opposite the bedroom door.

Matt bypassed the living room without so much as a second glance and walked right into the bedroom, throwing his overnight bag on the bed. He loved this room because of the view outside the balcony. It was one of the few rooms in the entire hotel that had two balconies. The first time he booked a room at the Hotel de Paris with his ex-girlfriend, the hotel had bumped them into this suite because they had problems with their first room. He remembered waking up in bed, sunshine streaming on his face, to half of the city bathed in light. It was breathtaking and one of the pleasures he still allowed himself to have, even if he was still on business, which reminded him that he had a poker game in about an hour and needed to mentally prepare himself for a good night of fun. Matt had never imagined that he would enjoy playing poker this much, especially poker tournaments. When he was little, he had always wanted to do something exciting with his life, but he never knew it would be this glamorous. Being born to wealthy parents has its advantage, but it could be pretty boring. There was only so much you could spend your money on. Playing professional poker was a risk and something that made his blood run hot every time he played and won—and boy, did he play to win.

Poker was his game. He learned how to play from his grandfather, and after winning the first game, he got a rush every time he played. It was easy to learn other people's tells. Not too many knew that they did the same thing when they were trying to bluff or not share if they had a good hand or not. His friends always told him that he would make a killing in Las Vegas and that was exactly what he did on the night of his 21st birthday. His buddies surprised him and took him on an impromptu trip to Vegas, where they rang in his birthday at the blackjack tables. After winning a few hands there, he wandered to the poker tables and beat everyone at his table. They played for six hours and came to find out that one of the other players was a professional player that was on the World Tour of Poker, who was just playing a friendly game to keep his mind fresh.

Matt remembered that day like it was yesterday. James, the other player's name, came up to him and told him that he was more than impressed with how Matt played and wondered if he was interested in playing poker professionally. Matt clearly thought the man was joking and laughed at him. Once he figured out that James was not joking, he became curious and wanted to hear more. It gave him something to do with his time when he wasn't working for his father's multi-billion company. For the next three months, he followed James on tour to learn how to play on a professional level, and by the end of the tour, he became hooked. The rest was history. Being the owner's son gave him extreme advantages. He could take time off from work whenever he wanted to spend time on his "little hobby", as his father called it, but at least it was better than getting in trouble with the law or getting hammered every night to relieve himself of the boredom that followed him around like a shadow.

Opening up his overnight bag, he grabbed what he had come to call his lucky shirt out of the bag and changed into it. It was looser than the one he had been wearing, and he wouldn't show sweat stains if he was getting too hot or nervous. Tonight, he would be playing in the Room of Stars, which is the very room that holds the PokerStars Championship from April to May. It was the only poker room

on the floor. You could play blackjack elsewhere on the floor but not poker. It was a room where they could play in silence, away from the crowds at the other card tables and old-fashioned slot machines. He did like to play on slot machines when he could because the feel of putting in quarters or coins and pulling the lever was so much more fun than just hitting buttons.

The *Salle des Etoiles* (Room of Stars) was an outside room that looked like an open football stadium. There were windows all around the sides and tables throughout. The top of the room is open to enjoy the good weather and to see the stars at night. It is only closed during the cold and rainy seasons. Matt decided to walk through the casino floor and wait for his scheduled game. He found a slot machine and decided to try his luck out on the slots while he waited.

OceanofPDF.com

The door to Jessica's room opened up to her honeymoon suite, decorated just for that occasion. She should have called ahead to let the hotel know she was coming alone, but she didn't want to have to deal with it. Now, she wished she had. The king-size bed was decorated with rose petals, and there was a bottle of champagne chilling in an ice bucket on the side of the bed. Frustrated with herself, she stormed into the room, slammed the door behind her, and dropped her bag on the floor. Grabbing the trash can, she started throwing the rose petals in there by the handful until the bed looked bare for the most part. She could still see the indentation of the heart and threw the covers down to keep herself from crying, but it was too late. The tears started to flow down her face, and she needed to find a way to stop them. Grabbing the champagne out of the bucket, she pulled the top, flew on the bed, and gulped the bottle down until there was nothing but bubbles left.

"Well, that's not enough," she said as she turned the bottle upside down and let the last drops fall into her mouth. She could order more from room service or raid the mini bar and just charge it to her room. "Why not!" she exclaimed. She had never splurged like that before, but it was her honeymoon and she didn't have the groom to share this experience with her. She opened the mini bar and took a couple of bottles, then sat on the bed with them. Downing them one by one, she started to feel a little buzz going on, which took some of the edge off. However, she knew that if she stayed here all night, all she was going to do was drink her sorrows away into oblivion. She

knew that wouldn't be good for her at all. She needed to get out of this room and do something fun; be around other people.

Picking herself up from the bed, she threw all of the empty bottles in the trash can, on top of the discarded rose petals, and grabbed her clutch. She decided she could continue drinking on the casino floor. Making sure she had her room key, ID, and credit cards, she made her way to the elevator and down to the hotel lobby. The lobby was bustling with people, and even though she didn't know any of them, it still made her feel better that she wasn't alone anymore. Relying on her high school French, she used it to read the signs that directed her to the casino floor.

When she walked into the casino, Jessica felt like she had walked back in time. The room looked like a palace ballroom with a diamond chandelier right in the middle of the room and smaller ones throughout the room. She was introduced to a big green roulette table as soon as she walked through the door, and there were tables for games as far as her eye could see. There were chairs in front of each side of the roulette table, which was a little bit more civilized than what she was used to in Vegas. She was used to people congregating around the tables while someone was throwing dice as the main entertainer. The casino had high gold marble ceilings with brown casings all around it. There were royal blue fixtures on the high-vaulted ceiling as well. The carpets in the room matched the colors all around her. She felt like a little princess, and she wished Spencer was here to share this experience with her. He would have loved the royal feel of this room, the hotel, and even the town. He would have immediately wanted to walk around and check out the sites. She didn't know if she could do that by herself. She would think about that tomorrow, as she just needed to get through tonight and anything else she could deal with as it came.

Slowly moving along, she decided to head back towards the back of the casino floor to the modernized slot machines. She knew that the casino still had a section of old-fashioned slot machines, but she needed to move through the modern

section to get to them, and this was on the way to one of the cashiers. She needed to pull out some money to play.

The floor got louder the farther she moved through the casino. She could hear people happily screaming in the background and wished she could share their joy. Walking faster, she veered directly to the cashier's office and withdrew all of the money she and Spencer had saved up for this trip, which was a lot. She had been living on a very strict budget for the past year and a half, and no matter the circumstances, it felt good to be able to let loose and have a little freedom.

Sitting down at a random slot machine, she put in a twenty and started to play.

"Excuse me, Miss. Would you like a drink?" a waitress walked up to her and took out a pad to write down her order.

"Oh, yes, I would. A dirty martini with three olives, please," she said. The woman smiled and whisked away to fill all of her orders. After about twelve minutes, she heard a commotion from behind and turned around. A man was sitting at one of the old slot machines with a group of people and an employee of the casino.

"Let me show you the way," the casino employee said to the group. She was intrigued by the special attention they were receiving. They didn't look like anyone famous, but you never know.

"Here's your drink, Ma'am," the waitress handed her drink.

"Can you charge my drink to room 228?" Jessica asked.

"Of course, ma'am."

"Oh, hey. By any chance, would you know where that group is going?" she asked, pointing at the group heading outside the casino's back door. "Is it someplace secret?" The thought was kind of intriguing.

The woman chuckled. "It isn't a secret. They are going to play poker in the Room of Stars. There isn't a poker room directly on the casino floor. That is why they are being taken outside. "

“Is it a special event, or can anyone play?” she asked.

“Anyone who can afford to pay the buy-in price for the evening can play. Just talk to the man at the door,” the waitress told her, then moved on to take other orders.

This poker game instantly fascinated her. Even though there wasn't much of a special event, she felt like it somehow was because not everyone knew that there was a poker game going on outside, and she wanted to see if she could be a part of it. Taking her drink, she followed the direction that the rest of the group went. The warm night air hit her the moment she walked outside. She stopped short for a second and took in the air. It smelled different, cleaner than from back home. After a few seconds of taking in the air, she looked up and noticed the same casino employee from earlier, standing in front of a door to a room with no ceiling.

“Welcome to the Room of the Stars, Miss. Would you be playing tonight?” he asked her when she stopped in front of him.

“How much is the buy-in?”

“The initial buy-in is \$200 tonight.”

Jessica took the amount out of her clutch and handed it to the doorman.

“Thank you,” he said after taking it and adding it to a wad of bills he pulled out of his pocket. “Right this way,” he said. Jessica followed him and had no idea what she was getting herself into.

Matt noticed Jessica the moment the doorman let her into the room. He was hoping he would see her tonight. He just didn't expect it to be so early and in the Room of Stars for that matter. She was the most beautiful creature he had seen in such a long time that she almost broke his concentration. *Keep your poker face on. She has no idea that you know who she is, he said to himself.* He didn't want to blow his cover. The game he was playing was almost over. It was just between him and two other players. Terrance was deciding if he was going to check or fold. It was taking him a long time to decide what he wanted to do, and this gave him a moment to check Jessica out more since he had never seen her in person.

She was about 5'8, long and slender, with a little curve in her hips and thighs. She had long black hair, and he would have to observe her when she got a few inches closer. Right now, he needed to finish this game.

"I fold," Terrance yelled as he threw his cards down on the table and his chair flew behind him.

Thomas rolled his eyes. "How about some manners, man?" he yelled in Terrance's receding direction. "Okay, moment of truth," he laid down his cards on the table. "Straight. Read 'em and weep."

"Full house," Matt laid his cards calmly on the table.

"Damn it!" Thomas yelled. "Every single time."

“Sorry, man. Business is business,” Matt chuckled. Everyone got up from the table, except for Matt. He continued collecting and counting his chips. He had already made a small fortune tonight, but he couldn’t quit now. His adrenaline was kicking in, just as much as his luck.

“Is there going to be another game?” a sweet voice asked him.

He looked up, and the raven-haired woman was standing on the other side of the empty table.

“Oh, yeah. They’ll be back. They will want a chance to win back their money,” he said. “Sit down.”

“Great. I didn’t want to have given my money to that man over there in vain.”

Matt laughed. “Don’t worry. If there wasn’t a game, he would have to give it back to you.” Thomas and Terrance made their way back into the room and took their seats at the table.

“Well, hello, little lady. You gonna join us tonight?” Terrance asked her, noticing there was someone else sitting at their table. “Do you think you can hang with the big boys?”

Jessica rolled her eyes. “I just saw you get beat, and you’re going to come here acting like you’re so big shot?”

“She got you there,” Thomas said. “Thomas Epstein,” he extended his hand to her to shake.

“Jess,” she shook back.

“And that’s Terrance,” he pointed to the man who had been teasing her.

“You already know, Matt,” Terrance spoke.

“Actually, we were just talking. Hadn’t got a chance to introduce ourselves yet,” he replied. “Nice to meet you, little lady. What’s your poison?” he pointed to her empty glass.

“Dirty martini, three olives.”

Matthew snapped his fingers and talked to the waitress. For the rest of the night, Jessica would never have to worry

about her glass being empty again. Whenever she took her last sip, another glass would take its place.

Something told Matthew that she needed to let loose and have a little fun tonight. Well, not something. He knew the exact reason she was here and why she needed to get loose, but he wasn't telling anyone that little secret. Not now. Not ever.

“So, what are we playing?” she asked.

“Texas hold ‘em,” the dealer said as he sat down at their table. “Everyone, place your bets.”

All four players put in their initial bets, then the dealer passed out two cards to everyone, and the game started. This was the most important part of the game for Matt. This moment was when he observes all those at the table and tries to figure out their tell. He already knew Thomas' and Terrance's tells, but he needed to figure out how Jess ticked. He needed to see what or if anything made her nervous during the game, and that's where the endless drinks came from. Alcohol made a person a little more honest and easier to read. He wanted to know more about her. He needed to know what kind of poker player she was and how much about her life she was going to spill to distract herself from being a really good player. Good poker players didn't open up about anything, including their life. If she were smart, she would drink slowly and focus on the game, not her problems.

“So, why is a pretty girl like yourself at this magical place all alone? I don't know too many people who come to Monaco without a companion unless it's for business,” Matt asked her.

Jess put her cards face down on the table and looked up at him. “This was supposed to be one of the most important vacations of my life, but nothing turned out the way it was supposed to. So, I decided to get on the plane and come anyway. I deserved this getaway, even if my best friend wasn't here with me. I knew I would meet some new people and hopefully have some great stories to tell when I got back. Ever since I can remember, I have always wanted to come to Monaco. And I wasn't going to let anyone keep me from not

going on this vacation, especially when I budgeted for this trip for the past year and a half,” she told him.

The game continued, and he could see that the conversation was making her feel really uncomfortable. She kept adjusting herself in her chair, and her facial expressions told it all. There was more to her side of the story than she was letting on, and he was dying to know more. After hearing her story, he felt kind of bad for her. Planning a trip of a lifetime with your best friend, but then they decided to cancel on you for whatever reason. Matt came to Monaco all the time alone, but that was on business, as he liked to call it. However, he had made a lot of business associates – like Thomas and Terrance – and they usually caught up about what was going on in their lives before, during, and sometimes after a couple of games.

“That really sucks,” Matt said without thinking. Everyone at the table looked at him like he was crazy. Matt was a very calm player and never blurted out things during a game. What made this situation different than any other one? He averted everyone’s eyes by taking a swig of his drink. “I hope that you find our company a little more satisfying tonight. Forget about them and enjoy a little friendly game of poker.” Maybe he could make her night and help her forget about all of her problems. He was very curious about how the night was going to play out.

Jess raised her eyebrows. “A friendly game? It seems like I have a lot of money riding on this game,” she said with a chuckle. “You know the one thing that will make me feel better? Going home with my purse a little fuller than it was when I came in tonight.”

“Well, let’s see what you got,” Matt said as they continued to play. His phone chirped, and without thinking, he picked it up.

Hey Matt, it’s Spencer. Call me. I didn’t go through with it.

There was the text he was waiting for all day. The plot just started to thicken. Now, he didn’t feel bad having Jess sitting right across from him, playing into his hands.

Matt wondered what Spencer would tell him. He would give his friend a call when he got back to his hotel room. He knew he would still be away and waiting for his call, but now, he needed to get back to the task at hand.

OceanofPDF.com

Jessica's head felt light, and her movements were all delayed. She knew she had way too much to drink, but she kept drinking anyway. She didn't want to think about Spencer anymore and all the hurt he had caused her. She wanted to focus on this particular moment, and that is exactly what she did, or to the best of her ability. Maybe that's why she didn't realize that Matt had upped the bet to \$50,000. Everyone else had folded, so it was just between them and the dealer. It came down to who had the better hand.

Staring at the two aces in her hand, she knew that she had this in the bag. Matt was a good player, but there was no way that he could continue to keep winning hand after hand. No one's luck was that good, then it happened, and she felt like she was living in a dream. All three put their hands on the table, and her mouth fell open. She was right, Matt's luck was going to have to run out sometime, but she thought she would be the one to take his money. Instead, they both lost to the dealer. Jessica couldn't believe that not only was she not going to walk away with nothing when she had a great hand this whole time, but also she was going to walk away in debt. She didn't have \$50,000 to pay back the casino. What was she going to do?

Her brow furrowed with worry.

"You alright?" Matt was standing over her. "You don't look good."

"I think I might have had a little too much to drink," she replied.

“Do you need help to your room?” he asked her.

“I might,” she said, embarrassed. She turned her head and looked around to make sure that no one was in earshot. “How long do I have to pay the casino? I don’t have all the money I just lost on hand.”

“Oh, they give you 24 hours to acquire the funds from your bank. So, don’t worry about that. Let me help you to your room.” Carefully, he tucked her arm under his and pulled her up to a standing position. Her legs were wobbly, and she almost fell down. “Careful,” he put his other arm behind her back to help steady her. “What’s your room number?”

Jessica started to giggle. “Oh, no, you don’t. I’ll take you there myself. If I tell you, you might try to take advantage of me,” she said.

“Okay, we’re gonna get there no matter what,” he said while helping her walk out of the room, back through the casino floor, and onto the elevator. “What floor?” he asked.

Turning her head and grinning at him, she held her hand to hide the floor number from Matt.

“Sneaky, I like it,” he said to appease her. He made no indication that he could see the floor numbers above the doors and continued playing her game.

DING!

The elevator doors opened to the second floor, and Jessica stepped out, pulling Matt along with her since he was still holding onto her to keep her from falling down or bumping into things. He continued to let her pull him down the long hallway. They stopped at room 228, and he realized that they were standing outside of a honeymoon suite. He played curious but wondered if she would let him inside of her suite. *What was going on in that sexy brain of hers?*

“Um, this is a honeymoon suite. Is there something you’re not telling me? Is there a husband I should be aware of?” he asked her inquisitively.

“Come in, and I’ll tell you the story,” she said, waving the key in front of the door until it lit up. The honeymoon suite

was smaller than the suite he was staying in. Yet, it had a wonderful view and would be a great room for a couple spending their first few days and nights as husband and wife together.

Jessica threw her clutch on the coffee table and fell onto the bed, picking up an empty champagne bottle and trying to swallow anything that was left over.

Matt looked around until he found the mini-fridge. Grabbing a water bottle, he took the empty champagne bottle out of her hand and replaced it with the bottled water “You should really drink this. I could see that you were already partying up here before you made it downstairs. You don’t want to have a bad hangover in the morning.”

Come to think of it, she was pretty thirsty. She twisted the cap off and chugged half the water bottle before she noticed that Matt was staring straight at her. “What?” she asked.

“You said you were gonna tell me why you were staying in this honeymoon suite all by yourself. I take it the friend you planned this trip with was your fiancé?” He couldn’t believe he said that with a straight face.

She nodded in agreement. “He was more than my fiancé. He was my best friend, and he broke my heart,” she started telling him. “We knew each other for years, and our friendship turned into a budding romance. We finally decided to take it to the next level because we realized that we couldn’t live without each other. We had the same dreams. We planned this immaculate wedding, something he wanted more than I did. My parents paid for this beautiful wedding at Gotham Hall in New York City. My mother and I had picked out this extravagant wedding dress called White by Vera Wang Illusion Floral that made me look and feel like a princess. Spencer—that was my fiancé’s name—wanted only the best, and my parents agreed. They spent no expense on our luxury wedding. Spencer and I budgeted for our all-expense paid honeymoon that his parents paid for with a little spending money. We wanted to make sure that we could have the time of our lives while we were here, so I lived without a few luxuries for a year and a half, but I knew it would be worth it.”

“That doesn’t sound all that bad,” Matt interrupted.

“I haven’t gotten to the bad part yet,” she said before taking another sip of her water. “It was the morning of my wedding. This previous morning to be exact. I woke up in a state of bliss in my old bedroom. My entire wedding party had stayed the night at my parents’ house-”

Matt’s phone chirped. He picked it up, checked who had sent him a message, and put it back down as he continued listening to her story.

“We spent half the morning chatting like girls do, eating strawberries, sipping on champagne, and all the other things girls do when they are getting ready for weddings. My hair, makeup, and nails were done before we left for the hall. My stomach was bouncing with butterflies, but the fact that I would be walking down the aisle in a few hours, greeting my best friend, and making him my husband was the best feeling in the world. I wouldn’t want it any other way. That was until my worst nightmare came true.

I was standing in the bridal room of the Gotham Hall. My dress had been zipped with all the buttons done. I looked at myself in the mirror, and then there was a knock on the door. The wedding planner stuck her head in the room and reassured me that we would start in a few moments. All the guests were piled into their seats, and I was getting more nervous by the minute. Whitney, my maid of honor, helped me sit down so I wouldn’t wrinkle my dress, and we waited until it was my cue to go. About twenty minutes later, my mom walked into the room.

“You look so beautiful,” she said, tears streaming down her face.

“What’s taking so long, mom? Is there a problem?” I asked her.

The smile dropped from her face. “My darling. I hate to tell you this, but Spencer hasn’t shown. Vivian gave him a call to see what was taking him so long, and his phone went straight to voicemail. What would you like us to do?”

“I felt my heart drop in my chest. Spencer hadn’t shown. There must be some kind of mistake. I spoke to him this morning, and he was so excited to meet me at the altar. Those were his exact words. I reassured my mom that everything was okay, and that Spencer would show up. She left the room, and Whitney went to the restroom before the wedding started. That’s when I made a run for it. I knew Spencer well enough. If he wasn’t at the hall early, he wasn’t coming. I couldn’t face all my guests in that room, so I took my shoes off and went through the window. I hailed a taxi and had him take me all the way to my apartment, where I changed, grabbed my suitcase and passport, and made my way to JFK. The rest you already know.”

OceanofPDF.com

Spencer threw his phone down on the bed. Why wasn't Matt calling him back? The Coretti brothers did not like to be kept waiting. He dialed his friend's number one more time.

"You've reached the phone of Matthew Miller. Please leave me a detailed message, and I'll get back to you as soon as I can," his voicemail chimed.

"Matt, it's Spencer again. Call me back. I have the Coretti brothers on my heels, and I need to know if the game plan is in play. I need to reassure them that they will be getting the money that we owe them. You know how they are if they don't get their money. If you are deciding on backing out, I suggest that you don't come back to Vegas anytime soon. Because they will be hiding outside your house to find you."

Letting the phone fall, he rubbed his hands through his hair. He couldn't believe what he had gotten himself into. He should be the one in Monaco right now, enjoying his honeymoon with the woman of his dreams. But he wasn't a professional poker player like Matt, and if anyone could get them out of this mess, he could. He just prayed that Matt had his head in the game, and he wasn't playing around. He wasn't in Monaco on vacation, as he was there to conduct business and bring home the first installment of the money that they requested. They were coming up on their deadline, and the thought of that made Spencer nervous.

"You okay, babe?" his girlfriend Melissa sat down on the bed. She rubbed her fingers through his hair and let the strap

of her black teddy slip down her arm, revealing the top of one of her firm breasts. Melissa was no Jessica, but she was good enough for now.

“Yeah, just stressing over some business. Nothing to worry about,” he said, putting his hand on her arm and pulling the strap further down to reveal an erect areola. “But I do know how you can make me feel better,” he said.

Melissa giggled as she pushed him down on the bed and started pulling at his shorts. An image of Jessica flashed before his eyes, and he tried to push the thought of her away, but no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't get her flushed face out of his mind. The way wisps of her raven locks fell in front of her face, little drops of sweat beads running down her shoulders, and the way her mouth moved when she was reaching her high point of ecstasy got him every time.

“Baby, something must be wrong. You didn't even move when I did that favorite thing you like. That thing with my tongue.”

Spencer sat up. “I'm sorry, babe. I guess I just can't get out of my head tonight. Let's lay down and go to sleep.”

Melissa gave him the pouty face.

“I mean it. I'm not in the mood. I'm tired.” He was getting irritated now. Throwing the covers over himself, he turned over and had his back facing Melissa. He just couldn't look at her right now because the one person he wanted to face right now was who he left at the altar. He left her at the altar because he was too much of a coward to tell her what was really going on in his life. He had never kept one secret from her for years, but he knew this was the clencher. If he had told her about his gambling debts, she would have left him. There was no way that she would have been able to forgive him. He came from a family, who was very well off, and she would never understand how he got himself into this mess. He didn't understand it himself. All sense of reason flew out of his mind whenever he was gambling. There were times he wished he played as well as Matt, and then there were times that he wished he had never met Matt at all. This is why it had to be

this way. This is why he would have to settle for Melissa as his consolation prize. No matter how hard he tried, he would never be able to find a woman like Jessica again, which made him want to cry more than anything in the world. Today, he did not only lose the love of his life but also his best friend, and right at this moment, that was more than he could bare.

The sound of Melissa's snoring was getting on his nerves. Anger started to well up inside of him. He hated the Coretti brothers and Matt, but mostly himself for now for being the coward that he was. Jumping out of bed, he put on his shoes and a hoodie, grabbed his keys, and decided to go for a walk. He needed to get rid of some steam. The night air was crisp and cool when he walked outside. He loved desert nights in Vegas, especially in the spring. They were such a nice reprieve from summer nights in Vegas, where the only thing different was the moon replacing the sun.

There was a trail behind the house that led up to the most amazing view. Whenever he had the time, he made his way up to this clearing to see the lights of the city across the night sky. It was the one place where he could come to release some tension. It reminded him that there was always something greater than himself—something in this world that was bigger than his problems. A small bench was positioned behind a tree. It faced the opening in the clearing, and it was one of the most romantic places he had ever been. He only wished that he could have brought Jessica there. However, Melissa was the one who discovered this spot on one of their walks early on in their relationship, and there was no way he could have brought his fiancé anywhere where she might run into his mistress. *It's not like that matters now!* he thought to himself as his mind came back to reality.

His phone beeped. It was a text from Matt. *Plan still on. Things going good. Will call you tomorrow and explain things.*

Spencer felt some tension leave his chest. Now, he could go back and get some much-needed sleep next to the woman who would always be second in his life.

Matt couldn't realize how much Jess' story moved him. There were times when he wanted to cry for her, especially since he knew that this would happen to her. He didn't know all the details, but Spencer had told him that he was going to leave his fiancé at the altar. That was one of the main reasons why Matt was in Monaco this weekend. If Spencer had actually married Jess, they wouldn't be in the mess they were in now, and he wouldn't have to be the one to improvise. He hated having to play this beautiful woman like this, but it was the only way to get what he wanted and so desperately needed. He needed to make sure that the Coretti brothers never got access to his money, so he had to keep playing Spencer like a fiddle and have them go after Spencer and his family, while he still got what he wanted: Jessica.

He had met Spencer Garcia a little over a year ago at the Venetian at one of the card tables. He seemed out of place where he was. He wasn't playing but just observing the players at the table. There was a crowd standing behind the players on all sides and, for some reason, this man stood out from the crowd. His hands were hanging down his sides. His hands were opening and closing into fists, and his neck was moving in a nervous tick. Matt knew then and there that this man wasn't a card player.

Matt slowly made his way through the crowd until he was standing within arm's length of the nervous observer. "Good game?" he asked to spike up a conversation.

“I don’t really know. I don’t play. I’m trying to figure out if he has a good hand or not,” the observer pointed toward the man sitting in front of him.

“Put your hand down,” Matt hissed, looking around to make sure no one had noticed. “You have to be careful around here. People might think you’re cheating.”

“Oh, sorry,” he lowered his hand. “I’m new at this gambling thing.”

“It’s okay. I just know how people are here. I do this for a living.”

“You’re a professional gambler?” the man was clearly stunned.

“Poker player, but yeah,” he chuckled.

“That must be so awesome. I wish I could do something like that. My girlfriend is the poker player. She could give these guys a run for their money, but me? Not so much. I can’t even win at a game of blackjack.”

Matt chuckled. “That’s because you never had the right teacher. Poker is more than just a game of cards. It’s a game of observation as well. You need to know how to read people. You might not have the best hand but can still go home with a lot of money if you know how to read people. It’s a great advantage and one that helps me win every time.”

“Spencer Garcia,” the man held his hand out for Matt to shake.

“Matthew Miller,” he shook back.

“Do you want to grab a drink? I would love to pick your brain about the world of professional poker,” Spencer asked with curiosity.

He wasn’t here on business tonight. Tonight was one of his nights off, but he still found himself at the casinos on these nights because he loved the sound of people’s hopes here, and it was a far cry from his boring life at home. The sound of people’s voices happy to be here and wanting to go home with more than they came with. This was a place that could make or

break people, but for some reason, that sound made him feel at home. “Sure, there’s a lounge on the other side of the card tables where we can sit away from the madness for a while.”

The two found a booth and ordered a couple of beers. “So, is this your first time in Vegas?” he asked Spencer.

“It is, actually. I’ve been to Atlantic City a few times but have never been here. I had to come out here on some business and decided I would check out what everyone has been talking about.”

“And what do you think?”

“I like it so far. This is the first casino I’ve been in, but I am staying here, so that doesn’t really say much. I would like to check out more casinos and see what the differences are.”

“This is one of my favorites. It’s so elegant. Reminds me of what Venice would be like. So, you said that your fiancé plays?”

“Yes, she was taught by her Uncle Vinnie. He used to play a lot in Atlantic City back in the 40s and 50s.”

“Oh, she learned from some of the greats,” he said. “I would love to play with someone of his caliber. I bet he has a lot of tricks up his sleeve.”

“According to her, he does,” Spencer laughed. The two continued to talk for hours. They had so much in common. More than just their fascination with poker.”

Spencer shared a lot about his fiancé, Jessica. To the point where Matt felt like he knew her himself. “Want to see our engagement photo?” Spencer flipped open his wallet and pulled out a wallet-size photo that showed his arms around the waist of a raven-haired woman with piercing emerald green eyes and olive-kissed skin. She was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. The more Spencer talked about her, the more Matt wanted to get to know this woman in person.

“What do you think?” Spencer asked, bringing Matt back to reality.

“What do I think about what?”

“Teaching me how to play poker at a casino level.”

“This is going to take some time,” Matt told him. “It’s not something that I can teach you over a series of days. However, I do have a busy schedule, and I would have to find time to be able to teach you. First of all, how are we going to do this if you live all the way in New York?”

“Well, you wouldn’t be doing this for free. I’ll pay you for the lessons, of course, and, to answer your question, my job’s sending me out here once a month or so, and when they’re not, we can always meet in Atlantic City.”

Matt thought about it for a second. He could always use the challenge. It would help save him from the monotony that had become his life because the next poker tour was still a couple of months away, and he needed things to do with his extra time. Plus, this could be a fulfilling venture. Something he had never really tried before, and he could hear more about Jessica. “Sounds great to me. When do we start?”

Matt and Spencer met up a few times a month and started to form a strong business relationship. Spencer was a terrible poker player. Matt started out with the basics: observation. They would attend various poker games at different casinos, and they would observe the players. Afterward, Matt would quiz him on each of the players and see if he could tell when they were bluffing, their certain mannerisms, and tells. Spencer had a hard time figuring that out, so Matt moved on to teaching him the basics of the game, and they would come back to the observation part of the lessons later.

Even though Spencer was awful, he never gave up. He was determined he could learn how to be a great poker player. He just needed to keep practicing, and that is exactly what they did, practice, but what Spencer didn’t know was that Matt was observing him the whole time, especially when he talked about Jessica. In the beginning, Spencer talked about Jessica like he worshiped the ground she walked on.

At one of their meetings in Vegas, Spencer started complaining about Jessica and her family.

“They think they’re God’s gift to the earth. I swear,” he started off the conversation.

Matt was confused. He had no idea who Spencer was talking about. “Who?”

“Jessica and her parents. They keep telling me that we should have the wedding this way or that way, — I know what I want, and I’m not going to back down. I mean, my family comes from money, and I know what is classy and what’s not. Just because they’re paying for the wedding doesn’t mean that I don’t get a say.”

“What about Jessica? You don’t care what she wants?” he asked.

“Of course, I do, but there should be some sort of compromise.” The rest of the night continued like that. That was until Spencer let something slip, and he said Melissa instead of Jessica.

“Who’s Melissa?” Matt asked.

A wide grin went up Spencer’s face. *“She’s the showgirl I met the last time I was here. She’s incredible. So reckless and full of adventure. I’m seeing her tomorrow night.”*

“What about your fiancé?”

“What she won’t know won’t hurt her. It’s all harmless fun. I’m still getting married,” he responded like he wasn’t doing anything wrong, like he wasn’t deceiving his best friend, the woman who was loyal to him. *“I just need a little relaxation from the stress of wedding planning itself. Every time I came home, she would hound me with questions about making decisions about trivial things like flowers. I know I wanted to be involved, but she could get off my back. I sometimes wish that we could go back to the night before I proposed. Where we just made passionate love before we even thought about dinner. Sometimes I wish for the old days. Is that so wrong?”*

Matt kept his mouth shut. Again, he was observing Spencer and learning how to play him. This was going to be the biggest game of his life, and he needed to make sure that he knew every single detail about Spencer Garcia. This would

be the ultimate test of how good of a player he was. His mentor had taught him something valuable about poker, which made Matt so good. He told him that poker was very much a game of life. How players acted when playing was similar to how they dealt with situations in real life. Now, he knew how Spencer dealt with stress. Instead of fixing the problem or communicating with his soon-to-be wife, he decided to cheat on her or, as he called it, have a little relaxation. At this point, Matt knew what his end game would be and what hands he would be holding for the win, so he just went along with the lessons for the next few months.

That was until they met the Coretti brothers.

OceanofPDF.com

Jessica realized that she had been talking about herself for over an hour. Matt must be severely bored. She commended him for sitting there, listening to her vent about her ex. What kind of guy would be really interested to hear a girl complain about her ex and how he did her wrong?

“I’m so sorry,” she said, pulling herself out of her sorrow. “I’ve been talking about myself for the past hour. You must be bored out of your mind.”

“No, I like hearing about you. I’m sorry that he put you through that. No one deserves that. I know that if it were me and my fiancé felt different about the wedding, all they had to do was communicate with me. I would rather postpone the wedding and work on things than not have it happen altogether, but some people are more cowardly than others,” he said with a shrug. “No matter what happened, remember that you did nothing wrong, and you are not the problem. He didn’t deserve you.”

“You are so sweet,” she said. She studied this man as she sat back firmly on the bed. She had only known him for a couple of hours, but in that short amount of time, he made her feel very comfortable. She had no problem opening up to him and telling him all the details of the worst day of her life, and he didn’t even bat an eye. He offered her encouragement. Who was this guy? “Tell me something about yourself. I don’t really know anything about you.”

“Hmmm, let’s see. Well, you know my name’s Matt, and I’m from Las Vegas.”

“Oh, that sounds like a fun place to live. All the glamour and lights. What brings you to Monaco then? I know I would never leave the city if I lived in Vegas,” she said with a sparkle in her eyes.

Matt laughed. “You would think so. Vegas is a great city, and I love living there, but you just have to venture out sometimes and see other parts of the world. You just told me that you’re from New York. I could say the same thing about the Big Apple. There’s so much to see and do there. Why would I ever want to leave?”

“Okay, okay, I get it. There is more to see than where we live. You never answered my question, though. What brings you to Monaco?”

“Oh, you caught that, huh? I was trying to be slick,” he lifted his eyebrow, and Jessica felt her knees go weak. She was glad she was sitting down. She still had quite a buzz going on inside her head, and there would be no way she could stand now. “I’m here on business,” he said without giving any details.

“So, you were conducting business tonight?” she asked him. “Whatever business you’re in, I want in.”

“Yes, I was before you showed up. Our game was just a friendly game after I took all of Thomas’ and Terrance’s money from the previous game.”

“Wait, let me get this straight. You’re a professional gambler? Is that even legal?”

“Professional poker player, which I guess would kind of be the same thing, but yes, it is legal. We have a tour every year, and sometimes, we play the European tour championship game in the Room of the Stars. This has come to be one of my favorite casinos in the world.”

“It is beautiful. Hell, this whole island is beautiful, and I’ve only got to see very little of it.”

“Maybe I can show you around tomorrow. If you have a little time,” he said while grabbing a sweating water bottle from the ice bucket next to the bed. He pressed it to his red

cheeks and his forehead. Drips of condensation fell onto his neck and slid down his shirt.

Jessica felt it in the pit of her stomach—the burning hot sensation of arousal. It hit her like she had burned herself, which made her push back into the head of the bed. She had never felt this way before about anyone, including Spencer. She needed to get a hold of things before she went too far. *Just keep him talking, Jess. Just keep him talking.*

“Oh yeah, that sounds great. I want to see as much of this place before I have to go back to New York and face my family. They don’t even know that I left,” she said.

“What do you mean?”

“I never called them from the airport or when I landed. I just couldn’t face anyone with all their questions and the ‘I told you so’s’ from my parents. I needed to get away from it all and clear my head. I think I have about 20 missed calls on my phone. I know I’ll have to answer them eventually before they file a missing person’s report, but I’m not gonna worry about that tonight. I need to get Spencer off my mind. Can you help me do that, Matt? Can you help me get Spencer off my mind? We can play a little game if you want. I think I saw a deck of cards around here,” she said as she got up and started looking for them.



MATT WATCHED THE LOOK ON JESS’S FACE WHEN HE PUT THE water bottle on his face. There was pure attraction written all over it, at least that’s what he thought he saw. It was gone in a flash of a second. Could she really be attracted to him like he was attracted to her? There was only one way to find out. He knew an opportunity would come up soon enough, and he would leap on it, so when she suggested that they play a little game to keep her mind off of Spencer, he already had one in mind.

“I don’t think you’re ready for it,” he said flirtatiously.

She turned around and looked him dead in the eye. “Try me,” she said.

Those words made Matt gulp. Meeting her gaze, he stood up and joined her at the little table in the room. “How about we make this worth our while? No money attached. I challenge you to a game of strip poker,” he finished with a smile. He was waiting to see if she would break down.

“Let’s see what you got without your boys around,” she said as she took the deck of cards out of the pack and started shuffling them. “You know, I learned how to play poker from my Great Uncle Vinnie. He was a big name in Atlantic City in the 40s and 50s. You should look him up.”

“Vinnie, what?” he asked.

“Vinnie De Luca,” she replied.

Matt thought he might have heard that name somewhere before. He was going to have to do some digging when he got back home, but right now, he needed to put his game face on. “So, let’s make this interesting,” he said to her. “What game are we playing?”

“5 card stud. If there’s no money, what’s the ante?”

“A piece of clothing that we both agree on,” he said.

Jessica dealt two cards to them, one face up and one face down. “I’m betting your shirt,” she said. Matt matched the bet, and they continued until they both had five cards.

“Okay, you ready to turn over and see who wins,” he said. They both flipped over their fifth card. “Looks like dealer loses,” Matt said with triumph.

Jess got up and started to dance to some invisible music, but it didn’t bother Matt at all. That was one of the sexiest things he had seen in a long time. She wasn’t a sore loser at all. She took her punishment like a champ, and he liked that very much. He had no idea what Spencer had been thinking. Oh well, his loss was only Matt’s gain. She slowly and seductively pulled her shirt over her head, and he could see the curve in her spine and the back of a sexy lacy black bra. She was facing the door when she took it off. She slowly turned

around, and he kept himself from losing all control at that moment. Her breasts were pushed up to greet him, but her nipples were hidden behind the lace, and he prayed that she lost the next hand so that he could see the bra come off.

Just to show her that he wasn't an egotistical winner, he started to unbutton his shirt.

“What are you doing?” she asked him.

“Showing you that there are no losers in this game,” he said as he continued to take his shirt off and let it drop onto the floor.

“I hope I'm not going to regret this,” Jess said as she rushed up to him and planted her lips on his. After his initial shock wore off, he felt a fire behind that kiss, and he kissed her back with everything he had in him. She pulled back and looked longingly at him. Putting her hand on the primitive sun tattooed on the left side of his chest, she pushed him down on the chair and straddled him. He felt her lips on top of his again, her tongue pushing inside his mouth. Opening his mouth, his tongue met hers with the same intensity, one that made him start to grow hard.

“You want to take this party to the bed?” he asked her, breathless. Standing up, she took his arm and led him over to the bed. He laid her down and looked down at the beauty that was staring up at him. She was a vision and all he wanted to do was make sweet love to her. Crawling on top of her, he kissed her mouth and then moved down to her neck. He moaned as he continued to move down to her breasts, slowly sliding one strap down, then he cradled her firm breast in his hand and licked the tip of her nipple with his tongue. He could feel her shudder underneath him. Looking her straight in the eye, he took her entire nipple in his mouth, sucking and licking it. He could feel her softening underneath him.

Her hands reached down and started to unbutton her pants, and he helped her shimmy them off until her legs were free of them. He never once let her nipple out of his mouth. As soon as her pants were off, he repositioned himself, putting his leg between her legs to part them. She was wearing a thin lacey

black thong that matched her bra, and it was making him go crazy.

Before he had time to think about it, she took his hand and led it between her moist folds. He gasped as he felt how wet she was. He parted her lips with his middle finger and started running it up and down the length of her, plunging one or two fingers inside of her to see how tight she was. He could feel himself getting harder every second he pulled his finger out of her. Sliding his finger upward, he found her clit and started teasing it.

She put her hand on his chest as she squirmed underneath him. Her cries started to get higher as his fingers found the spot and started teasing it in a circular motion. She felt her orgasm before he heard it. Her clit started getting wetter and wetter, and then her whole body spasmed in a cry of bliss.

He opened up his eyes and looked down at her. It took him a moment to find the words. “Do you want me to continue?” he asked, reaching down for his pants.

Recognition appeared on her face, and she stopped him by grabbing his hand. “I want to say yes, but I don’t think this is a good idea. I think we should wait.”

Without another word, Matt got up from the bed and grabbed his shirt. He had started to feel like everything that had just occurred was a bad idea, and he needed to get out of there before he made another mistake.

“Wait, there’s something I have to tell you.”

OceanofPDF.com

“*I* don’t have the money to pay the casino,” Jessica blurted out.

“What?” he asked in surprise.

“I lost all my money in the first game that we played. I thought I could win it back, but when the dealer won, I was so stunned I had no idea what I was going to do,” she said. “I should be here racking my brain on how I’m going to pay them back, but instead, I got caught up in this. I just can’t get this out of my head. Believe me, it has nothing to do with you,” she let her voice drop. What else was she supposed to say? She still thought that she was betraying Spencer, even though he was the one who left her at the altar. She knew it was stupid, but she couldn’t deny her heart. She didn’t want Matt to think he was a rebound. She really liked him, but she needed to know she was only attracted to him because of the alcohol, to get back at Spencer, or if her attraction was genuine. She hoped he could understand that, which was why she stopped. She wasn’t that girl. She didn’t have sex for all the wrong reasons. Sex meant more to her than that. It was not only a connection she had with someone else, but it was also something you shared with someone you cared about. She wasn’t about one-night stands or flings. If she was going to go all the way with Matt, she wanted to because it was part of something. She didn’t know if she was truly ready for that yet.

“That is a problem,” he sat down on the chair closest to the wall, his shirt still in his hands. She averted her eyes from staring at his nicely chiseled chest and the bulge in his pants.

She knew he must be uncomfortable right now. She knew she would be.

“I don’t know what to do,” she said. “But I don’t want to keep you here, especially after I just rejected you. I can figure this out on my own.” Why was she telling him this anyway? It’s not like she expected him to help her.

“It’s okay. I can help you come up with some options,” he said.

“Really?” she sat up and pulled the covers over her partially naked body. Now that they were separated from each other, she felt kind of silly sitting there all exposed to him.

“Yeah, I know what it feels like to be in that position. It happened to me once or twice early on in my career, except things are a little different here in Monaco. You’re not in the United States, and things can get a little bit scary. Do you have anyone who could wire you the money?”

She shook her head. There was no way she was going to call her parents, who were worried sick about her, and ask them if they would pay her gambling debts. They would freak out. She couldn’t embarrass herself any further. “No, I don’t.” She didn’t hesitate. She probably had a friend who she could call. Whitney came to mind, but again, she didn’t want to have to explain herself. This was all too much. She was supposed to be having the time of her life in Monaco, not trying to figure out how to pay a gambling debt while nursing a broken heart. What else could happen to her? She already felt like she was on rock bottom, making poor decisions every other turn. This was not who she was.

“Okay, we could go to the bank and ask for credit, then you would just have to pay them back.”

“I guess I could try that. Oh my God, this is so embarrassing. How did I get myself into this mess? This was supposed to be the best weekend of my life, and it’s turning into one of the worst, save for meeting you.” She wanted to reassure him that he was the only good thing about her past few days.

“Thank you. I wasn’t taking it personally. I know you’ve been going through a lot the past couple of days,” he said.

“Can’t I make out a payment plan with the casino? I really don’t want to get the bank involved. I just know that my parents will find out, and then I will never hear the end of it. There has to be another way. I don’t know what to do,” she put her hand over her face to keep her from sobbing. This was unfair. It was all too much, and to make matters worse, she couldn’t go to the bank and ask for a loan. She had no collateral or way of paying them back. Secondly, her parents would find out because she would have to call them to be able to co-sign for the loan, and she knew they would never because they couldn’t afford it if she missed any of the payments.

“I wish there was something I could say that would help. What about your Uncle Vinnie? Could you call him and ask him to loan you the money?”

“You don’t want to borrow money from a loan shark,” she said with conviction.

“I definitely know what you mean. I got myself into one of those situations before, and it wasn’t pretty getting out. I still feel like I’m reaping the repercussions of that bad decision. I guess under the circumstances, the only thing I can think of is you going to the bank and trying to get a small loan to pay back the casino.”

“What if that isn’t an option either?” she asked him.

“I’m afraid the casino doesn’t play when it comes to their money. They give you 24 hours to pay back the debt, or they will throw you in jail until you serve time or find another way to pay. This is a town of billionaires. As you should know from your uncle when it comes to money, they will get it by any means necessary, except their ‘necessary’ is debtor’s prison, which I heard is not somewhere an American wants to go. You know how the French feel about Americans.”

Matt’s words hit her hard, and tears started falling down her face before she could stop them. She was screwed. There was nothing she could do because she had nowhere to turn.

Her parents were going to be furious. They were already against so many decisions she had made in her life recently that this would just be the icing on her cake. She could just hear her father's voice now, *'What were you thinking, young lady?! Didn't we raise you better than that? Now, you are going to have to face the consequences of your decisions'*. Therefore, calling them wasn't an option. Not only was she going to have to explain why she ran from the hall, but then she was going to have to grovel and tell them about her current situation. All they were going to do was humiliate her and then make her face the consequences. Her parents were big perpetrators of tough love. She was going to have to make a decision by tomorrow. For now, she was going to drink the rest of the night away, at least she could forget her worries for one more night. Forgetting that she was halfway-naked, she got out of bed and walked to the mini bar. Throwing it open, she grabbed the rest of the alcohol bottles that were left from earlier and dropped them on the bed.

Matt raised an eyebrow when he saw what she was doing. "Do you really think that's wise?" he asked her.

"Why do I have to worry? The room and all of the amenities are being paid for by the Garcias. Let Spencer's family pay for me to have a little fun. After all, it was their son who left me alone at the altar."

Matt shook his head. "I can't really complain about your logic, but I think all you need is a good night's rest, and you can think about this with a clear head in the morning. Maybe you will come up with some different ideas then," he said – hoping it would bring her some reassurance.

"What do you think I'm doing?" she asked him. "These will help me sleep tonight. They will help me forget about all the worries that I will have to face tomorrow, so don't rain on my parade, okay?" She could see that he didn't like that. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to snap at you. I know this is not how you want to be spending the rest of your night."

He sighed before he spoke. "We all need things to get us out of our minds or to numb the pain sometimes. I hope that I was that for you this evening, and, as I said earlier, maybe I

can be that for you tomorrow when I show you around the island. Hell, if all the amenities are paid for, we should just order room service in the morning on behalf of the Garcias,” he said with a laugh.

Jessica frowned. She really shouldn't be taking advantage of the Garcias. Even though they didn't want her to be with their son, they had never done anything wrong to her personally. It was only their son who had hurt her when he left her at the altar. They were probably glad they had dodged the bullet that was her life right now. The thought alone made her heart hurt even more.

“Wait, I hope you don't think I'm actually serious. I was just teasing,” he said. “I would never take advantage of their hospitality, especially given that I don't even know them. I can take care of myself, and breakfast will be my treat,” he said.

“Thank you for being so understanding. Where did you come from? I've never met a man as understanding as you are before. Most men that I know could care less about anybody else but themselves. Case in point, my ex-fiancé, who hasn't even attempted to call to check up on me. He should give me a chance not to answer his phone calls. I mean, if he truly loved me, he would want to make sure that I was okay at least. I guess that's just being too hopeful, right? Oh God, listen to me. Don't I sound pathetic? Matt, I totally give you permission to leave this suite and go back to your own. You don't have to sit here and listen to me bitch about another man and how he has hurt me. I would never expect you to. I know if I was in your position, I don't think I could sit here, watch you drink, and babble on about your ex. I'm sorry for putting you through this. You must think I'm awful,” she said.

“Jess, if I was that disinterested in what you had to say, I would have left already, and I wouldn't have offered to take you out to breakfast tomorrow and go and see the sights. I think you're being too hard on yourself. Don't you have friends at home that you can be your full self around?” he asked her.

Jessica looked shocked. “I guess I never thought of it that way. Honestly, I don't think that I have anyone at home that I

have ever been as open with in my life. You are the very first person,” she had no idea, but the thought of that hit differently.

“I really hope that you figure things out,” he said with a smile as he bid her goodnight and left to back to his suite and sleep. “I will check in on you in the morning if you don’t mind,” he said as he shut the door firmly behind him.

OceanofPDF.com

*M*att closed the door of Jess' suite firmly behind him. The events of the night came rushing back to him. After all that he knew about Spencer's Jessica, he had never thought in a million years that she would have opened up to him like that. Well, at least that fast, but he had to get out of that room. Her vulnerability was getting to him, and he knew that the next time he saw, Spencer he was going to clock him for making her feel like that. However, seeing her strutting to the mini-bar just in her bra and thong, ass jiggling, was driving him crazy. It made him remember how soft she felt underneath him. The feel of her pussy as he was rubbing it, and the sounds that were coming out of her mouth. All he wanted to do was fuck her hard, but that wasn't in the cards for the night, so he had to save himself from the ache in his pants and go back to his suite and take care of it himself.

Pulling himself together, he walked back to the elevator and took it up to the ninth floor. The door of his suite opened up to a clean room—the maid must have been there. The bed was turned down for him. Ignoring all the special amenities the hotel provided him for his stay, he walked over to the bathroom and turned on the shower, turning the nozzle as hot as it went until he saw steam rising around him. He took that as an invitation and stripped down to his birthday suit.

He slid the door open to the shower and walked right under the water, letting it scorch his skin. He loved the way it burned all the way down. After he had been in the shower for a few moments, he started to clean all the smells of the casino off him, as well as the smell and taste of Jess. It didn't matter

because he would never be able to get that sweet smell and taste of her out of his mouth. She tasted like nothing he had ever experienced before. She tasted like hope, recklessness, and love. He tasted like everything he had ever dreamed of in a woman, and he finally knew how he could make things better for her. He finally knew how he could get what he wanted and help her out of her dilemma. It was killing two birds with one stone, but he knew that they would be great together. He just hoped she understood that too.

Not being able to get her off his mind, he pumped some conditioner on his hand and moved back under the water. Closing his eyes, he pictured her lying on the bed, staring up at him, his hands in between her legs while she was moaning in bliss. He grew harder than he had been a few moments ago, and he was hard then too. He took all of himself in his hand and started to stroke slowly. The conditioner reminded him of how soft and squishy she felt under his fingers, and he imagined this was the rhythm he would take when he first put himself inside of her. He would slowly thrust his full length inside her and then slowly pull it out, the same exact motion he was using with his fist. He would keep this up for a few moments and then go faster for a few seconds to get her wanting more, then he would recede his speed, doing this over and over again until he drove her crazy, and she screamed for him to go faster and harder, then he would give her everything that he had. He changed up his momentum in the shower. With his eyes closed, he imagined how her body responded to his motions and when he changed positions. He could feel himself on the brink of orgasm, and he slowed down a little bit. He didn't want the dream to end. In his mind, he flipped Jess over on her back and took her doggy style. In this position, he could feel everything more, and he started pumping harder, his fist copying the motion that he was playing in his mind. This time he didn't slow himself down when he came to the break of orgasm. He let it wash over him until he couldn't stand it anymore and held onto the wall for support. He continued to stand in this current position until he felt like he could put all of his weight on his legs. Turning off the shower, he grabbed a towel and fell onto the bed without getting dressed. He hoped that he could find out if sex with Jess was as good as he

imagined it because it was wonderful in his mind. Standing up, he grabbed a bottled water from the mini fridge and some strawberries from the rack of fruit that had been delivered to his room while he was gone. The strawberries tasted so ripe and sweet, and he licked his fingers to savor the last of the juices left on his fingers.

When he had his fill, he laid back down on the bed and picked up the phone. He knew exactly what he was going to do.

“Hotel de Paris, how may I help you?” the clerk at the front desk answered the phone. She sounded chipper even at two o’clock in the morning.

“Yes, can you transfer me to room 228, please?”

“Hold on one moment.” Matt stayed on the line and waited for the ring and then for Jess to answer it on the other end. He hoped she was still awake because she was going to want to hear what he was going to say to her.



WHAT IS THAT RINGING NOISE? JESSICA ROLLED OVER IN BED. The room was pitch black; she had turned off all the lights after Matt had left the room. She wanted to match the color to the inside of her eyelids and had even closed all the curtains, which had blocked out all the stars that had continued to shine into her room, even when she had politely asked them not to. The ringing continued, and she knew that it wasn’t going to stop on its own. She was going to have to get up and find the source of the ringing.

Throwing her legs over the bed, she tried to make her way to the light switch without bumping into anything. “Ouch,” she yelled as she ran into the table, but at least she knew that the light was to the right of the door on the other side of the table. Turning the light on, she looked around for the source of the sound and realized that it was the hotel phone. Trudging back to the nightstand, she sat down on the bed. “This better be good,” she said. Who would be calling at this hour? No one

knew where she was. She prayed it wasn't her parents finally locating her. Maybe she should have taken the phone off the hook. It was too late now.

"Jess, it's Matt. Did I wake you?" he asked.

Her heart started beating faster. He called to check up on her, and it wasn't her parents. Those were two good things, but why was he calling so late? Hadn't he just left the room about an hour ago?

"Yeah, I fell asleep a little bit after you left. Is everything okay?" she asked him. "Did you forget something important that you need?"

There was silence on the other end of the line.

"Hello?"

"Sorry, I was going to say something to the effect that I left you there, and you could come up to my room as another attempt to flirt with you, but, as that is all in bad taste, I was refraining from saying anything, except I just revealed all of that to you now, so..." he trailed off.

"Oh, funny," she chuckled. It was way too late for awkward talk. "Um, is there a reason you called?"

"Oh yeah, sorry. I got distracted. I called because I was thinking about our last conversation, you know—your debt problem, and I think that I might have found a solution that would help you solve that," he said anxiously.

"No way. What did you figure out?" she asked enthusiastically.

"Yeah, I remembered a personal banker who might be able to loan you the money for your debt."

"You know, I don't want to go through the bank. I was trying to avoid that. How is this any new information that could help me?"

"Just listen, okay? I know him on a personal level, and he would lend you his own personal money. It wouldn't be coming from the bank or anything."

“Oh, has he helped people in my situation before? I mean there have got to be other people who have gotten themselves into this position before. I can’t be the only one, and I know for a fact that the whole Principality of Monaco does not want to put everyone in prison that owes them money.”

“Yes, he has helped people in your situation before, except that it has been a while. He kind of has retired, and that’s why I didn’t think of him until a little bit ago.”

“That’s great if he comes out of retirement,” she said. “Just my luck, but he wouldn’t want to help me or anything, even though he does understand my dilemma and might even be empathetic towards it.”

“I know for a fact he would come out of retirement for you.”

“Well, that is great news. So, when can we call him?” she asked.

“Before we get into all that. There are some stipulations that I should address with you before we go any further.”

“Okay,” she said. “But I do have one question, though. What are his interest rates? Because I don’t want to have to pay back double my money, just to get out of debt, even though that really shouldn’t even matter at this point. I mean, who am I kidding? I would probably pay triple if I knew that I would stay out of prison. Anyway, here I go babbling all over again.”

“His interest rates are actually very reasonable because he doesn’t charge interest at all. To be honest, it’s more than likely you wouldn’t have to pay back the loan at all. He would probably gift you the money because he would see it as an investment.”

“An investment? An investment in what? Why would he give me the money for free? This is starting to sound stranger by the minute. Matt, what’s really going on?”

“He would be investing in you because all you have to do is one small, simple favor, something that would help both of

you in the long run. You get yourself out of debt, and it helps get him out of a bind. What do you say?”

“What do you mean what do I say? How would we know what the favor would be? We haven’t even asked him yet!” Now, she was getting more anxious. It was like Matt was talking in circles. She wished he would get right to the point and tell her what he knew or wait until the morning when they could call his friend and see if he would even do it. Why were they even discussing favors right now?

“I know what the favor would be because I’m the friend. I would be the person gifting you this money to pay back your debt to the casino.”

Now, Jessica was really shocked. “Oh, why didn’t you think of that before?”

“Well, as I said, this is not something I have done in a really long time, and I had to look over my finances to make sure I could even afford to do it before I suggested it.” He knew he was lying. He could totally afford to give her the money. He was swimming in it, but he couldn’t let her know that right now. “So, after careful consideration, which only took me an hour, I have decided that I could gift you the money.”

“Well, thank you, but what made you come to the conclusion that you could gift me the money instead of loaning it to me? Either way, it would be an investment, especially if you charge me interest. I mean, I really appreciate the fact that you would like to gift it to me, but you don’t know me that well. Something must have happened for you to put that much trust in me. I guess what I am trying to ask you is, what is the favor?”

She heard Matt sigh on the other end of the phone. “It’s nothing too crazy. I’m not going to ask you to kill anyone or anything. I was just going to ask you if you would give me the pleasure of becoming my wife. In other words, Jessica, would you marry me?”

The room was empty, except for the minimal furniture and a flower vase on top of the center table. Jessica sat on the expensive-looking sofa across from it, staring blankly at the single flower inside the vase. The door was closed, and she heard faint voices from the outside but couldn't make out what they were saying, not that she was trying to, anyway. She was occupied, trying to recall the events of the last few hours. It seemed like a lifetime ago. She contemplated how she ended up where she was. She couldn't believe the turn her life had taken in a single day.

Was it just this morning that she was on her way to getting married to what she believed was the man of her dreams. She had believed she was going to make it, that she was finally going to settle down and live out a long and happy life.

Sure, she felt the nerves every bride feels on the big day, but she was looking forward to it, and that's why nothing could have prepared her for what happened next. She was left at the altar by the man she thought she would spend the rest of her life with. Jessica wondered which was more humiliating, the fact that her tragic life was out on display for all the guests to witness, or that she was the only one who seemed genuinely shocked. Looking at the people who gave her looks of pity and sympathy, she found not a single face filled with the same horror that she wore on her face.

Had she been that clueless? Was everyone in that church aware of Spencer's disloyalties but her? She couldn't take the crushing humiliation any longer, so she ran away where her

feet took her. Their honeymoon was already planned and paid for, part of it was her hard-earned money. Maybe it's not that big of a deal for her ex to throw it away, but Jessica hated wasting what she could have used for a better cause. In a moment of impulsive insanity, she decided that she would go on this honeymoon by herself. She deserved the luxury hotels, the beds, and the spas she paid for. Without letting herself think better of it, she took the flight to Monte Carlo. She found a bar and got drunk like she had never done before. After all, it's not every day you get dumped at the altar like Ted Mosby.

What a classic, she thought as she chugged down another glass of vodka. The casino in Monte Carlo was as grand as she had always imagined it to be, with gamblers bustling at every table. The night air was electric, and she was drunk out of her mind. She tried to gamble her problems away. At first, she thought she was off to a good start, but eventually, she racked up quite a bit of debt. She got even drunker. Her opponent seemed to win all the rounds at her cost, and he was mighty pleased about it. She almost hooked up with him, and, to top it all off, that professional gambler offered to pay off her debt in exchange for her hand in marriage. Jessica had experienced a lot of crazy things in her life, but these last two days take the cake of being over the top.

She had piled up a staggering \$50,000 debt to the casino and had no idea how to pay it off. She had to pay it back within 24 hours or get arrested. Of course, she didn't have that much money and was starting to panic when the professional gambler, her opponent, came to the rescue. He proposed to her, right then and there in the casino. He offered to pay off her debt if she agreed to marry him. Of course, she had laughed at his face and told him to get the hell out with his bluffing, but then 24 hours were over, and here she was, locked up in a hotel room.



“IT’S NOTHING TOO CRAZY. I’M NOT GOING TO ASK YOU TO kill anyone for me or anything. I was just going to ask you if

you would give me the pleasure of becoming my wife, In other words, Jessica, would you marry me?” Matt said over the phone.

Jessica was stunned. She had been drinking all night, so she was understandably buzzed and in a state of panic and hopelessness. Plus, she was barely half-awake when Matt called her room. He had started by telling her how he knew the best way she could get out of this mess. Hearing Matt give her a solitary option of getting out of that debt, slowly pulled her out of her daze, but the sudden proposal was enough to pull her back to reality. She was in shock. She didn't know if she had heard him right. She might be losing her mind at this point.

Wait, what? Did I just hear a proposal? Is he proposing to me? No, that can't be right. Maybe I'm hallucinating.

“Excuse me?” she gaped into the receiver.

Matt repeated his marriage proposal to her in earnest, but the same thought kept running through her mind.

I must have heard him wrong. Why would he ask me, a stranger he just met, to marry him? He must be crazy, or I'm still drunk. I'm hearing things. This broken wedding of mine mixed with the dubious amounts of alcohol I downed has me out of it. Am I so desperate to get married that now I'm making up imaginary marriage proposals from strangers?

After a long and awkward silence of ringing these thoughts in her mind over and over again, Jessica finally asked, “What did you just say? I'm sorry I must have heard you wrong,” Jessica chuckled, “I could've sworn I heard you proposing to me? My ears must be failing me due to all this drinking. I'm hammered right now.”

The voice on the other end rang out, “Well, I do agree that you are indeed hammered from all the drinking, like wow, you downed a whole fountain last night.” Matt chuckled and then continued, in a more serious tone, “But you definitely heard me correctly. I did just ask you to marry me. Let me repeat. Jessica, will you marry me?”

This was the turning point of Jessica's crazy night. She thought that with all the craziness she's faced in these last two days, there wouldn't be any more surprises, but clearly, she was wrong. Life has many surprises planned for her—*too* many. Matt's abrupt proposal threw a wrench in the already dysfunctional engine that was her supposed self-honeymoon.

She still couldn't think clearly. Jessica believed that Maatt was making fun of her. In her mind, that proposal was basically something along the lines of '*If you sleep with me, I'll erase your debts,*' but why would he want to marry her just to sleep with her? It's not like that was a prerequisite or anything. She honestly didn't know what was worse—that Matt found her whole situation hilarious enough to joke like this or that he thought she was going to be some cheap bang that he bought his way in, especially when she had first thought that Matt was an understanding and kind person. All these thoughts made her erupt.

"You think this is funny? I have just passed through a series of awful events one after another, and you're joking? You woke me up in the middle of the night to play such an elaborate joke when I'm already knee-deep in trouble as it is."

"No, it's nothing like that! I'm not jo—" Matt's response to Jessica's allegations was cut midway by her anger.

"Just leave me alone! I'll figure out how to handle this debt on my own. I can't believe I actually thought you were a decent guy, trying to help me through my problems. I just—" Jessica's breath finally caught up in her mouth. She was exhausted and defeated, and if those weren't enough, her jetlag wouldn't let her function properly. She was sleep-deprived, so she couldn't handle another event that day.

"I don't want to think about you or any of this tonight. Don't call me again," Jessica hung up the phone before she could hear Matt trying to utter something on his end.

Putting the phone in its position, Jessica stood there trying to figure out where it all went wrong. How did it come to this? She no longer had the strength to stand. Lifelessly moving her body to the bed, she dropped herself down onto the mattress.

She grabbed the pillow and buried her face in it. The reality of it all finally hit her. The tears started to pour down her face and into the pillow. Her life came crashing down in just two days. It was such a huge mess she couldn't even begin to understand how to untangle it because not only had she lost her significant other, but she got herself into this mess, which was a joke. It was serious, and she was two steps away from going to jail. How could she ever get out of this? What was supposed to be the best trip of her life turned into a nightmare, and the tragedies kept on piling up one after another. Letting it all out, her exhaustion got the best of her, and she finally succumbed to sleep in a fetal position.



JESSICA SLEPT FOR A FEW HOURS IN A DREAMLESS SLEEP. SHE was hoping that this would all be just a nightmare, but reality was often cruel. Instead of the relief of waking up from a nightmare, she was greeted with a blinding headache immediately after. Her mind was all over the place, and her head was pounding. She sat up and threw the pillow away, then searched for a water bottle. Thankfully, she found one, and, to her surprise and relief, some aspirin on the table near her bed. She unscrewed the lid and gulped down the water, then took a pill.

She quickly got up and ran to the bathroom to freshen up. Once she found the sink, she looked at herself in the adjacent mirror. Her smudged makeup and mascara made her look miserable. Her hair looked frizzy and stuck out in all the wrong places. With that, last night's memories came flooding back. She remembered the debt and the events with Matt. With that little trip to memory lane, the hangover took its toll on Jessica, and she threw up.

Her headache gradually started to subside after throwing up. She couldn't fathom the situation she was in. Leaving the bathroom, she put on her shirt and got dressed. She tried to think of solutions that could get her out of this situation, but she couldn't think of anything that might help her.

Jessica took out her phone and googled “Matthew Miller”. Immediately, the screen filled up with results, and she saw the familiar face of Matt pop up. Since her location was turned on, she came across a lot of local news involving Matt. She skimmed through them until she found his Instagram ID in one of the search results and clicked on it. The link opened her Instagram app on Matt’s page.

Hmm, a nice following he’s got there. He is pleasant to the eyes, I will admit.

Jessica scrolled through his pictures. There were a lot of them inside the casino where they met. He was big on traveling, too, and had pictures of many exhilarating activities. He seemed like a very outgoing person, judging from his Instagram profile. She also found that he had a lot of friends and seemed to be popular among them. She was scrolling down when a picture caught her eye, and she stopped her thumb. Her heart came to a sudden stop, then picked up again with more speed. This could not be happening, she thought. There was a picture of Spencer and Matt with their arms on each other’s shoulders. The caption on the photo read, “Met with this guy after so long”.

SPENCER KNOWS MATT?! For real? It seemed too much of a coincidence that she met him right after being left at the altar, and then he proposed to her out of nowhere. Could it be that this was all some kind of plot between the two of them? Could Spencer have set Matt up for this? What if this was some bet?

Jessica was shocked to her bone, but surely they couldn’t be so cruel as to play such a mean joke, right? Besides, there was no way they had known beforehand that she would end up here, get drunk, and gamble away all her money. It didn’t make sense.

Finally, it clicked. What if she just walked away? What if she just ended her disastrous honeymoon and simply left? Was that even possible?

No you stupid fool, you signed in with your credit and all that debt is recorded there.

Jessica let out a sigh of frustration. She thought that if she would just check out and catch an instant flight, her problems would be solved. If she left the country, they couldn't do anything, so, in a frenzy, she planned to pull exactly that. Another question popped into her head: What if the authorities got to her on the way? That would be like throwing gasoline on an already raging fire. She'd be a criminal on the run. All of these thoughts muddled up her head even more. Her thoughts went back to the time when she lost a huge chunk of her money on a single game of poker.

Like seriously? A single game of poker? She let out a huge sigh again.

Could my life be any worse than it already is? Well, screw this. I need to make a run for it.

She mustered up the courage to deal with the situation at hand. She got up quickly and collected her belongings. Luckily, she didn't unpack most of her stuff. She tried to dust off all the unnecessary thoughts from her head and concentrated on the objective, which was to flee. She opened the door of her suite and made her way to the elevator. Walking down the hallway, her paranoia started growing more and more. She finally reached the elevator.

Beads of sweat trickled down her forehead and she nervously pressed the button of the elevator. Fifth floor... Fourth floor... The time it took for the elevator to come to the lower floor felt like an eternity. Suddenly she realized, "Wait, I'm just on the second floor. I could easily use the stairs. Man, I should cut off on the booze." She quickly ran down the stairs and descended as if being chased by a ghost. The exit was just ten feet away from the counter. She could finally taste the long-awaited freedom. She felt like Andy Dufrene making his way out of Shawshank prison.

Suddenly, she felt a firm tight grip on her shoulder. She looked behind and saw a big guy in a black suit. "I found her," the guy said on a walkie-talkie. She froze as if time had stopped, and then looked up to see a pair of stern eyes looking at her. "Ma'am, I need you to come with me," he finally said. As they passed the counter and made their way to the corridor,

two more guards joined them. “Why are you guys treating me like some convict? Where are you taking me?” Jessica yelled.

The guards led her to a gray door and opened it up. “Please stay here until further notice,” said one of them. They gently led her in and closed the door behind her. “Hey! What the hell?! You can’t just lock me up! I demand a lawyer!” she screamed in a fit of rage.

Now, here she was. From a luxurious hotel room suite to a holding cell. Maybe trying to fizzle her way out wasn’t the best idea. Even though a small logical part of her brain had warned her it’d be no good, she couldn’t help but try. Now, Jessica was arrested *and* in debt, and she had no idea how to get out of either predicament. She looked around the room, which only had a bed and a sink. There was a medium-sized window at the top half of the back wall that overlooked the forest area behind the hotel. It had thick railings, so planning a prison escape was out of the options. They’d just track her down anyway.

She sat on the bed and realized the gravity of the situation. There was no avoiding this. This was no joke she could wiggle out of. Her life depended on this. She felt fear grip her chest that she had to tell herself to calm down. She had to call someone for help. Anyone would suffice—her parents, Brittney, or hell, maybe even Spencer. He was the last person she would want to call for help, but she was desperate, and right now, she required a miracle, and she would do anything to achieve that miracle. She searched for her phone in her pockets but couldn’t find it. She then realized that her phone was in the bag that was confiscated from her. *Oh, damn.* Now, she was really out of options. She laid down on the surprisingly comfortable prison bed and kept rummaging through her mind to find any kind of leeway.

After a lot of recollecting and trying to think of a solution, she came up with nothing. An hour passed by, and the bland gray door finally opened. A man in a navy-blue suit walked in, and he looked to be about average height. He was followed by the same two guards that apprehended her and took her to the cell.

Looking at her, the man in the suit spoke, “I am sorry for the inconvenience, Ma’am, but it has come to my attention that you have accrued a certain amount of debt, which is still unpaid. You have to clear all pending payments before you walk out of this hotel.” The man continued, “My name is Robert. I am a financial advisor to anyone who owes the hotel a debt. I work directly for the owner of the hotel.”

Jessica looked at the man and thought that she desperately needed all the help she could get, even if it was an advisor given to her by the hotel. She replied, “Well, you could’ve told me that without arresting me and throwing me into a literal prison.”

“Well, our men told me you were trying to leave the hotel in a rush, so we had to take some action. It was in poor taste. For that, I truly apologize, but we couldn’t take the risk of you fleeing.”

Jessica stopped talking. They were right. She was indeed trying to escape, so she had no counter-rebuttal.

“We were trying to reach you in your room as requested by the hotel owner, but by the time we reached your floor, one of our men saw you running down the stairs, so we sent men to bring you here.”

Jessica understood the whole situation, but one detail from that statement confused her. Why would the hotel owner personally send men to her aid? Is that person that generous, or does he treat every debtor with such hospitality? These questions popped up in her mind, but she brushed them off for the time being.

“Fine, so what are my options? How can I deal with this? I don’t have money to pay you back. The only option I have is to ask for money from my parents, who are currently in the States,” Jessica said. “Please allow me to call my parents.”

Robert instantly replied, “Yes, of course. You are allowed a phone call. I’ll have my men bring your belongings.”

Not even a minute later, the two guards came back with her bag. They handed over the bag to Jessica. Robert offered

to give Jessica some privacy and said that he would be back in an hour to hear her answer. Before leaving the room, he procured his business card from his breast pocket and gave it to her.

“Please feel free to call me if you need any assistance,” Robert said as he stepped out of the room and closed the door. Jessica was back to being alone in that holding cell. She shuffled through her bag and found her phone. It still had some juice left before the battery dies down. She stared at her phone and kept staring for a solid minute. Jessica was about to call her parents for the first time since the wedding ceremony. She didn’t know how she was going to initiate the conversation. She wasn’t planning on calling her parents so soon, but she couldn’t avoid this impending conversation any longer. Unlocking her phone, she searched for her parents’ contact, pressed the “call” button, and mentally prepared herself for the unpleasant chat.

“Hey, Dad,” Jessica says in a half-scared tone after the call went through. Instantly, her father replied,” Jessica! Oh my God! Where have you been the past couple of days? Do you have any idea how worried we were? Where are you right now?”

Jessica let out a deep sigh and said, “I’m at the Hotel de Paris. Dad, I’m sorry I ran. I just couldn’t take it one more second. I...I just couldn’t.”

She could feel the sympathetic look on her father’s face. He had been gentle with her on the phone even though she knew they were worried sick, but they also understood the state she was in. After Spencer had left her at the altar, it felt like the world she was familiar with had vanished into thin air.

“I needed a way out. Call it impulsive, but this was the only escape I could think of at the moment,” she added.

“Oh, honey, your mom and I were both shocked and sad about what happened to you on your wedding day. I understand that you are devastated. It’s okay, but please don’t just leave without saying a single word. At least, give your old man a warning. Your mom was nearly going to faint, and you

weren't picking up any of our calls. Brittney had no idea where you could've been. None of your friends or Spencer's relatives could give us your whereabouts. If you hadn't called when you did, we would've reported you missing to the police."

"I know, Dad. I'm sorry I made you and mom worry. I should've at least notified you when I arrived." Jessica's dad replied in a softer tone, "Well, there's not much we can do at this point. How are you doing over there? At least, now we know where you are. That's a big relief."

"The place is beautiful, though I haven't gone out of the hotel ever since I entered. It would have been an amazing honeymoon destination for us, but I'm here alone and well, honestly, I don't feel all that great. I feel like the world is closing in on me." Jessica said, her throat closing up as the tears threatened to spill.

"I know it must be tough, honey, and it is indeed unfortunate that you had to go through that, but now, I guess you should take some time off for yourself. This is the first step of you trying to move on."

Jessica took a gulp and answered, "Well...umm, Dad, I mean there's that, but I was talking about something else."

"What do you mean?" Her dad was curious.

"Do you remember the times you and mom used to fight because of your gambling ordeals with Uncle Vinnie? I guess you could say I've inherited some of that from you."

"What are you implying, Jessica? What did you do?"

"Well, I might've lost some money while I was gambling, drunk." She paused for a bit and then said in a very quick voice, like the one a kid might use while confessing a crime to its parents. "...and by some, I mean \$50,000. I don't know what got over me. I guess I was dumb enough to subconsciously think that since I got such a huge blow just that day I might have extra luck with gambling and the universe shouldn't be so cruel all to a single person and so..." she let out a breath, "...yeah."

After a long pause, her father finally replied, “WHAT???” Jessica, have you lost your mind? Why would you bet that much money?”

“I’m sorry, Dad. I was drunk.”

Jessica’s dad replies, “Oh, hell no. Don’t you give me that drunken nonsense now! How did this happen? Jessica, seriously? How are you going to get out of this mess?”

“I honestly don’t know yet. I don’t have that much money on me right now. I might have to take out a loan from the bank. The hotel also assigned a financial advisor to me. I might end up needing your help with this. I swear I’ll pay it back at some point. Maybe I can call Spencer for the money.”

Jessica’s dad was silent for a moment. She could sense that he was mad at her. She would be too. “I don’t have that kind of money lying around, Jessica. We spent a lot on the wedding arrangements with Spencer. I know what he did to you isn’t fair, but Jess, you can’t just go ahead and be so irresponsible. We are normal people with normal funds, not billionaires to be able to gamble away \$50,000, and no, don’t call Spencer, no matter what the situation is. He is the one that put you in this position. You can figure it out on your own.”

“Okay, Dad. I’ll see what I can do.”

Suddenly, she heard a knock on the door. “Hey, Dad, I’ll uh... Talk to you later. There’s someone at the door.”

“Okay, honey. Please keep in touch and keep me updated. I’ll give your mom the rundown of recent events once she wakes up.” After having said that, her dad ended the call.

She put the phone inside her bag and went to the door. When she opened it, Matthew Millers was standing on the other side.

Matt felt like he'd never had this much fun in—well—*forever*, ever since he laid eyes on the alcohol-sodden, beautiful woman gambling away at the casino the other night. He had been watching over the casino tables from an upstairs balcony that overlooked the whole room. When Jessica won a few hands from what looked to be an amateur newbie at the casino, he had decided to step in to amp up the entertainment, and it seemed as though that was the perfect decision because Jessica turned out to be as entertaining as he had guessed. She was not good at gambling at all. He was amused at how clueless she was in the game but still showed such confidence and cheerful enthusiasm. Whatever reason had gotten her drunk like a sailor during a celebration, he didn't know, but he wanted to play with her. At first, he let her win a few rounds on him, then he started going hard on her, made her lose small amounts, and made her believe she could make it up with a few more rounds. Soon, the numbers kept getting bigger, and Matt relished in watching her slowly start to squirm. This went on until she had lost \$50,000. She still might have kept going had he not reminded her of the amount she had already stacked up.

When she had come to her senses, Jessica had looked as if she would throw up her vodka. That had made Matt a little concerned, and he had suggested that she turn in for the night. He had been the one to assist her back to her room. Pretty good room, from the looks of it, and a couple's suite too.

What an interesting creature.

He had helped Jessica into her bed and let her sleep the night off. He had even placed a glass of water and some aspirin on the bedside table, and then the next morning, he called her room and made the marriage proposal to her, to which she had completely lost it over him. Understandable, Matt thought, but what he didn't understand was why he felt the sudden urge to marry her. There was something about her that drew him towards her like a magnet. It was amusing to him to see her get all flustered, and by the look on her face when he had told her the amount of her debt, he deduced that she was probably in huge trouble and had no way to procure that huge sum of money. That was when this crazy thought had occurred to him, to give her the offer of marrying him. It gave him some carnal kind of pleasure knowing that she was somewhat dependent on his help for clearing her debt, and he intended to try his best to make sure she accepted.

Right now, Matt was standing by the door to her room. He could hear her talk over the phone inside but couldn't make out what she was saying. A few seconds later, the door opened, and there she was standing on the other side, with her hair still a mess and mascara smudges under her eyes. This lady could use a good night's sleep, he thought, and yet, she looked striking to him. Like some lush and mysterious beauty with secrets in her eyes. Her confused face changed into a scowl as she recognized him and was about to close the door when he put his foot inside and prevented it.

“Good morning, sunshine,” he said in a loud cheerful voice, to which she flinched. “Rough hangover?”

“Get out,” she said, turning away. Matt followed her inside and closed the door behind him.

“I'm only here to help. Your knight in shining armor.”

“Look, Mister, I don't know what your deal is, but people don't just go around offering marriage proposals to damsels in distress,” she said, annoyed.

“So you admit you are my damsel in distress?” he cocked an eyebrow.

“But why? Why would you possibly want to me marry me? I’m nothing but a stranger and an unreliable one at that, who gets drunk and loses all her money at casinos.”

“Maybe I just really wanted to help such an unreliable person with my generosity.”

“Are you so generous that you throw proposals to everyone who lost money here? That would be a lot of wives for you.” She said.

“No, you’re the first. Maybe you just struck my generous side into being activated,” he said with a wink.

Jessica rolled her eyes and sat on the corner of her bed. She crossed her hands on her chest and asked, “Where are you getting the money may I ask? Are you that rich?”

“Maybe I am.”

“Oh, please, drop the cockiness,” she snapped.

“Okay, okay, I’ll tell you the truth. My family owns this hotel. I’m the heir, and most of the shares here are mine, so you could say that I own this place, even though it technically belongs to my family.”

The look on Jessica’s face was another one that amused him immensely. He couldn’t help but twitch his lips in amusement at her expression. Her jaw dropped, and she stared at him like he had somehow transformed into someone else entirely.

“But you- but then why didn’t you tell me that sooner? We played poker all night, and you never once mentioned this while you stole all my money!” she cried in disbelief.

At this, Matt let out a laugh. “Stole your money? A bold thing to say when you handed everything over to me out of your own volition.”

“I was drunk!!!”

“Everyone is drunk here at night, love,” he said.

“Don’t call me that. I am not marrying you. This is absolutely absurd.” She huffed her chest and walked over to

her bag. She rummaged a few seconds into it, took out her phone again, and seemed to be pondering over something.

“You want to call someone?” Matt asked.

She was silent. She stared at the phone for a few more seconds, and then put it inside the bag again and looked at him.

“Let’s say I do agree to your proposal. What’s in it for you?” she asked.

“Oh, not a thing, save for one very beautiful lady by my side,” he said with a grin.

Jessica’s cheeks grew a faint shade of pink, and she took in his flirtatious comment. She looked like she was seriously considering his offer.

Yes. You’re on the right track sweet thing. Just say yes.

“Why did you arrest me when you could have just simply asked me this and let me decide on my own?” she asked instead.

Matt was lost in his daydreams of her saying yes, so it took a few seconds for him to realize she had asked another question. “Oh, that’s just a ruse. You’re not actually under arrest. I only gave that order to mess with you. The men who caught you aren’t the police. They’re just members of my protection team. Any debt of \$50,000 and under gets handed to our collection department and handled internally. We only involve the authorities for debts over \$75,000.”

Again, Jessica gave a priceless look of astonishment. Matt could get used to these looks. She grabbed the flower from the vase and threw it at him. Matt ducked it and laughed at the top of his lungs. He was really having a lot of fun with this woman.

Jessica felt like someone had splashed her face with ice water. She wasn't sure she had heard him right. *My family owns this hotel. I'm the heir.* This man standing in front of her, to whom she had lost all her money in the most impulsive gambling spree in the history of impulsive gambling, and the man, who had proposed to her to save her from this mess, was the owner of this grand hotel? No way. *Oh my god, it's true.* He did look like he came from old money. He had this air about him that suggested a natural confidence that only came from years of success. If there was anyone who could help her out of this debt, it was Matt. "But at what cost," she asked herself. The offer of marriage was too absurd to even consider, but it also was the only option out there that seemed possible and within reach. She racked her brain again for any other way she could pay back the hotel. Should she call Spencer? Her dad's stern voice came back to her warning her against calling the man who had left her at the altar.

No, I shouldn't do that. I have that much dignity not to ask him for help ever. Matthew Millers...should I actually consider marrying him? Was it truly the only way out of this?

Jessica couldn't find any other way. She remembered her dad telling her that he would try to manage some money and wire it to her, but she knew it would be hard for him even if he did try to manage it. \$50,000 was no joke, and Jessica didn't want to put her dad in a bind. She felt a wave of guilt hit her because not only had she made her parents worry, but now, her dad must be going out of his mind to manage the money, all the while keeping it secret from her mom.

Jessica sighed heavily. She guessed she didn't have any choice. Her life was ruined anyway. Through this marriage, at least she could live a decent life. All marriages didn't have to be from love. Look what love got you, she thought darkly, recalling Spencer. A marriage of convenience was better than the alternative for her, which would be being stuck in jail for God knows how long.

Matt was on the other side of the room, laughing his head off. He seemed to be having the time of his life. She had just thrown that stupid flower at him, and it had nearly hit him. She couldn't believe he had the audacity to find this whole situation funny when she was going crazy trying to find a solution.

"Okay," she said after staying silent for a few moments.

"Okay, what?" Matt asked, his voice a little breathless, the last bits of laughter lightening his tone.

"I'll marry you."

For a moment, Matt seemed to be at a loss for words. It was as if he was a bit taken aback by her agreement, but then his face returned to his usual cool self, and he smiled up at her crookedly. He was extraordinarily handsome. He held his tall frame with self-assurance, as if he was aware of his good looks and was proud of it. He had some scruff along his jaws but not too much. It was done in a way that looked almost careless as if he woke up looking this way. Jessica supposed he was good on the eye. He was, in fact, the most striking person that she saw in the whole casino two nights ago. They might even have had a night together if things didn't turn out this way...Jessica quickly shook the blush from her cheeks.

Matt got up and walked over to her. "Let's get you back to your room. Sorry about this whole ordeal, but you know I'm not guilty about it." He said.

"Matt, I want to ask you something."

"Yeah?"

"What do you get out of it?"

"All in good time, baby." That was all he said.

She rolled her eyes, grabbed her bag, and let Matt escort her out of the holding cell. They took the elevator to her room, and Matt seemed to be in a good mood. He was someone who loved talking.

“I’ve already made a lot of arrangements, so you wouldn’t have to worry about that. I know women have a lot of expectations when it comes to their wedding, and I’m afraid we didn’t have much time for wedding planning, but I can promise you that it will be spectacular,” he said. He walked by her side all the way through the corridor. There was a skip to his step as if he couldn’t wait to get to work.

“Good to know.” Jessica was still lost in thoughts. She wasn’t completely present as Matt went on about his arrangements in excitement. She felt like she was in a trance, doing one thing at a time, taking one step at a time. This whole day felt foreign to her.

When they reached her room, she expected it to be empty like she left it, but the door was unlocked, and inside there on the ornamented couch, sat a strikingly beautiful young lady. Jessica was confused because she had locked the room on her way out. Was it already booked for another guest since she was in debt to the hotel?

“Annabeth! You’re here,” exclaimed Matt, as the woman jumped up from the couch and hopped over to them.

“Brother!” she said and was enveloped in a big hug from Matt. Jessica didn’t have time to react when Annabeth came over to her and gave her a squeeze as well.

“Oh, uh, okay,” Jessica said as she hugged the woman back.

“You must be Jessica. I’ve been dying to meet you,” said Annabeth. Her voice was like a bird’s chirp. Springy like her steps and melodious. She seemed like a very jolly kind of person *and* a hugger. Jessica smiled at her, unsure of what to say.

“Don’t worry. Matt has already told me about you, and I wasted not a second driving here. You’re so pretty!” Annabeth

exclaimed.

“Thank you. Uh, you too!” Jessica managed. She was feeling overwhelmed meeting someone this beautiful without notice and getting compliments from them. She was sure she did not look pretty, with her disheveled looks and messed-up hair.

“Beth, Jessica hasn’t had breakfast yet. Could you order some room service? I’m gonna have to leave you, girls, to yourselves now. Got a lot of arrangements to make.” Matt exited the room with a wave of his hand.

Jessica was surprised that Matt had noticed it. She herself had forgotten that she didn’t get the chance to eat anything since last night. Annabeth quickly made a call to the reception and ordered some food for Jessica, and then she made her sit on the bed while she sat on the other end and started talking.

“So, are you excited?” she asked with a spark in her eyes.

“Umm, I don’t know. You know the whole situation is so...unusual,” replied Jessica.

“I know. It’s okay though. There’s nothing to worry about. Matt has already taken care of most of the ugly work. By that, I mean the legal arrangements, you know? You already have a marriage license and the chapel where the ceremony will take place is being set up as we speak. It’s tonight! So much to work on, OMG! I looked over the floral choices first thing when I got here. You do like peonies, right? I mean who doesn’t like peonies? You would look so good with a bouquet of peonies in your hand, and about the main course, I was going to select prawns, but then I didn’t know if you liked seafood, so I went with chicken instead, just to be safe. Wait, I can still alter the menu. Do you want me to call them and change the main course to prawn?” Annabeth asked.

“Oh, it’s no problem. I like both. Chicken is fine with me,” Jessica replied. Annabeth went on and on about every detail of the decorations, but Jessica didn’t care much for such things with the situation being as unusual as it was. She was wondering how on earth Matt had managed all that within a day. It was clear to her that he had already known what her

answer would be before she even agreed to it. That fact annoyed her, but she was already starting to get used to it by now. Matt had his way with everything, but getting the marriage license on such short notice was no big deal. Usually, it took weeks for it to get approved. She wondered what kind of power such an influential family's heir had to be able to manage this feat. She guessed that when you had enough money, you could get anything you wanted, and Matt had lots of it.

“You can call some of your family to come over. Matt told me to fix the guest list with you. Since it's on short notice, I figured a small wedding would be ideal. Maybe you can invite your parents and some close relatives and friends. It's totally your choice though. Oh, and I guess you gotta decide on a witness. Matt already booked me as his. I was so-” Annabeth was interrupted by a soft knock on the door. She went to the door and opened it to let in the hotel staff pushing in a tray with breakfast. It was filled to the last corner with different kinds of food. Jessica stared at it dumbfounded.

“I didn't know what you would prefer so I ordered a few different types of cuisines. Pick what you like and dig in!” Annabeth said as she poured herself a cup of coffee from the little French press.

Jessica could make out food for almost a dozen people laid out. There was toast, raw bread, butter, 2 choices of margarine, 3 choices of cheese, baguette, naan, tortillas, 2 choices of curry, and a rice dish that Jessica had no idea about. One plate at the side held freshly cut fruits. Beside it sat a dish with croissants. A French press held steaming coffee and another Turkish teapot contained tea. The table was a mix and match of food from so many different cuisines that Jessica felt her nostrils being assaulted with all these different flavors. Jessica gingerly took a knife, buttered a piece of toast, and bit into it. Annabeth offered her a cup of coffee, which she took gratefully. She had forgotten how hungry she was, but after having some food and coffee, she felt much better, and her hangover was starting to break. Now that her head's beginning to clear, she guessed that she really had to face the situation head-on.

OceanofPDF.com

Matt's room was on the top floor of the hotel. It was a premium suite that was not for guest bookings. Whenever he came to the hotel to look over things, or just to spend some days here, he stayed in that suite. After dropping Jessica off in her room in the care of his sister, he went to his suite and called his friends. He was elated when he told them about the big news, and they all seemed overjoyed for him. While they were on their way, Matt decided to take a quick shower.

Today is a long day ahead. I can't wait to meet my friends and get some good boys' time before the wedding.

He put on a pair of slacks and a white shirt and glanced at the clock on the wall. It was early in the morning. He had already texted his friends about the wedding. Though he wasn't certain Jessica would agree, he had told them to come over just in case, so they should be arriving sometime that afternoon. He was looking forward to meeting them, and it was all good that things worked out with Jessica saying yes.

Matt spent the morning going through some pressing matters at his office, making the last-minute wedding preparations, and going over all the necessary documents for the wedding. It was well past noon when he heard the buzzer to his suite ring.

"That must be the guys," he said and headed over to the door. Sure enough, it was Henry and Blake. They rushed in like boys excited to get the party started and took him into their arms and hollered in excitement.

“Where’s Greg?” asked Matt while being squeezed under the weight of Blake’s biceps.

“He was running late at work. I called him to ask if we should pick him up, but he said he was coming over on his own. He must be on his way now,” answered Henry.

Henry, Blake, and Gregory were his three best dudes. The four of them had been close ever since they were young. Besides Matt, who came from one of the most reputed families in the community, Blake and Gregory also came from old money. Their parents were in the business together and have been acquainted for a long time. Henry was a self-made man who came from a normal family but made it big pretty early in his career. Matt had met him on a business trip to Bali, where the other man was on vacation with his girlfriend. Now, the four of them were inseparable. Matt had called them to be present at the wedding, which was planned on a very small scale. Only those important to the bride and groom were invited. Blake and Gregory were regulars in the club. Henry also visited it pretty frequently, so they spent a lot of time together in the hotel and in Matt’s suite.

“You finally getting hitched man! Who’s the lucky lady?” yelled Henry.

“You’ll see her soon enough,” laughed Matt.

The three of them talked over some of the details over some drinks. Sometime later, Gregory also arrived. They played music and had a small bachelor party of sorts before Matt had to get ready for the wedding. His tuxedo arrived an hour after his friends did, and they left him in the room to try it on. It was perfectly tailored to his fit. He had already bought the ring earlier that morning, with an adjustable back so that it would fit Jessica’s finger. Gregory had brought with him a red corsage to go with the tux, which he pinned on Matt’s chest. When he was all ready as the groom, he took all of them down to the club.

The casino was filled with guests and gamblers as usual. Matt and his buddies went over there to play some poker while they waited. The four of them were exceptionally good at it.

They had a specific room equipped with a casino of its own, a personal bar, and a pool table. They usually spent a lot of time in this room. Today, they all drank to Matt's new start of a married life. Matt ordered drinks for all the guys. He was in a very good mood. He couldn't explain why, but he was looking forward to it.

"Drink up everybody! It's on me tonight!" cried Matt.

"To Matt's wedding!" shouted Henry.

"To Matt's wedding!" repeated the other two as they all clanked their glasses together and drank. Matt couldn't help the grin slipping on his face.

"Congratulations, boss," said the bartender who was close to their age but younger looking. Matt was a cool boss who liked to be friendly with all the staff working for him. He liked to make rounds around the hotel talking to the staff and asking for their feedback on the work, on their conditions, and if they had any problems. Naturally, he was much beloved among the hotel employees who all held him in high regard. They loved working for him, and the work environment in the hotel was one of friendliness and comfort. Word had gotten around the staff that their boss was set to be married tonight in the hotel chapel. When it was closer to the ceremony starting time, Matt drank the last of his drink and got ready to leave the room to wait outside in the main room.

The staff there congratulated him as well for the special day. It was as if a festive mood had fallen over the whole club, like the ones seen during holidays. Everyone was excited for Matt and genuinely happy for him, and that made Matt even happier and more excited for his wedding. He couldn't wait for it to start and to see his bride. He wondered if Jessica had gotten ready yet, how her wedding dress looks on her, and what she was doing to her hair. He wondered if the ring he had gotten for her was good enough, if she would like it, and if she was even a small bit excited as he was. Most of all, he wondered what Jessica was doing right at that moment.

Probably suffering through Annabeth's chatter.

The thought of Annabeth put a warm smile on his face. Matt held his younger sister in very protective regard. He was fond of her like most brothers are about their baby sisters. Annabeth was the dearest person to him with whom he could share all his worries, and she was always there for him. Without Annabeth, the wedding wouldn't have been planned as smoothly as it was. It was because of Annabeth that Matt could put his mind on the paperwork and be tension-free about the arrangements because he knew that she would take care of everything for him.

OceanofPDF.com

Jessica was sort of surprised, but much relieved to see that Annabeth had indeed thought of everything. She had made arrangements for all wedding preparations paying attention to every detail and seeing everything to the dot. She guessed that Annabeth must be the reason why Matt had been able to arrange everything smoothly.

A knock sounded at the door, and Annabeth got to it in an instant. “Yes, please set them here. Be careful now.” She heard her say to whoever was at the door.

“Your dresses are here!” Annabeth almost jumped with excitement as two men carried a cloth hanger with 4 different plastic-covered dresses. The men were followed by two maids in their uniforms. Jessica couldn’t see them under the covers but from the looks of it, they all looked designer-made. She stared at them with a mixture of shock and awe as they were placed in the corner of the room, a small distance from the walk-in closet. The dresses were uncovered by the maids, and each one was more beautiful than the next. Jessica’s breath caught in her throat as she beheld the beauty and gracefulness of the dresses in front of her.

“Annabeth, oh my god. You really didn’t have to do all this,” Jessica voiced out her gratefulness.

“Oh, it’s no biggy. Since I didn’t know your size and your preference, I went ahead and booked a few you could try out. Go ahead now, try one!”

Jessica walked over to the dress stand, touching the first dress just slightly. The material felt soft under her touch. One of the maids took the dress from its hanger and went inside the changing room with Jessica.

“I’ll wait here for the reveal. They are in different sizes, so you can try the ones that are fitting to yours,” said Annabeth from the bedroom.

The first dress Jessica tried on was a bit tight on her chest. Being a curvy woman, she faced this a lot every time she tried out dresses at the mall while shopping. She went for the next one but that one seemed a bit too loose. The maid helped her out of it and held the third one out to her for inspection. This one looked to be about her size. It was a knee-length bodycon dress. The color of the dress was the perfect shade of white, which soothed her eyes. She got herself into it and found that despite the looks outside, it was extremely comfortable to wear. The inner was stitched to the body in a thin skin-colored fabric, which was easy to slip on. The maids helped her get dressed and one of them chained her up while the other one adjusted the hem of the dress. The bodycon hugged her curves in all the right places. She was wearing a normal bra, nothing padded or pushed up as she preferred. The dress lifted her breasts just enough that it looked natural and was still masterfully done. The length of the dress was covered in small lace straps which, upon close inspection, revealed intricate floral designs. It was the perfect blend of modern and vintage styles. The dress was, Jessica thought, one of the latest fashion trends out there at the moment. What it must have cost, she could only imagine.

When she came out of the changing room, Annabeth stared at her with wonder.

“Dear God, Jessica, you look so beautiful,” Annabeth gushed. She came over to her and hugged her again. This time Jessica returned it in earnest and thanked her again for picking out such lovely dresses.

“I don’t think I’ll try the fourth one. I think this is the one.” She said to her soon-to-be sister-in-law.

“I agree. The dress has picked you. This is the one we’re going with. Now, come try the shoes. I got one for each size and yours seems to be the same as mine so try this one,” she said as she pointed at one of the boxes marked size 7, and one of the maids opened it. There inside the box lay a beautiful white shoe, with a delicate, silver rose on the front and a slender heel at the back. The maid helped Jessica into it, and as Annabeth had said, it did fit perfectly. All the other shoes were in other sizes, so they didn’t bother going through them. It was almost time, and Jessica had to get her makeup done as well.

“Wow. It looks so gorgeous with the dress! The rose adds the perfect touch of extravagance to the simplicity of the dress, you know what I mean? Okay, you can get out of them and come sit here. I’ll be seeing to your makeup personally. What kind of look are you going for?” chirped Annabeth. Jessica remembered Annabeth mentioning to her that she has some experience with makeup artists and loved doing makeup as a hobby and that she couldn’t wait to get her hands on Jessica.

“Whatever you like. You’re the artist,” replied Jessica with a smile.

“Hmm, I’d go for something sophisticated; light but also well done. It should be dewy because I’d love to see that rosy blush look on you, and it would look lip-smacking good with your dress,” said Annabeth as she took out a huge makeup bag, containing all the products Jessica could imagine, starting from various shades of foundations, powders, blushes, and a huge box of lipsticks.

As Annabeth decided on a shade of foundation, the maids did her hair. Annabeth started talking about Matt and how he would completely flip on his toes when she was done with Jessica.

“Speaking of Matt, he is so excited about this wedding,” added Annabeth.

“I got that idea, but I’m confused as to why that is,” replied Jessica.

Annabeth decided on a foundation and began applying it on her face with a flat brush. “Oh, he might act all tough and hard, but inside, he’s a big softy. My brother always has been. When we were little, he was always the protective big brother. I was a very overfriendly kid as you can see,” Annabeth giggled and continued, “so I got picked on a lot at school, and Matt could not stand that. He would threaten to beat up anyone who bullied me, and since he was my big brother, once anyone got to know about him, they would usually leave me be. This one time I came home from school crying because this guy in my class made fun of my braces, and I remember Matt was so pissed, even I was scared! He didn’t wait for another second, simply ran out of the house, went straight to my middle school riding his new bike, and actually slapped the guy! He then said, *“My sister has the cutest teeth. If you don’t like them, I’ll break all of yours.”* My bully was so scared, he ran off crying.”

Jessica laughed at the childhood stories Annabeth told about Matt. He seemed to be very attached to his younger sister, and as she spent more time with her, Jessica could see why. Annabeth was beginning to steadily grow on her.

“Matt is the most selfless person I know. Not only because I’m his sister, but because he is always there when anyone he cares about needs help. Hell, he’ll even help strangers if they need it!” Annabeth paused to examine her work so far and asked one of the maids to pass her a specific brush before continuing, “He is a member of so many charity programs, which he attends and contributes to regularly. You would think he’s almost a saint!”

“He sounds like a good person,” Jessica offered. She didn’t know what to think, other than that. Listening to Annabeth talk about her older brother, she could see that she was so fond of him. Their childhood stories were interesting to listen to because they created more images of Matt in her mind. She felt like she was seeing another side of him, which she didn’t stop to consider existing. She had seen him as just a bad boy billionaire up to that point.

“You should see how he is with the staff here. He probably knows every one of them personally. Just ask Edith here,” she said pointing to one of the maids, who offered a small reply in the affirmative.

“He makes a point of talking individually to each new employee. To see if they have anything to offer, or if they’re doing okay. He has a friendly relationship with all the existing employees of the hotel. You’d think that with such a big hotel, one would not remember all the faces here, but Matt does, and he remembered their stories too. He tries to help everyone in any way he can. They all absolutely love him. Their work relationship is made very comfortable because of Matt’s efforts and how he seems to care for everyone. They don’t see him strictly as a boss, but as a friend with whom they don’t have to be as rigid with, you know, and that greatly helps them in their work environment. Having a boss who isn’t too detached from how things are run but is a close person.”

“Yeah, I know what you mean. I am honestly surprised to get to know these things about Matt. He didn’t strike me as the kind of person who would go to such lengths to make things better for the staff.”

Jessica was honestly a little moved by all this new information about Matt. If what Annabeth said was true, Matt was a person of depth and a warm personality. There was so much to him she had no idea about. Of course, she had only known him for two days, but the image she had of him in her mind was nothing similar to what she got to know now.

On the flip side, a little voice in her head planted doubts. What if Annabeth was just an agent who planned to tell her lies about Matt so she believed him to be nice when he wasn’t? He was indeed powerful, and he could manage a great deal with that, as he has demonstrated already. Jessica didn’t know what to think, but Annabeth’s words and her fondness towards her brother really did seem genuine.

Looks like I’ll have to find out on my own when I get to know him more.

“And there, we’re done!” said Annabeth, bringing her out of her thoughts.

Jessica had forgotten to look in the mirror because of the engaging conversation with Annabeth. Now that she looked at herself for the first time since Annabeth had started doing her makeup, she was pleasantly shocked. Annabeth had done a spectacular job. Jessica had transformed from a mess to an elegant bride. Her soon-to-be sister-in-law was really good at this.

“Thank you so much, Annabeth! I look... beautiful.”

“You are the most beautiful bride I have ever seen. My brother is going to have his breath stolen in a moment.”

Jessica gave her a smile. She took a deep breath and said, “Let’s go then. Let’s do this wedding.”

OceanofPDF.com

The tux Matt wore fit his slim, muscular build perfectly. It seemed like it had been made for him, fitted on his body by the best tailor money could buy, which cost more than most people made in a year. Only the best would do for this important day, and Matt, a man who knew what ‘the best’ included, had made it a point to provide it for himself and his bride. His cufflinks sparkled every time he moved his wrists, the diamonds pulling in the overhead lighting and the flames from the candles sitting around the chapel’s edges. His dark hair was perfectly cut into the fade that he preferred, having been touched up just moments before he slipped into the tux. No man had ever been more stylish or handsome for his wedding, not even the movie stars who often stayed at his hotel.

Matt stood stiffly at the altar, the place where his life was about to change, for better or worse, and worried whether or not he was making a huge mistake. He was extraordinarily nervous, which was why he worried. He wasn’t the type of man who usually got nervous about anything, especially decisions he was in control of. He simply thought everything out, all the ups and downs, pros and cons, ins and outs, then made a choice and stuck with it. So far, his choices had been dead-on perfect. He had the money and the lifestyle to prove it. Why should this day be any different?

This wedding to a woman he knew only through another man’s stories was his choice, and hopefully, one of his very best. Why shouldn’t it be? He’d planned it all out carefully and pulled his sister into the mix for backup and help. He was

a gambler, a bad boy, and this was just another gamble. Actually, it was more calculated than any bet he'd made in the past, even the ones he'd hedged. He'd taken more time to think this through than a bet at cards or any table in the hotel. Now, it was time to execute the plan. There wasn't room for doubt or nerves. Confidence was the name of this particular game. Normally, he had plenty to spare.

The music started, ending his internal conversation. The time for backing out of this was over. He wasn't going to be the kind of man who left a woman at the altar, wondering what she'd done wrong, especially after the way he'd bulldozed her into being his bride in the first place. Jess already thought he was a little strange and a whole lot crazy. Maybe he was, but that was better than the alternative.

He released the breath he'd been holding as Annabeth came walking toward him. He thought his sister looked lovely in her simple bridesmaid's dress—simple with a designer label he reminded himself. She appeared calm and controlled, yet most of all, she seemed happy. Her smile wasn't one of those fake ones the rich bitches who came to the hotel wore for every occasion, the kind that never quite reached their eyes. It was genuine and crinkled the corners of her pretty eyes. She walked with confidence as if she was wise and had the insight that Matt's sudden marriage to a woman who was a virtual stranger to her was his greatest accomplishment in life. It eased his nerves just a little. She wouldn't be doing this if it wasn't the right thing to do.

She did know things about him and this plan that no one else did. He'd told her everything about his wants, his needs, and how he planned to get them covered. She was his confidant. They'd shared long talks that had surprised him. Annabeth understood him when no one else did. She believed in him when all everyone else saw was the bad boy, billionaire, gambler. She saw beneath that façade and the gruff demeanor and who he truly was. It always astonished him that she stood by him.

Who else would stand by him while he twisted things around so that he was marrying a woman who'd lost all her

money at their hotel? What sane woman would help him get a wedding together in a matter of hours, including the wedding dress for someone who knew nothing about him? If the shoe had been on the other foot, with Annabeth asking him to help her con some strange man into marrying her, he'd have locked her away until she came to her senses.

Instead, she had found the wedding dress, chosen her own bridesmaid dress, and spent the last couple of hours getting Jess ready to marry her brother. She was a treasure indeed. It was no wonder he'd told her so many intimate details about himself. She alone knew he had never found a woman he cared enough about to get even close to getting married. She'd understood exactly what he'd meant. She didn't find it odd that he'd seen something in Jess that called to him, something he had to have for his own. The fact that he'd recognized something in Jess that matched something in himself hadn't shocked or surprised Annabeth. She didn't argue with him about how ridiculous it all sounded.

Annabeth quickly realized he was serious about marrying Jess. She was a romantic at heart and, most likely, believed in love at first sight. She probably felt her brother had fallen for Jess and had finally found the woman he'd been searching for all these years.

He knew she thought he was Jess' savior. She saw him as a hero, not a manipulator. Jess had been in trouble. She'd gambled until she owed far more than she could pay back. She was sad, lonely, and a little broken, but then Matt had come along and rescued her from all that by forcing her to agree to marry him or go to jail. He'd actually used his position, his money, his status, and his half-truths to manipulate Jess to this point. A savior? Maybe, maybe not.

Annabeth had told him he was saving Jess from a lot of heartaches, giving her a new start when she needed it the most, so he'd choose to see all this through her rose-colored glasses and think of himself as a hero. Jess was getting a billionaire for a husband, and he was handsome as well. Women had fought over him more than once. Oddly enough, that had been more of a turnoff than a way to gain his approval.

Annabeth reached the front of the chapel and winked at him. Without a doubt, he made a winning bet.

The tone of the music changed. Matt recognized the sound of the bride's famous march. The time had come for him to stop second-guessing himself and get on with the marriage. He needed to be in the moment, so he could remember such a memorable occasion as his wedding day. He eagerly watched out for Jess to make her appearance.

His first sight of her didn't disappoint him. This wasn't the drunk, frightened woman he'd seen at the gambling tables. It wasn't the angry yet scared one from the 'jail' either. This one was beautiful from her head to her toes. Her eyes were clear and showed nothing of the trepidation he'd expected to see. She looked straight at him and began the short journey down the aisle to their shared destiny.

The man who'd designed her dress must have had her body in mind when doing so. No other woman in the world could have worn it as well as Jess did—the form-fitting dress of white lace over a skin-colored underlayment caressed her curves in the same way his hands itched to do. It gave the illusion that she was naked beneath the filmy layer of lace, teasing and taunting him almost painfully. The hem ended at least two inches above her knees, which showed off her lovely legs as she moved. There were also sheer lace-made straps that went over her delicate collarbone, begging for his tongue to follow.

Matt couldn't take his eyes off her, not even when he heard the whispers coming from the few guests, who surprisingly were as awed as he was. Her long raven hair was coiled in a soft knot at the base of her slim neck. Long, wispy strands had broken loose to fall across her pink cheeks and over her shoulders. They drew attention to the pulse quickly beating in her neck, the only outward sign that showed she was as nervous as Matt.

Matt considered himself to be the luckiest man alive. This beautiful woman was going to be his wife. She was going to share his bed, eat at his table, live at his home, and one day, give him children if they proved to be so lucky. Any man who

didn't see her worth was the crazy one, not Matt. There was no way a man could look at her and not want her. The appealing curves of her body, the beauty of her face, and the courage of her heart that showed by the fact that she was walking down the aisle to marry him were qualities others must envy, yet she was to be his alone, so let them all be jealous.

It was not the normal circumstance that brought her here to be his bride, and she might think he had lost his mind, but he could change all that once the marriage became a reality. In the past, thousands of women had wed men they didn't know. Their fathers had betrothed them to strangers, often men old enough to be their parents, without even consulting the women. Most of those marriages had lasted a lifetime despite the way they'd been carried out. His was going to work out as well.

At least Jess saw who she was getting as a husband. Matt wasn't an old man, who required a young woman to care for his needs, give him an heir before he died, and left her to live out her life as a widow. He was young, handsome, rich, and virile. He had many decades ahead of him to bring her pleasure. More than that, she was able to see what he could give her just by looking around her. She'd have everything money could buy.

Jess was almost there. A few more short steps and she'd be standing at his side. He had already caught the scent of the bouquet she held in her hands and the perfume she wore, both of his choosing. Her smile was so pretty, so soft, but also hesitant and faltering. It was obvious that she was still apprehensive about going through with the wedding, but her steps were firm. Her bravery came through quite clearly. She wasn't going to run away and leave him standing there all alone.

As Jess reached the altar, the room became quiet, the music stopped abruptly, and the rustle of clothing of those who attended could be heard as they sat back in their seats. Other than that, the sound of the gentle air that was going in and out of his lungs and his heartbeat reached his ears. He wondered if Jess' heart was racing as fast as his, and if it was, there would

be a difference. His was racing out of joy and eagerness, whereas hers was probably doing so out of fear of the unknown. He was sorry for that, but it couldn't be helped.

Jess acknowledged his unasked question of whether or not she was ready with a small nod of her head. She turned and handed Annabeth her bouquet as per tradition, then, finally, she allowed him to take her hands in his.

Her palms were soft, smooth, and just so slightly damp while her hands were lay loosely in his grip, and they trembled. He gently squeezed them to reassure her everything was going to be fine, and he thought she squeezed back but couldn't be certain. She bravely looked into his face as the ceremony began.

OceanofPDF.com

This was insane. The whole idea of this wedding was crazy. Matt was a lunatic. Jess felt like she was living in the *Twilight Zone*. Coming to Monte Carlo for a honeymoon without a husband was the ultimate form of insanity. Worse, she'd pushed the whole thing a step further into lunacy by getting drunk off her ass and losing money she didn't have. She had to be unhinged or demented to think the best way out of her mistakes was to make a new one, one that was supposed to last forever.

Yet, here she was in a bridal gown she hadn't chosen, carrying flowers also not of her choosing, as she was about to walk down the aisle of a chapel to marry a gorgeous, sexy billionaire who was a virtual stranger to her. This didn't happen in the 21st century or in any century that she could think of. Did they even have billionaires in the 1800s or farther back?

A gambler, a professional gambler, was what Matt called his profession. How was that a real job? Though it had to be because he had the big bucks and the power to prove it. He'd used some of that power to get her right where she was, hadn't he?

Matt had watched as she'd gotten pissed face drunk and lost everything she had and more. He'd stood by as she was taken to a holding cell to sit around and become distraught and afraid over what was going to happen to her. He'd let her stew in her own negative thoughts, then come to her aid in the strangest way possible. Marriage? Really? He'd offered her a

way out of being locked up that was actually a kind of prison in itself. Didn't some men refer to their wives as the old ball and chain? That was a definite prison reference.

Sure, this particular prison had some special perks. Her warden was to be the handsome, sexy, heart-stopping rich part-owner of the hotel. Her jail cell included designer sheets, a minibar, a bed the size of a small pond, and a bathtub she could swim in, then there was the extra perk of her roommate. Her warden was going to share her bed, at least she figured he would. Why else would he bother marrying her? A girl was easily led to do worse. Hadn't she fallen for Spencer?

The thought of Spencer twisted her guts into a knot. This wasn't the time to bring him to mind. In fact, it was one of the worst. What woman in her right mind thought of the man who'd dumped her at the altar when she was about to marry another man? Then again, maybe it was the perfect time to remember him.

He'd be shocked to see her now. It was going to royally piss him off when he found out she'd gotten married on what was supposed to be their honeymoon. She'd gladly toss it in his face, then step up and rub it in. She'd give him every detail of the wedding, making sure to let him know about the designer dress she'd been gifted to wear and the champagne that had been in her room to sip on while she'd gotten ready to walk down the aisle. Lastly, she'd freak him out with the news that her husband was a billionaire! He'd never get past that news.

The music began, startling Jess back to reality as she stood in front of the doors to the chapel.

"Jess, it's time for me to walk in. Will you be okay? Can I count on you to take the cue for your turn?" Annabeth asked.

"I'm fine. Better than fine. This is my wedding day, and you helped make me look gorgeous. I won't miss my cue. I promise," Jess replied and was surprised to realize she meant it.

Annabeth kissed her cheek. "For luck," she whispered and walked into the chapel leaving Jess to take a deep breath.

“This is your wedding day, a day you’ve looked forward to since you were three years old. You’re going to pay attention to every detail of this day, so you’ll remember it when your great-grandchildren ask about it. Maybe, you’ll leave out the part about not really knowing their great-grandfather. It might be best if they didn’t think it was okay to follow your lead,” Jess told herself.

The wedding march began, and the hotel attendants swung open the doors to the small chapel. From her vantage point, Jess saw the candles glowing all along the sides of the walls while white roses seemed to be everywhere—on stands, between the candles, at the altar, and on the ends of the pews, where they hung artfully.

The small group gathered to witness the marriage rose from their chairs in honor of her, the bride. It was lovely to watch them stand and turn just for her sake. It gave her courage, which until that instant, she hadn’t realized she needed.

Jess discovered she liked the intimacy of this wedding venue. It felt more personal to have a small number of guests. Somehow, it gave it all more meaning and focused on the true purpose of the occasion and how important it was.

Her own wedding, the disastrous one, as she now thought of it, was a large one. There were supposed to be too many guests to speak to and a lot who she didn’t personally know in attendance. It was a show put on to make Spencer appear as important as he thought himself to be. The actual meaning of the day would have been lost in all the pomp and circumstance. It was slated to be more of a circus than a celebration of two people in love. She saw that now, though it had eluded her at the time.

This simple, low-key version of a wedding was better. It didn’t stress her out, yet it was elegant and classy. The beauty of it was in its simplicity. It was perfect except for one thing—her heart ached because her parents weren’t there to see her take her vows, her father wasn’t walking her down the aisle to give her away to the man of her dreams, and her mother hadn’t been there to help her dress or to stick tiny flowers into her

hair. There would be no photos of them with the bride and groom. She wasn't going to get the traditional father/daughter dance nor was Matt going to take her mother out onto the dance floor and make her feel special.

Otherwise, everything was just as it should be. Matt obviously didn't need a circus or hundreds of gawkers to make him feel like a big man. He knew what and who he was without having to prove it to anyone else. She liked that about him. She was finding that she quite liked a bit about this stranger she was about to marry, even if she'd decided he'd lost his mind.

When she caught sight of him standing at the altar, she almost lost her breath. He was magnificent. There was no other way to describe him. She didn't have that kind of vocabulary, so 'magnificent' would have to be good enough.

She'd never forget his proud stance or the way his eyes followed her down the aisle. His tux was perfection. It fit him as if he'd been born wearing it. She liked his hair, which she believed he had freshened up while she dressed. He hadn't shaved off his scruff, and that made her happy. For her, it made him appear more human and more approachable. It also brought attention to his regal cheekbones that, for some reason, she wanted to kiss.

His eyes swept her from head to toe. For a moment, she wondered if he'd be disappointed in the way she looked, then she saw the gleam of approval come into his eyes. There was more, too. Behind the approval was a heat, one she recognized as lust. The dress and its nude underlayment had done their job. He was imagining her naked and getting turned on by it. The idea of her ability to do that made her stand taller. She wasn't rich or some famous star, but she could give him this, her beautiful body.

Each step brought him closer. Before long, she'd be able to reach out and touch him. Was she strong enough to keep going? Yes, she was. She handed her bouquet of roses twined with pearls and baby's breath to Annabeth and allowed Matt to take her hand.

His hands were warm, whereas hers were icy. His were dry, and hers were damp. She shook while he remained steady as a rock. They were different in hundreds of ways, but he wanted to marry her anyway. He could have had his pick of a hundred different women—rich, stars, well-bred, or models—but he'd chosen her. It boggled her mind.

As the ceremony began and the words flowed from the officiant's mouth, she stared into Matt's eyes, and her eyes became trapped in his. She found her safety net there. As long as she didn't look away, she'd get through this without faltering or stuttering. She definitely didn't want to embarrass herself or Matt by stumbling over her vows.

"I, Matthew Miller, take you, Jessica, to be my lawful wife," Matt began, his voice strong and true.

Oh! This was happening. This was real! It wasn't a joke or a dream. Jess was getting married. Her hands trembled, but Matt squeezed them gently until they stopped. He winked and caught her off guard. It relaxed her nerves and stopped the nervous giggle that almost snuck out from between her lips.

"For richer or poorer, in sickness and in health," he continued without stumbling.

Richer? Was it possible for him to be richer?

It was her turn. Her voice was barely above a whisper when she started but grew stronger and more confident as she progressed.

"Until death do us part," she ended loud enough for the audience to hear.

The officiate asked the ultimate question, and she responded, "I do," with a barely discernable tremor in her voice.

Matt's "I do" was curt and determined. It brought a laugh from his friends.

The kiss came next. Matt's large hands cupped her cheeks ever so gently. He gazed deeply into her eyes and seemed to see all the way to her soul. She hoped he wasn't seeing the

flaws she'd so carefully hidden away from the world. If so, his lips would never join hers.

She let out a soft puff of air as he lowered his head, and his full lips were about to take hers. Either he hadn't seen the flaws, or he'd dismissed them as irrelevant. It didn't matter anyway. She simply wanted to taste him. She hadn't even considered checking on his soul at all.

Warmth met warmth. A gentle caress of mouth against mouth became much more. Their eager lips melded together as if it was meant to be like two puzzle pieces. Jess thought she heard a sigh come from Matt, or maybe it was her heart. The kiss heated to a flame when his tongue darted out to cross her mouth. She had no defenses against such fire, so she allowed her lips to part. His masterful tongue eagerly entered and took control. It seemed to wander over every inch of her mouth, caressing her tongue, and drawing out her innocence. The soft suction put her in a daze.

Slowly, he backed his way out. As their lips parted, he laid his forehead against hers, and this time she definitely heard his sigh of contentment.

For such a small gathering, the applause was loud and long. There were congratulations and happiness in each clap of hands, though no one was aware of the confusion bombarding Jess. The kiss, the taste of Matt, and the sudden need for more from him made her head swirl. How could one kiss make her feel this way about a man when she'd been in love with someone else so recently? Did it mean she'd never loved Spencer? Was this what lust felt like? If so, then give her more, please.

They were introduced as Mr. and Mrs. Miller which sent shivers down Jess' spine. She was married to this man for better or worse. What if worse came too soon?

"Take my arm, Jess," he softly ordered. "It's time to walk out as a unit."

"Did we really do this, or am I dreaming?" she asked to see if he'd smile.

He reacted as she'd hoped, with a broad, deliciously happy smile. "If it's a dream then let's not wake up. I'm enjoying this far too much, especially the kissing."

"Where are you leading me?" Jess inquired as they left the chapel.

"We're going to the hotel restaurant to celebrate. I've had it closed for the night, so we and our wedding party can have it all to ourselves. We'll have a private dinner, some toasts to us, and a little dancing. I think we deserve that, don't you? We both deserve to have excellent memories of our wedding night, and our guests need to be thanked for their attendance. I believe delicious food and expensive champagne are the way to do both, then we can have some fun. Do you like to dance?"

OceanofPDF.com

The restaurant manager had put a sign out front declaring that the restaurant was closed for a private gathering. Apparently, that wasn't enough of a deterrent for Matt, or maybe he wished to advertise what was happening to him on this momentous day. Standing beside the manager's discreet sign was another more elaborate one. It was stated in bold, curling gold lettering that the wedding reception for Matthew Miller, co-owner of the hotel, and his bride Jessica was being held in the restaurant. At the bottom in much smaller letters, it also said he was sorry for the inconvenience.

Jess glanced up at Matt and asked, "Why did you want that sign added? The other one gives all the information anyone needs. It's not like you have to explain yourself. I mean, this place is yours to do with as you please, so why bother announcing your reasoning, especially since you kept the wedding so intimate? Was this your gambling side wanting attention?"

"I don't necessarily seek attention, Jess. It seems to follow me around whether I care to have it or not. To many people, I'm a celebrity. To others, I'm an oddity, something to be stared at yet not understood. The sign isn't an advertisement. At least, it's not meant to be that kind of thing. It's just a way of avoiding questions. The manager was receiving dozens of calls asking why the restaurant was closed, some of them were angry and rude. The front desk got over fifty of the same. It was tiresome and annoying, so I ended it all with my announcement. Now, none of us will be bothered," he explained.

“You may not have meant it as an advertisement and your motives may have been the very best, but it will draw attention to us. Those staying in the hotel or gambling in the casino will be roaming this hallway just to see if they can catch a glimpse inside now that they know who’s inside and why. This idea may backfire on you,” Jess told him.

“Did you really think I wouldn’t think of that and take care of the problem long before it occurred? You must not understand how a professional gambler’s brain works. It’s no wonder you lost so much of your own money. You see, a gambler has to think at least four steps ahead of his opponents. He has to calculate the consequences of each turn of the card or every roll of the dice. You consider gambling to be a game of chance. For me, it’s not as much about chance as it is about planning. That’s why I win and others lose. Security will keep this hallway empty. There will be no gawkers.”

“You’re a little smug about putting me in my place, aren’t you?” Jess asked.

“I wasn’t putting you in your place. I was explaining myself, which isn’t something I do very often. It was a courtesy to my new wife. I’m sorry if I made it sound as if I was admonishing you. I’m new at being a husband, and I hate having to explain anything. I know I must because my business is now yours as well, so I will do better in the future,” Matt replied.

Jess blushed. She was doing this all wrong, getting her marriage off to a rocky start by criticizing Matt. It was the nerves that had her saying all the wrong things. She needed to get them under control, so the rest of the evening went much smoother.

The restaurant manager, or some wedding decorator, had changed the whole appearance of the trendy restaurant. Excess tables had been removed. Others had been lined up to form one long table that held the wedding cake and gifts, which Jess hadn’t expected. The rest of the tables were in a circle, covered in snow-white tablecloths, set with crystal glassware, white China on silver chargers, and silverware.

One table sat inside the circle, and Jess knew it was for her and Matt. Its tablecloth was silver lace over the white cloth that was on the others. Everyone stood to acknowledge their entrance and watch them walk to the center of the room. Since Jess found it difficult to look each person in the eye, she allowed herself to check out the rest of the room.

A small dance floor had been set to the left of the eating tables. Once again there were candles on stands everywhere. This time, not all were white. Some of them were silver and had tiny gems as decoration. The roses here were different as well—mixed in with the pure white ones were sterling silver tea roses, their pale lavender hues adding a special touch to each arrangement.

The moment they reached their table, servers came to pour champagne. Everyone took their seats, except for Matt. His standing form drew the attention of the wedding guests and quieted the chattering at the tables.

“It may be unorthodox for the groom to begin the toasting the instant he arrives, but I’ve never been one to follow rules, as most of you are aware,” Matt spoke.

Light laughter came with his admission since his guests knew him well.

“I can’t seem to hold back these words, so I will give my toast to my bride at this moment. Jess is not only lovely to look at, but she is also the bravest woman I know. She has chosen to take the dare of marrying me despite my many faults, so her bravery goes above and beyond anyone else in this room. It’s doubtful any of you would take a chance on me.”

More laughter, some of it uncomfortable, was heard.

“I am proud and pleased to call this beautiful woman my wife. She is an asset that means more than money. I hope I’m able to live up to her expectations and bring her the happiness she deserves, so please, tap your glasses together and give a salute to Jess, my most precious possession!” Matt ended.

Annabeth stood and said, “As long as Matt started the toasts, I’d like to say something. I have loved Matt all my life, not just because he’s my brother but because he’s been so good to me. I’m happy for him today because he’s found a treasure in Jess, and as he already said, it’s a treasure greater than money. Both Matt and Jess are good people. They’re going to be wonderful together. Lift your glasses to a couple who’ll make this marriage last forever.”

Others made toasts until Matt tapped his glass and announced, “I would like to share my first dance with Jess before the meal is served. Annabeth and my best man may join us after the first few steps. More dancing will come your way once dinner is over. You are all welcome to party as late into the night as you wish.”

Jess placed her hand in Matt’s once again. The gesture was becoming natural to her already. The warmth was familiar and gave her joy. He took her in his arms on the dance floor and pulled her close. Automatically, her arms circled his neck.

They fit together as if they were made for one another. Matt was excellent at leading her across the small dance floor in a smooth, slow dance. His choice of song surprised and pleased her. He didn’t seem like the type to enjoy *Your Song* by Sir Elton John, but it was one of her favorites.

As he turned her, so that her back was hidden from the guests, his hands began to roam freely over her body. He lightly massaged her back as his errant hands wandered down toward her waist. One roaming hand caressed her bottom and gave it a gentle squeeze, sending signals of lust throughout her body. He kept his hand there for a moment while he leaned in and touched his lips to her ear. She shivered in response.

Unheeding of who watched, Jess reveled in the feel of his hands gripping her hips and pulling her pelvis into contact with his. He made her aware that the dance was making him as lust-crazed as it was for her. Though she’d been nervous and worried about sharing a wedding night with Matt, and not even sure there would be one, she now was beginning to anticipate enjoying every moment of it. He wasn’t going to touch her this way unless it was going to happen, was he? If he could make

her feel this way with just a few caresses in front of an audience, what was he going to do when they were alone?

Her breasts tingled when they rubbed against his hard chest. She knew he was very aware of what he was doing to her. There was no way he'd missed the soft gasps or the sexual tension that was building. As the song came to an end, his hand swept across an aching nipple. Whether it was an accident or a purposeful movement, Jess had no clue.

They returned to their table as the salads were being delivered. Jess was highly energized and tense. She hadn't expected to want Matt or believed that he'd want her. She didn't know where the sexual desire was coming from. A part of her was still hung up on Spencer, so how was it possible to desire another man? She missed him, which didn't mesh with wanting to have sex with Matt.

She nibbled at her salad and barely tasted the tomato bisque soup that was the second course. Her mind was engaged with her uncontrollable libido. If she went to bed with Matt, it was the same as picking up a man in a bar just because she'd been jilted. It wasn't right, and yet, it didn't feel like it was wrong to want it. Her confusion became worse when Matt's hand landed on her leg, high on her thigh, and remained there throughout the rest of the meal.

She gulped champagne to calm herself and did her best to eat the tender chicken parmesan that was served for the main course. She almost choked when Matt's finger made a circle on her inner thigh. She didn't notice as her glass of champagne was refilled due to the buzz going on in her nervous system.

Jess felt heat coming off Matt as dessert was served. She knew just how he felt. She imagined he could feel the tension rising in her as well, especially since his hand remained solidly on her upper thigh muscle. The skin was probably on fire. She was surprised the gelato they were eating didn't melt on contact.

By the time they cut the cake, Jess had downed several glasses of champagne. Thankfully, the food had mitigated some of the effects, or she'd be face down on the floor. Matt

licked the cake off her fingers, and she came close to losing control in front of everyone. He just grinned as his eyes glowed in smugness.

OceanofPDF.com

The dance floor was small, barely bigger than minuscule. Even though there was a limited number of guests, it was admittedly crowded once the real dancing began. The lack of space shoved bodies closer together than natural. Jess found hers smashed against Matt's so tightly that movement was next to impossible. They weren't able to do much more than rub up against one another. It was hot in more ways than one, and he might have planned it that way. He was known as the bad boy type and liked to live dangerously.

Matt's hands continued to roam over her body in suggestive ways, which led her to believe they were getting close to going upstairs and consummating their wedding vows. He had a way of making her entire body hum with desire. Each intimate caress brought more stress on her than she was able to handle, so she drank more champagne at every opportunity.

The dance she shared with the best man was awkward at best. They didn't know each other, yet they were smashed together even though it wasn't a slow dance. Their conversation was stilted since they didn't know what they had in common if there was anything at all. They stuck with talking about the hotel, the food, and the wedding ceremony. It wasn't as pleasant as it should have been.

By the time the dance was over, Jess had a mild headache. All the drinking was making her dizzy, and she was growing tired. It had been an extremely long day full of surprises and shocks. She hadn't awoken that morning with any of this on

the agenda. The idea of marriage had disappeared along with Spencer. The stress of it all was beginning to take its toll on her. Not even her strange sexual desire for Matt overcame the exhaustion she was fighting.

Matt was suddenly in front of her. When had her last partner left her? She couldn't remember, though she vaguely thought he'd excused himself before their dance ended.

"I cut in because you appeared to be feeling a little unwell. I thought that perhaps your partner was giving you trouble, but now I see that you're tipsy and tired. That's a bad combination, especially as warm as it is on the dance floor. Would you like to say your goodbyes and go upstairs?" Matt asked.

The suggestion was a relief in many ways. She was sick of smiling at people she didn't know and forcing herself to make conversations about absolutely nothing. Her feet were killing her, and Jess was having a hard time thinking straight. How long had she been awake? Her head was too fuzzy to add up the hours. Besides, she had no idea what time it was. She wasn't wearing a watch with her wedding dress, and the restaurant didn't display a clock. She only knew she was hot, tired, and slightly nauseous.

She nodded and replied as if speaking to her host rather than her husband, "I think that's a really great idea. I've had enough. Thank you for a lovely wedding day. It's a memory I'll keep forever."

"That was the whole point, Jess. Every woman should have a wedding day she can look back on with joy. I'd hoped you'd be pleased. I'm sorry I wasn't paying more attention to how much champagne you were drinking. It's my fault you're tipsy again. I don't plan on allowing you to get this way on a daily basis. Getting drunk while gambling is what got you here in the first place. Now, I'm the one to blame for tonight."

"No, you're not. I did the drinking to soothe my nerves, then again, maybe you are to blame since you're the one who made me nervous in the first place. Doesn't all this seem a

little odd and a whole lot crazy to you? Even drunk, I can see that this is nuts,” Jess answered with honesty.

Matt smiled the secretive way he'd done several times before and replied, “It's not as crazy as it appears. You'll understand soon enough, but now isn't the time for explanations. Let's go tell Annabeth goodnight. She'll see to the guests after we leave.”

Jess allowed him to take her arm and lead her to where Annabeth was speaking to the restaurant manager. They were stopped several times on their journey as the guests understood they were leaving and wished to say goodbye and good luck. Jess wondered if they all were in on whatever secret Matt was holding back, or if they knew the bride considered her husband a stranger.

“Annabeth, I hate to bother you or ask you for another favor, but I find that I must. Jess has had a bit too much champagne, and I need to take her upstairs. I don't want to leave you all alone to deal with all this. I can come back down if you want me to. However, until I know Jess will be okay, I would appreciate it if you'd watch over the party and let everyone continue to have fun,” Matt stated.

Jess understood he felt obligated to take care of his guests. After all, he was the host, but it seemed odd that a professional gambler would show such care and kindness for others. She was suddenly aware that as the bride she should have been more attentive to their needs and less absorbed in herself. If Matt could be a responsible person, then so could she. She'd remedy a little of her mistake right away.

“It's okay. I can get to the room by myself. Stay with your guests, Matt. I'm sorry I wasn't thinking of them and their needs at all. I've been very selfish tonight, so let me go up by myself,” she pleaded.

“Nonsense! The bride is supposed to be selfish on her wedding day. It's practically a law. I just thank the Lord you haven't been a bridezilla,” Annabeth replied with a laugh. “I've got this covered, and I don't mind it in the least. You shouldn't go upstairs alone, Jess. Your husband would appear

foolish if he remained here without his new wife. Matt would definitely hate looking foolish. I doubt that he'd want to stay anyway. He hasn't been able to keep his hands off you all night, so he certainly won't be willing to now."

"Annabeth," Matt said in a tone of admonishment. "What are you talking about?"

She patted Matt's cheeks in a gesture that surprised Jess. It was loving and very sisterly, which was unexpected.

"Dear brother, did you actually think no one noticed? For once your famous poker face won't help you. Your eyes have been burning a hole through Jess all night, and your hands have barely left her even to eat. Don't argue. Just take your leave and say thank you. We'll talk tomorrow," Annabeth chided.

"Thank you, dearest sister," Matt sarcastically replied.

Jess clung to his arm as they made the trip to the elevators. She stumbled a time or two, and he kept her upright. She was having trouble keeping herself from kicking the uncomfortable heels off and leaving them for someone else to find. They no longer seemed sexy or necessary. Instead, she'd decided they were the reason she was so unsteady on her feet.

In the elevator, alone with Matt, reality began to sink in. The muscular body she was hanging onto was her husband, a man she had yet to learn anything important about or completely understand. If things progressed as they should, and she secretly hoped, that hard body would soon be bare and on top of her, which would be an adventure but definitely odd. She didn't know his likes or dislikes in bed or otherwise. What was he going to think when he saw the tiny strips of white underwear she wore? Were her curvy body and full breasts the kind he preferred, or was he into the overly thin, almost breastless models who came to the hotel?

Was Matt into foreplay, or did he simply do the deed? How was she going to handle this? She wasn't into picking guys up at bars and bringing them home for sex, so how was she going to react to getting naked with Matt? Jess wasn't shy as a rule,

but this was a whole new ball game, way out of her comfort zone.

She was going to let Matt take the lead, that's what she decided as the elevator began to rise. She'd follow his cues, and everything would be fine. She liked his touch. In fact, she more than liked it. It had kept her turned on all night. Just his hand on her leg had brought her to the brink of losing it. He had a way of causing her body to hum in an indescribable way. He was sexy to the point of being unreal, much like a character in a book or movie. He clearly knew how to court a woman and excite her—that much she learned in one evening.

Was it enough to know they desired each other? Not really. Jess wanted to know more. She needed to know how his mind worked, what he felt, and most of all, why he came to her rescue by offering marriage. Why had he rescued her at all? She was nothing to him. What exactly did he get out of this, especially marrying her? She wanted him to open up and talk to her. She wanted an explanation.

There had to be more to this arrangement than she'd seen. It was impossible to figure it all out while her head was muddled with alcohol and spinning. Her brain wasn't up to doing calculations or putting together puzzle pieces at the moment. Previously, Matt hadn't given her time to think. He'd made an offer she couldn't refuse, then rushed her off to fulfill it. Everything had already been planned and settled before she'd agreed to the offer, which she should have questioned but was too freaked out to do. Jess wanted and needed the whole truth from him.

Unable to think clearly and unravel the tangled-up mess Matt had gotten her into, Jess decided to think only of her own feelings and deal with them as she saw fit. Right now, she was concerned about her wedding night. Despite all the intimate touching and the heart-stopping kiss he'd planted on her to seal their vows, Matt hadn't said a word about sex. He'd never mentioned it when he made the deal with her. Jess wanted to know his intentions. Was she freaking out for nothing, or was she right in assuming he'd be taking her to bed?

Actually, she feared she'd freak out worse if he didn't want her in his bed. That was the really weird part of it all. Perhaps she thought screwing Matt would erase Spencer from her mind. If she had sex with Matt enough times, she could get over the anger, sadness, and love she still hung onto for Spencer. He was a plague she needed to get rid of. That had to be why Matt turned her on so easily. He was the cure for all the awfulness Spencer had put her through. He was the solution to her broken heart. If anyone could screw Spencer out of her heart and head, it was Matt. Every time he kissed her, she was saturated in heat, lust, and desire.

If that was the case, then Jess wasn't leaving the choice of whether or not to consummate the wedding night up to Matt. She was going to take things into her own hands. They were married, so it wasn't like she was jumping the bones of a random man in hopes of derailing her thoughts of another. Matt was legally hers to do with as she pleased, wasn't he? That's what her muddled brain told her anyway.

She took a deep breath and turned slightly toward Matt. She placed her free hand on his chest to feel his heartbeat. It was pounding faster than she'd imagined beneath her questing hand. When he didn't protest, she tried to slip a finger between buttonholes to find bare skin. Matt covered her hand with his own and held it still.

Well, that wasn't going to work. She wasn't going to let him stop her so easily, so Jess began to rub her ample breast against his side, turning more so that she was soon front-to-front with him.

"Jess, what are you doing?" he gruffly asked.

In answer, she pulled her hand from beneath his and lifted it to his neck, yanking his head down and kissing him the way she'd longed to all night. Her tongue swept his mouth leaving no doubt as to what she wanted. She took his hand and placed it on her breast, forced it to squeeze her, and then let out a moan. Something inside her had opened wide with the touch of his big, warm hand. The now-familiar hum began again.

Matt took her wrists and abruptly removed her hands from him. He pulled away, but she fought back. With her knee she rubbed his manhood, making him jerk and curse. He dropped her hands to push away her knee.

Instantly, she began to tug at the straps of her dress. She pulled until the bodice fell, letting the lacy, sheer bra give him a glimpse of her darkened, alert nipples. She'd seduce him one way or another because now she wanted him, not just to erase Spencer but to give herself the gift of fulfilling a desire.

“Don't do this, Jess. You don't really want to do this. You've been drinking, and you're tired. You've got to stop humiliating yourself for me or anyone else,” Matt demanded.

OceanofPDF.com

Matt's words were like a bucket of ice water tossed on her head. Nothing else he could have said or done would have hurt more. She'd had more than her share of rejection lately, not to mention in her entire life. It wasn't quite as much of a shock as she'd have expected it to be, yet the pain it brought was way above what she could tolerate at the moment. Every inch of her felt the ache, but most of all, her heart was shattered, which was insane in itself since she'd already considered it to be in that condition after Spencer had jilted her.

How much rejection and heartache could one woman take and still be alive? Jess was finding out the answer to that question the hard way. She may have whimpered from the pain. She wasn't sure, though. She'd definitely heard the sound but couldn't be certain it had come from her lips. She was so dazed and confused that she was beginning to shut her consciousness down in order to spare herself any more agony. She welcomed the numbness she felt coming on.

She felt Matt tugging at her bodice to cover her from his gaze and any other prying eyes that might be in the hallway when the elevator stopped on the floor where her room was located. This time, when his hands brushed her breasts, she felt nothing but shame. She'd thrown herself at him like some kind of slut when she'd been betrothed to another man just hours ago. He was right—she had humiliated herself.

Jess walked beside Matt without saying another word. What was there to say? Her own husband didn't want to kiss

her or come to her bed. She allowed the numbness to take her over completely. It was better than the alternative. She felt a sudden sense of déjà vu because she'd used that phrase before in regard to Matt.

Matt retrieved the swipe card to her room from his pocket. Annabeth must have given it to him at some point during their goodnights. He opened the door for her and waved her to step inside. She couldn't move those last few inches without looking at him one more time. When she did her eyes begged for an explanation, something to make her feel less worthless.

Matt sighed, lifted her chin gently in his palm, and softly said, "It's going to be fine. I promise." The compassion in his eyes blew her away.

Then his lips brushed hers like the wings of a butterfly before he left her standing there all alone. Her fingers reached for her mouth to hold that last kiss to her quivering lips. She was shaking, afraid the warmth would leave her, that the kiss would flutter away on the butterfly's wings, and she'd crumble to the floor on that spot.

A sob slipped through her defenses. Her skin was freezing, and her heart was barely beating. She entered the hotel room in a zombie-like state. She sought warmth. Jess climbed on the bed and wrapped herself in the fluffy duvet. She rocked back and forth in an effort to get warm. After thirty minutes of frustration, she realized she had no body heat for the duvet to capture. Shivering from head to toe, she undressed and went to the shower where instant heat was available.

Her teeth were chattering, and the shivering was uncontrollable. It hurt. Her whole life was nothing but pain. She made the water so hot she came close to scalding herself. After a few moments, it ended the shivering. However, it had another side effect, one she'd rather have done without. It brought the numbness that kept her sane to an end. All her anxiety and self-pity returned to haunt her.

She dried her now red skin and grabbed the robe the hotel had thoughtfully provided off its hook. She wrapped it tightly around her body, tight enough to imagine it was someone's

arms holding her since she lacked the real thing. Two weddings in two days; one fulfilled, the other not; one planned, the other an extraordinary surprise, yet here she sat all alone in a fancy room that was meant to be a honeymoon haven. The bed was enormous and meant for two people to share as they began their life together. Jess drew up her knees, wrapped her arms around them, and laid her head on them. She tried to understand why things were so messed up.

It all began and ended with Spencer. There was no other explanation. She'd loved him, and in a way, still did. She'd thought he loved her. He'd said he did. Why else would he have proposed? He must have been pretending all along, but why? It wasn't for sex because she'd already given him that. Had he been using her for something? If so, what?

Love and hate were two sides of one coin. Jess flipped it over as she considered Spencer. There was hate for what he'd done to her, for what he'd led her to believe she meant to him. It simmered beneath the love and longing. She missed him, damn him! It wasn't fair that he was still in her thoughts and her heart, but then, life wasn't supposed to be fair, was it? Hadn't her mother told her that since childhood?

However, this was a whole new level of unfairness. What was wrong with her, Jess asked herself. Was she broken in some manner that brought about rejection? Was her soul ugly? Did she lack something other women had?

Two rejections by two different men told her it was her fault. There wasn't any way to put the blame on them since she was the common denominator. It had to be her. She'd said or done something wrong. Maybe she was wired wrong. Perhaps she asked more of men than they could give. Did she push them so much that they pushed back or walked away?

None of her ideas gave her an answer to her dilemma. She'd drawn the men to her, hadn't she? So, she had something they'd liked or wanted. They'd both offered marriage. She just wasn't able to figure out why then they'd both walked away from her without a backward glance.

At least, Matt had gone through with the wedding, or so it appeared. For all she knew, the whole thing was a fake. He had the money and the power to pull off that kind of scheme, but he wouldn't do that. Deep inside her, she knew Matt wasn't that type of man. He wasn't evil. Scheming? Yes. He was a gambler, which made scheming a prerequisite. Evil and cruel? No. His eyes showed compassion and kindness. She wasn't misreading that.

Why had he come to her rescue? If he considered himself to be some kind of knight in shining armor, why hadn't he just forgiven her debt, allowed her to pay it off slowly, or forced her to work for the hotel? Why had he made a deal that included marriage? What did he want out of it?

It certainly wasn't sex. She offered, even stripped naked in the elevator to give herself to him, and she'd have gone much farther in her drunken, pity party state. He'd shoved her off, turned her down flat, and said she was humiliating herself.

He'd left her alone with a gentle kiss and sadness on his face. The sadness had been for her she finally realized. He'd said she shouldn't have to humiliate herself for anyone. Was that what she'd been doing with Spencer as well as Matt? Was that the reason for all the rejections?

She did have a tendency to blame herself for everything that went wrong in her little piece of the world. She still believed trouble followed her around. She felt she brought it on herself. Why was it so wrong to see the truth in your own faults?

Jess fell onto her side and curled into a ball. She was sad and lonely. She was sure that would always be the case from now on. What else was she to think? She was married! It was a loveless marriage of convenience. At least, it was convenient for her. She was automatically free of debt, which should make her feel happy. A huge burden had been lifted off her sagging shoulders. She wasn't in jail, so why was she suddenly sobbing uncontrollably?

She knew exactly why. She was a worthless human being. She was unlovable. She was a sad, pitiful excuse for a woman.

Sure, the outside was pretty, maybe even hot, but her inside was screwed up beyond repair. No amount of therapy was going to fix this mess. Any legitimate therapist would laugh their ass off when she explained her situation. She'd laugh herself except that she knew it would turn into hysteria. She was close to that already.

Where was Matt now? Had he gone back to the party without her and made some excuse to Annabeth as to why he wasn't making love to his bride? Did he say she'd passed out from too much champagne? Annabeth was sure to believe him. Her brother wasn't going to lie to her.

Was he sitting somewhere with his buddies, laughing at the stupid woman who'd been so scared and gullible that she'd agreed to marry him? No, she didn't see that. She saw him at a table raking in money as he gambled the night away.

Her entire body shook with her sobs. She was devastated and sick. Why was the only man who wanted her as his wife a crazy, impulsive, rich gambler? She needed him if for nothing else than to pay off her debts. She thought she might need him for more if she'd allow her mind to admit it, but he didn't need her. He had everything he wanted at his fingertips, so what was she? A bet?

The idea of being a bet made the tears flow faster. She couldn't stand the thought of being a pawn in some game. Matt had another motive, didn't he? She was useful for something. She had to be, or she'd never be able to live with herself.

Her body was wracked with sobs as her shaking hand lifted her cell phone. She desperately wanted to call Matt but realized she didn't have his phone number. The irony of it nearly broke her in half.

With tears running like rain down her cheeks, eyes so swollen she could barely see the phone screen, and fingers that wouldn't stop shaking, Jess sent a text message to her parents. She told them she was married then cried until the wee hours of the morning and soon fell asleep.

The first thing Jessica felt after she came into consciousness was a blinding pain in her eyes. They were red and swollen as she tried to rub the sleep from them. She felt groggy and tired despite just waking up. The clock on the bedside table showed it was 8:56 am. She had overslept, which was very unusual for her. Being a nurse and someone tight on financial situations, paying for her education by doing her job multiple shifts a week, Jessica could never afford to sleep in late. She looked around the unfamiliar room, her mind taking a little time to catch up to her surroundings.

Oh, right. This is my marriage bed, and I'm alone in here. My unexpected new husband left me alone last night.

Just as the clock hit 9 am, there was a knock at the door. Jessica had no idea who it could be. She grabbed a robe, laid it out over the chair, and wrapped it around herself before walking over to the door and cracking it open to see who was outside. A neatly dressed woman stood there with a polite smile on her face.

“Good morning, Mrs. Miller. I am your assistant Natalie. Mr. Miller told me to come to wake you up at 9 am and help you get ready,” she said in a voice that sounded gentle.

At the sound of “Mrs. Miller,” something inside Jessica jolted awake. She was Mrs. Miller now. It was unbelievable how she was on her way to getting a completely different last name only a week ago. Had it only been so less time since her failed wedding ceremony with Spencer? Who would have thought she would end up in this position?

“Oh, okay. Please come in,” she said. She sounded groggy and unpresentable even to herself. She needed a shower and lots of coffee, so she could walk straight. Natalie came inside and closed the door softly behind her. She did a quick scan of the room for anything that needed organizing. Jessica wondered what she thought of this whole situation, but she found that she couldn’t care too much about that right now.

“Where is Mr. Miller?” she asked her assistant.

“He is currently attending a meeting. After that, he will be heading directly to his private jet, which is where he told me to take you.”

“Alright. I will go for a quick shower. Please make yourself comfortable,” Jessica offered Natalie as she started for the bathroom.

“Do you want me to pack your things, Ma’am?”

Jessica turned back and looked around the room. Some of her makeup were scattered across the vanity, and there were a few pieces of clothing on the couch.

“Yeah, sure. Leave the cosmetics out though. I need them after the shower.” She gave a small smile and disappeared inside the bathroom.

Jessica felt her body instantly start to relax as she stood under the shower, letting the warm water calm her nerves. The bathroom, like any other aspect of this hotel, was generously furnished. She took the bottle of expensive shampoo and lathered up her hair, breathing in the heavenly scent of it. The body wash was equally amazing. Most of the toiletries seemed to be French imported products.

Hmm, being rich does have its perks.

She came out of the shower, put her hair up in a bundle inside the towel, and got out of the steamy bathroom, feeling refreshed. All that she needed now was a good cup of coffee. Natalie had tidied up the whole room. All of Jessica’s things were packed inside her luggage. Her handbag sat on one end of the couch, and just as she had said, the makeup on the

vanity was left out for her to use. Natalie had arranged them in an organized way.

“I took the liberty to order some breakfast for you as you were showering so that you could have it right after you came out. It should be here any minute,” said Natalie.

At the mention of breakfast, Jessica felt the sudden hit of hunger. She felt grateful to Natalie for thinking about that small detail and thanked her with a smile. Breakfast arrived just then, and Jessica was delighted to see the freshly brewed pot of coffee. She let Natalie pour some into a mug and ate some buttered toast and some fruit.

“Natalie, please join me for breakfast.”

“I already ate, Ma’am, but thank you. I think I will take some coffee only.”

Jessica offered Natalie some coffee, and they both enjoyed their morning in comfortable silence, with occasional small talk. All of Matt’s employees seemed to be well-adjusted to their positions. Everyone Jessica had met so far was genuinely kind, and Matt seemed to treat them like he knew them beyond just being their boss, like friends or acquaintances. That must have been why they, in return, felt so at home to be working for him. The thought put a smile on Jessica’s face. Though she didn’t know much about her husband, she was coming to understand the fact that he was a good boss.

“When does Matt’s meeting end?” she asked Natalie.

Natalie glanced at her hand-watch. “It should be done in about fifteen minutes, then there are another five minutes from his office to the helipad, so we should be fine if we reach there within twenty minutes, Ma’am.”

Jessica nodded and sipped her coffee. She had no idea where Matt was taking her. At this, she had no idea about her life or what would happen the day after when she was. She guessed that was just the result of this bizarre situation. It was either this or imprisoned for God knows how long. At least this way, she could live and work without being deemed a criminal.

She finished her coffee and put on the only dress she had left from her luggage. She had packed light coming to Monte Carlo as she had only meant to stay for the duration of her and Spencer's honeymoon, maybe even less. The dress was an olive green silk fabric with a thin sleeve coated with tiny jeweled beads. The neck was pretty low but not too much. She would have preferred something a bit less revealing, but she didn't have a choice.

"It's a beautiful dress, Ma'am. It suits you very much," came Natalie's voice, cutting in through her thoughts.

"Oh, thank you, though I'm not sure if it's the one for today."

"What are you saying? It's perfect, paired with the correct jewelry and makeup. It's going to be gorgeous for today. Let me help you."

Natalie guided Jessica in front of the vanity and began drying her hair.

"What do you want your hairdo to be like, Ma'am?"

"I don't know. Maybe just leave it loose?"

Natalie nodded and brushed her hair until it was naturally loose and falling gently over her bare shoulders, and then she helped Jessica put on some makeup, agreeing with her on the fact that a light, dewy look would be best with the dress. When the makeup was done, Jessica took out a necklace. It was a delicate locket on a single chain.

"That is just the necklace for this dress, Ma'am. You look beautiful." Natalie smiled and Jessica thanked her again. She was starting to grow fond of Natalie.

"If you're ready, we should leave for the helipad now. Mr. Matthew should be there shortly."

Jessica nodded that she was ready, and Natalie helped her take out the luggage and guided her toward the terrace. It was a bright day outside, and Jessica could see that the area was huge. On the left side of it were a helipad and a private jet sitting at the center of it. She followed Natalie towards the jet.

Matt must have been inside it because, upon seeing her approach, he climbed down from it.

“Morning, wife. Had breakfast and ready to go?” Matt greeted her with a grin on his face. He put out his hand towards her.

“Yeah, had breakfast,” said Jessica and placed her hand in his, feeling him grip it firmly. Matt helped her into the jet and got inside himself. Natalie handed the luggage to the pilot, who stowed it in the luggage compartment. Getting inside the plane, he called out from behind “All good, Sir.”

“Fly,” Matt ordered the pilot.

“Where are we going?” Jessica asked.

“You’ll see,” was all he said. He put his arm around her, which even though she didn’t want to admit it, helped her not get scared as the jet took off.

OceanofPDF.com

As soon as Matt was done with the meeting, he went to the terrace. He was looking forward to seeing his newly-wedded wife and taking her out on his private jet. He had sent Natalie to help her pack and get her there and hoped they weren't running late. When he got to the jet, the pilot, Jacob, greeted him. "Good morning, Sir."

"Good morning, Jacob. Is this baby ready to fly?" asked Matt humorously.

"Yes, Sir. It's a well-oiled machine."

Matt nodded distractedly as his eyes fell upon the door to the terrace, and as it opened, out came Natalie, followed closely by Jessica. Matt felt a jolt of awareness at the sight of her. In the bright morning light, she looked so pretty. The dress she had on hugged her curvy body perfectly, and he could see that she was beautiful, even from afar. He was inside the jet now, but he couldn't take his eyes off her from the window.

Jessica seemed hesitant, but Matt didn't miss the slight widening of her eyes as she took in her surroundings and, finally, the private jet. He guessed it was indeed a sight to behold. He forced himself to tear his eyes away from her, got up from his seat, and climbed out. Jessica stood just below the stairs to the plane, and from Matt's position above, he could see directly into her upturned face. His breath got caught for a second. She was so strikingly beautiful upfront. Her arched eyebrows were somewhat thin but perfect for her slim-cut face. Other than that, her full lips and high cheekbones made her a look to behold. Surprisingly, he hadn't noticed these

features when they first met. After exchanging a short greeting, he offered her his hand and helped her up into the jet. He had arranged their seats to be in the best position from where they could get the best view. The jet was equipped with a small kitchen and toilet behind. He was concerned if she had breakfast already. If not, Matt had already made arrangements for light snacks after taking flight.

Jessica took her seat by the window and looked outside. Matt made sure she was secured in place with the seatbelt on, then he instructed the pilot to fly, and the jet took off to the sky smoothly.

“All good?” he asked.

“Yeah.”

“Nervous flyer?”

“No, but this is the first time I’m flying on a private jet though.”

“You get used to it, honey,” Matt teased a bit. At the word “honey,” Jessica raised one eyebrow but didn’t protest or say much. She was looking out the window. Matt could see that she was a little nervous indeed or maybe feeling shy and awkward. He didn’t blame her though, given the situation. In fact, he thought she handled it pretty well so far. He couldn’t help but smile. He was over the moon with joy about the fact that he’d married the woman he had fallen in love with at first sight. Of course, people would call him silly and this whole thing impossible, but Matt didn’t care. It was what it was, and he couldn’t change anything. It was true that he did fall in love with her the moment their eyes met. A few months ago, he probably wouldn’t have believed such fantastical notions, but there he was, sitting beside his beautiful bride and smiling giddily.

It wasn’t like he didn’t even know about her existence. He did for some time now. Matt and Spencer had been acquainted for a long time before he had the chance to meet Jessica.

Spencer had started coming into his casino frequently and quickly became a regular. His presence had become too

consistent for Matt to ignore, so he had struck up a conversation one day. They had gotten acquainted with each other gradually, and Spencer had turned out to be an enthusiastic learner. He had a keen eye for the game and was a quick learner. His sense of wicked cunningness and willingness to cheat the money out of other people were effective skills to have while gambling. Matt had been impressed with his potential and taught him some tricks. Gradually, Spencer turned out to be a professional gambler. As they had gotten to know each other more and had started keeping in contact through their social media, Matt heard about Jessica. She was apparently his long-time girlfriend. Spencer talked about her a lot, but Matt could never see that shine in his eyes that people usually get when they're in love.

Spencer talked about Jessica like she was a trophy, something to show off and brag. Matt was slightly annoyed at this fact, though he didn't know why. He had never seen this Jessica, but it was clear from what he heard from Spencer—and Spencer was generous with his details—that she seemed like a very nice person. Someone who cared for Spencer and loved him, and Matt thought that no one should be treated the way Spencer had been treating Jessica behind her back, not to mention his other pursuits despite having a girlfriend.

Lost in these thoughts, Matt looked over at Jessica who was staring out the window. Natalie chose that moment to appear with a tray of snacks and drinks. Jessica gratefully accepted the glass of apple juice he passed to her and sipped on it. Matt got a cup of black coffee for himself and let Natalie excuse herself.

“Is that the outskirts of the city?” Jessica asked, pointing outside.

“Yes, that is,” said Matt.

“Such a large city, yet we can fly out of it within minutes,” Jessica said with a voice full of wonder.

Matt guessed she must have loved watching the city pass by under them. He followed her eyes and looked out himself. The view from the jet was beautiful. They had almost crossed

the city line and were getting closer to the hills and the countryside. The sun was high up in the sky, while the sky was mostly clear, save for a few clouds scattered here and there. It was a beautiful morning, and the look on Jessica's face was even more beautiful.

She was a bit awkward with him, yes, and he didn't blame her for it, but despite that, her appreciation for the whole thing was apparent on her face. It was radiant with wonder.

She watched the city go by, not because she was trying to find something to do, but because she was genuinely interested in watching it. She liked it. Witnessing this made something inside Matt stir up with emotion. At that moment, he felt like protecting her, treasuring her amazement, and wonder. He was glad that he was responsible for putting that look on her face, and he wanted to be the only person to ever be able to give it all to her.

“Are you excited, Jess?”

She blinked a little and said, “I would be thrilled if I actually knew what the hell was going on.”

Matt chuckled and teased her some more. He loved getting to have such banter with her, and they made him excited to be in her company.

OceanofPDF.com

“Are you excited, Jess?”

Hearing Matt use the shortened version of her name caused some kind of reaction in her that she wasn't expecting. Lots of people called her Jess. Spencer used to call her Jess, but Matt had never used it until now. It was weird enough for her to be called “wife” earlier that morning by Matt, but the sound of her own nickname resonated with something inside her. She couldn't help but notice that it sounded nice coming from his mouth and that maybe she liked the sound of it.

Momentarily caught off guard by these sudden thoughts, she blinked a few times before answering Matt. If she was being honest with herself, she was more than thrilled to be in that private jet. It wasn't because it was expensive or a rare thing people can afford, but it was more about the beauty of it all. Jessica had always been that person who loved window seats in planes so she could look at the earth below. She seldom slept during flights, preferring to gaze out at the sky and watch the clouds go by. Every time she did get the window seat though, it was usually half obstructed by the plane wing, or the window was too small. Most times, she didn't even get window seats.

Come to think of it, I don't even need to fly that often. I probably have had like three or four flights in my whole life.

This private jet was different. The seat was so comfortable, and it felt firm. She felt safe, and the best thing was that the window was large. It allowed a magnificent view of the world

passing by her, and she just couldn't get enough of it. She spent a lot of time watching outside, forgetting that she had a cup of juice in her hands or that Matt was beside her.

However, she was aware of his presence now, with him calling her name like that. There was something almost intimate about it. She felt confused about her feelings toward Matt. So far, they had been a sense of dislike and annoyance.

No, it's more like he gets on my nerves, and I have to shake off the thought of him.

Despite that, she couldn't help but be curious about her new husband. Within the few days of meeting him, she had got to know bits and pieces about him from one source to another, but that wasn't enough. She wanted to know more about this man. So far, she collected an idea in her head that he was mysterious, but he was also sweet to those he cared about, he was an excellent speaker who can convince you to do anything, and he was a diplomat who used skills very generously in his gambling business.

I guess I could admire him for that. After all, it is, in fact, a quality very few possess.

But what confused and bothered Jessica was his connection to Spencer. She had been so shocked when she saw that picture of the two of them together in Matt's casino. They knew each other well enough for Matt to post pictures with him on his Instagram, and after Spencer had left her, what were the chances that Matt would be the one to propose to her out of nowhere?

I guess the selection of this very specific hotel makes sense now, as Spencer knew him so naturally, he booked our honeymoon here.

Was it just a mere coincidence? Or was Spencer still somehow controlling his role in her life through Matt? Trying to play with Jessica's feelings even further than he had done by manipulating her through Matt? She felt distressed by all these thoughts.

“Penny for your thoughts?” asked Matt, breaking into her disheartening ideas.

Jessica chewed her lower lip for a few seconds. She noticed Matt’s eyes go down to her lips unwittingly, then return to her eyes. She tried to ignore the electric tingling she felt when his eyes landed on her lips and continued speaking, “Matt, if I ask you a question, would you answer me honestly?”

“Hmm... that depends on the question,” he said in a rough voice.

“Please, I’m serious.”

“Okay, shoot.”

“How exactly do you know, Spencer?” asked Jessica. Matt was silent for a moment. She wasn’t sure he was going to answer her at all, but then he let out a breath and answered her question.

“He was a gambler here at my hotel,” he said in a matter-of-fact tone.

“Wh-what? A gambler? Spencer?!” Jessica stammered out.

“Uhh... yes. He was a regular at my casino in Atlantic City,” Matt said after initially hesitating. “Though, sometimes we would meet in Vegas or even Shreveport.”

Jessica touched her forehead and rubbed it. This could not be real. Surely, there must be a misunderstanding. In all the years she had been with Spencer, and even before then when they were just friends, she had never known him to be into gambling. Not that she would be bothered by it since she was also into some occasional gambling herself, but the fact that she had no idea about it despite being in a relationship with him surprised her. It shocked her.

“Did you know him for a long time?” she asked in a small voice.

“You could say that. He started coming in about a couple of years ago. At first, he didn’t know anything about gambling, just tried his luck and stuck to it. When I met him,

he asked me how it was all done. I was not interested in his requests at first, but he was persistent. He started spending more time here and we got friendly, and you could say his enthusiasm won me over, you know? I taught him a lot of tricks and cheats in the game, showed him how it's done to win, and he was a quick learner. Pretty soon, he was cashing in lots of money and winning over almost all my other customers." Matt had a look of remembering on his face as if he was looking back to a long time ago, which Jessica supposed it was.

"Two years ago would mean when we were already dating. We dated for about four years before he proposed," Jessica said, mostly to herself than Matt. She couldn't understand his sudden want for gambling. Was he struggling financially? But it didn't look like that to her. He was still spending lavishly as he always did on himself.

"That would seem so. He did mention he had a girlfriend," Matt said distantly.

"So you *did* know about me before."

"Yes and no. He did mention you and told me a lot of things. Spencer was heavy on the details; I'll give him that." Matt flashed her with a wink. Jessica felt heat shoot up her cheeks but Matt continued, "Having said that, he didn't show me any pictures. Only told me stuff all guys tell their other guy friends about their girlfriend."

"How did you find out that I was Spencer's fiancé when you saw me at the hotel, though?" Jessica asked.

"It's my hotel, I would know." Matt answered.

Jessica kept staring at Matt.

"I have my ways." Matt said, embarrassed to admit that he hired help to track Jessica.

"And why did we end up getting married?" Jessica was still confused.

"I'm a sucker for hot mess, or should I say, the damsel in distress." Matt quickly responded.

Jessica didn't know what to feel at this revelation. She felt many conflicting emotions all at once. Of course, it hurt that the man she had thought was her best friend and thought she'd spend the rest of her life with turned out to be a fraud. She thought knowing Spencer for so many years meant she knew everything about him—knew what kind of person he was or what things he liked—but now, she realized she was utterly, mortifyingly wrong. Was their relationship even real? What about their friendship? Was that all just pretending on his part? She didn't know him at all. He was living a double life, and he had been, even when they were just friends. He had been deceiving her this whole time.

As much as that was a painful realization, it was also a relief to know she was saved from marrying a stranger. If they had been married, it would have been a big lie. When eventually, she found out much later after being married, it could have been too late, and she would be way too hurt to comprehend. Jessica thought that maybe, even though this whole wedding fiasco with Spencer felt like a curse, it was a blessing in disguise. Maybe it was some offhanded way of the universe to save her from ultimate demise by hurting her now. Jessica was reminded of her current situation.

You don't know Matt either, and he's already your husband. You are still married to a stranger though.

This did not scare Jessica like the thought of being accidentally married to a fake manipulative Spencer did. It was true that she didn't know Matt either... yet. At least Matt didn't seem like he was faking a whole other identity as Spencer had done.

Matt was all but unknown to her, yes, but there was the possibility of getting to know one another. He was a new person in her life, waiting to be explored, to be seen, to be heard—to be known. Even though she didn't like him initially, she was starting to get used to him now.

Slowly, they might even become friends. After all, he had saved her from imprisonment. Even though she had had to marry him so he could pay off her boatload of debts in his hotel casino, it wasn't altogether too bad of a situation. *Lots of*

people married for convenience, right? She thought. That thought made Jessica breathe a little easier and not be afraid of the life that would lay ahead of her —a life with Matt.



MATT WAS SLIGHTLY TAKEN ABACK BY JESSICA'S SUDDEN question about how he knew Spencer. He supposed he would have to come clean at some point, now that they are married, and anyway, Matt would have told her everything because she had the right to know. He just hadn't expected it to be right now, on their way out on his private jet. He had imagined this trip to be a cute and lovely interaction, but he guessed this would have to be gotten through. It was how it was.

However, he debated whether to tell her some more details about Spencer. About the real reason why he was never okay with the fact that Spencer was dating a seemingly nice girl named Jessica. Spencer was never loyal to her in the first place. He cheated on Jessica all the time, ever since Matt had gotten to know him a little. It was one of the first things about him that made Matt lose respect for the guy. He had witnessed all of Spencer's side pursuits when he was at his hotel. Spencer would show up with a new girl every week and book themselves in one of the hotel rooms overnight. He had the audacity to talk about Jessica while holding another girl in his arms. Matt was never okay with that, but he felt like it wasn't his place to try to amend Spencer's personality. If Matt had been acquainted with Jessica, maybe he would have, but since he wasn't, he didn't know if he had the liberty to intervene.

After giving it some thought, he decided not to tell Jessica. She didn't need to add more burns to her already bad heartbreak. She had been left by Spencer, which to Matt, seemed like the best outcome for her, and he believed dwelling on past details was not needed anymore. Telling her about Spencer's cheating wouldn't help her in any way. It would only help to aggravate her and hurt her further. What was more important now was to make her see that she deserved much more than that fake pretender, that she was in a much better

place right now, and that the cancellation of the wedding was a brutal but required change in her life.

Jessica was chewing her lower lip again, lost in thought. Matt felt something stirring deep inside. Earlier when Jessica had chewed her lip unknowingly at something he had said, Matt had felt the same pull towards her. He had been gripped with the sudden urge to gently lift her chin and kiss her on the mouth. He felt the same way again. This woman really pulled some strong reactions from him indeed.

Jessica had rose blush-colored lipstick on. It went so well with her skin and made her already full lips look lush and soft. Matt imagined rubbing his thumb on those lips and smudging the color on the sides of her lips, on her face. He imagined bringing his face down onto hers and licking the lipstick stain from her chin. How sweet she would taste, for sure. He further imagined trailing kisses along those high cheekbones and not stopping until he got to her earlobe and gave small bites there, just to see how she'd react to his teeth.

Stop.

Matt was feeling hot now. He couldn't believe how much he was attracted to Jessica. He thought of her a lot, and seeing her made him imagine things that made him feel excited. Matt didn't want to let Jessica know just yet. She had just gotten out of a huge relationship and been coerced into another in a matter of days. Matt was concerned for her mental being and happiness. He wanted to give her time and free will. No matter how much he wanted to take things to the next level, he had to remind himself to be patient with her. He didn't want to force her into anything. He wanted her to come to him when she was ready, and Matt was determined to give Jessica that space. He was in love with her already, but he still needed to know her. Gradually and steadily, he decided to get to know what she likes and doesn't like—things that made her smile and happy. He wanted her to fall in love with him as well. He wanted a good life with her, and he wasn't going to mess it up, no matter what.

*I*t had been thirty minutes after they started their flight. Natalie appeared from the back of the jet again. This time, with a tray of English breakfast tea in dainty little cups and some butter croissants.

Matt watched Jessica throughout the whole process. He was interested to see her reaction to it all—being waited upon, served, and pampered. Natalie offered a cup to Matt and another to Jessica. She took the cup gingerly from Natalie, smiled up at her, and said, “Thank you, Natalie. This looks amazing.”

Matt saw that she was exceptionally well-behaved with his employees and with anyone attending to her in general. She had that kind of innate nice attitude towards everyone that only a few people have. Even when she needed to be neutral to someone, she would add a smile here or a nod there. She treated everyone so nicely. Her uncalled-for but very much welcomed signs of kindness were what made Matt like her even more. He looked at her and noticed that she gave a slight shiver. It was getting kind of cold in the seat.

“Are you cold? Should I tell Jacob to adjust the air conditioner?” he asked.

“No, no. I’m fine. You could hand me a blanket though,” she said, balling her fists over the cup of hot tea.

Matt reached down to the compartment and took out the folded-up blanket from there. He unfolded it and motioned for her to lift the cup from her lap. When she did, he laid it out

over her lap and tucked it under her folded legs. She watched him while he was doing so, and when he was done, her face broke into the most delicate of smiles. “Thank you, Matt.”

Matt felt his heart melt a little at that. He was usually quick with witty responses, but at that moment, he was out of words. He only nodded and went back to his tea. They both sat quietly and sipped on their tea as they watched the world go by.

So she's the kind of person who loves getting cozy inside a blanket rather than turning the cooler off.

This made him smile to himself. One piece of information he was able to collect. Soon, he'd be able to collect more and more of such small but important information, he thought to himself.



JESSICA WAS STARTING TO FEEL VERY AWARE OF MATT'S presence beside her now. She was feeling like an overinflated balloon on the inside but remained calm on the surface. She didn't know what to think of the fact that Matt was actually very sweet. A fact that she was slowly but steadily coming to realize. When she was slightly shivering, she didn't even know anyone could notice since it was so subtle, but Matt noticed, and the way he got the blanket and tucked her feet inside was something Jessica was not expecting at all. It made her feel all fluttery inside, like a young high school girl watching her crush and getting a glance from him. A small ember of hopefulness lit up inside her that made her think that maybe she could learn to enjoy this new life of hers.

She looked out the window again, immersed in countless thoughts. It had only been a few days of this situation. It had been less than a week since she walked down the aisle to marry Spencer, only to find it empty. She remembered the looks on the faces of her family and friends, so full of pity. It was as if they weren't even surprised. Jessica couldn't decide which hurt more, the fact that she was the only one completely clueless or how her friends and family felt so sorry for her. She

felt so humiliated, so betrayed, so wronged, and so unfairly treated. She had thought she loved Spencer, though now she didn't even think she knew him anymore. She only knew a fake picture of him inside her head. Even though she could see that not marrying Spencer was what saved her from a life of misery, she couldn't ignore the price she had to pay for it—humiliation and heartbreak. She was hurt, and she couldn't do anything to help it. It didn't matter that she told herself that this was the only good outcome because it still hurt like hell, thinking that she could have been so utterly blind to a person for so many years while everyone around her saw through his façade. She felt stupid and worthless. Maybe it was because she was disappointed in herself that it hurt more. It probably would have hurt less if she could blame it all on someone else.

Her life had taken such a sharp turn that it would take her a long time to wrap her head around it—how she had impulsively decided to go on her pre-planned honeymoon alone, how she had seen the casino and instantly gone on to gamble without hesitation and without looking back, and how that decision was the stupidest one in her life that had led her to lose all her life savings and jeopardize her life. That had given Matt the chance to offer her his indecent proposal of marrying him to pay back the gambling debt, and it was interesting how she had rejected him at first but then got arrested by what she thought was the police, which turned out to be Matt's security instead.

Looking back at this memory, Jessica rolled her eyes, but her lips perked up a little in an amused smile. It had already been stored in her mind as a funny incident at her own expense. She also thought about how she finally accepted his proposal after failing to find any other solution. He was someone she knew nothing about, but he had saved her life after all. It was marriage to him or being locked up in jail for probably the rest of her life, given the amount of debt she'd piled up.

What a crazy turn of events! Is this really my life now?

Jessica looked out the window again. They were over a lake right then. The morning sun made the water sparkle like

some kind of portal to another world. The view was astounding, and she felt like she could get lost in it. If this was a normal day in her life, she probably would have brought a book with her and done some reading while sipping coffee, but this wasn't a normal day in her normal life. Her new life didn't seem normal at all. She was grateful to Matt for saving her, but she realized she needed time to ease into it. There were just too many changes in too short of a time.

OceanofPDF.com

“Matt! Matt...Spencer? What is he doing here?... I can't see clearly. Everything is so blurry.”

Jessica was under attack. Someone was chasing her through the aisles of a plane that seemed to stretch on forever. All the seats were filled with people, but they didn't have any faces. They were like nameless mannequins of the same shape and size, just positioned on the seats as placeholders. Jessica was creeped out and couldn't find her husband. He was right there one second, but come the next, he was nowhere to be seen. That's when she noticed one of those faceless people in the seats get up and approach her with intent. It looked familiar, but she couldn't figure out who it was. All she knew, all she felt in her bones, was that she had to run away from him. Her vision was blurred around the edges, and she could only focus on one thing at a time. It was like walking through a thick liquid. She felt like she was heavily drugged and struggled to stay awake, like that one time when she was seven and had to get a molar pulled out. She hated this feeling, not being able to use her senses to the fullest, and she was scared because she was alone in a plane full of people. She ran and ran, but the aisle never ended. It repeated itself periodically like the horizon of a low-budget video game. She noticed with horror that it was Matt's private jet going on forever. The beautiful scenery she had been looking at just a moment ago was now dull, gray, and looked depressing. That's when she spotted someone else in front of her—it was Matt. She screamed out his name and ran faster toward him, but he was always out of reach. At the same time, she wasn't sure if it was

Matt. For a second, it looked like Spencer. She was confused, scared, and still running from her assailant. Her feet were getting tired, but the aisle was never-ending... until the person chasing her finally caught up to her and -

Jessica jerked awake. She broke out into a cold sweat. Matt's eyes came into view as he brought his concerned face closer to her and asked her if she was alright. She nodded and gratefully took the paper towel he handed over to her. She hadn't realized when she dozed off, but that was a nightmare she was having. Jessica was glad that she was awake now.

What was that all about? I must be too stressed. The turmoil of the last few days is finally catching up to me.

"Were you having a nightmare?" Matt asked, still sounding concerned, and handed her a bottle of water.

Jessica opened the bottle cap, gulped down a mouthful of water, and said, "Yes. I didn't realize when I drifted to sleep."

"I didn't wake you because you looked tired. After all, you didn't get much sleep in the last few days."

"No, I know. Thanks."

Matt called over Natalie.

"Would you like something to drink? Coffee?" he asked turning back to Jessica.

"No, I'm fine, but maybe some cool apple juice," she replied.

Natalie nodded and rushed off to the end of the aisle. Jessica looked around the jet again.

Yes, it was definitely this very same plane in my dream but stretching on and on.

Before the nap, Jessica felt moderately peaceful at that moment, watching the view and letting herself relax, but now, she felt troubled again. The dream didn't make sense to her. Was that Matt or Spencer? If it was Matt, was he there to save her, or was it Matt that she should be afraid of? What was her brain trying to tell her, and what was Spencer's role in all of this?

She looked over at Matt again. He was out of his seat and talking to Jacob at the front of the jet. She couldn't listen to what he was saying from her seat, but his face was serious, and he seemed to be giving Jacob some instructions. Jessica felt conflicted about Matt. She was in a dilemma of what to think and what to believe. She couldn't just simply sit still with knowing the fact that Matt knew Spencer, and everything Matt had just revealed to her—about knowing Spencer for a long time, teaching him all he knew about gambling, about hearing about her from Spencer—confused her even further. One part of her brain told her to be cautious of this mysterious man, but another part of it told her she was just being paranoid. At this moment, given her present distressed state of mind, the former part of her brain took over her thoughts. She was scared of the man she had married. She had only an inkling of him, but she didn't know what he was really like. *"You do know a little bit about him, and you will get to know him better gradually,"* she told herself.

But what if I don't like what I find?

What had she gotten herself into? There could be a chance that Matt was a conman or worse, she could be in real danger. He was rich and powerful, and men in power often were known to misuse it.

Surely, Matt wouldn't do that, given how he is with his employees and how they all love him, right?

Suddenly, Jessica's heart leaped inside her chest as a thought occurred to her—they were married now. What if Matt forced her into having sex with him? He was, after all, her lawfully wedded husband, and she was his wife. It would seem natural for him to want to have sex with her, but what if he forced her against her wishes? Jessica calculated her options. She was the wife of a rich and powerful man who had leverage against her. He had rescued her from the worst disaster of her life, which was her own doing. If she hadn't agreed to marry him, she would be a convicted prisoner rotting in jail, so she couldn't possibly turn to the law to go against him if he did decide to force himself on her. That would only put her in a harsher light, so it was out of the question. That would mean

she was defenseless against his advances and utterly vulnerable, at the mercy of his will. She bit her lip and felt another wave of cold sweat break out all over her body. She was jittery, nervous, and fidgeting with her hands. Her legs were jumping rhythmically under the dress, as was her habit when she got nervous.

“Hey, you still seem distressed. What was in that nightmare you saw?” Matt’s voice came through to her worry-riddled mind.

“Oh, uhh... nothing! I’m just getting tired of the plane ride. When do we get off?” she spoke in an out-of-balanced voice.

“We’re almost there, another thirty minutes at most. There’s been some slight turbulence, which is why we are a little bit delayed,” said Matt, his eyes fleeting out the window for a second and coming back to look at her.

“Okay.”

Jessica thought back to all her interactions with Matt so far—starting from meeting him at the bar, up to the point where they got married, then their actual wedding night, when she was confused out of wits and didn’t think about the whole sex thing. Now that she thought back, she understood that Matt could have taken advantage of her that very night if he wanted to, but he hadn’t. His actions so far were nothing but cordial.

That’s if I don’t take into account his persistent pursuance of me and his scandalous offer of marriage.

Despite that, he hadn’t done anything that would suggest that he was a person who was okay with violating another person, even if that other person was his lawfully wedded wife. She was mortified when she remembered that first night when she had been drunk and gambling away all her money at his casino, how he had smoothly turned up at her table and seamlessly joined the round of poker—how she had been extremely attracted to him and felt that he had been attracted to her as well, how they had heated and electrified chemistry between them, and how Jessica was so close to having sex with him. She regretted her actions now. What had she been

thinking? Honestly, she cursed herself for what she had been thinking when she decided to come to this bloody failed solo honeymoon in the first place.

Nothing, apparently, but I was hurting and only wanted to shut everything out with alcohol and gambling.

Even so, she was glad that they hadn't had sex that night because she would have very much regretted her actions now. She wasn't sure whose contribution it was for stopping her at the right time that first night, or whose self-control had prevented them from making a terrible mistake. Was it his or hers?

Let's not think about that anymore. I'm just glad we didn't sleep together that night. Phew.

She had expected a lot worse from this man, but so far, his intentions seemed less sinister than she initially thought. For the life of her, she couldn't understand his motives for marrying her. He didn't even know her, and it wasn't that she was the beauty of her class. She was no Helen of Troy, or so she thought.

No wars would ever be fought over me, thank God.

She was having a little panic attack. In all her wild thoughts, she looked over at Matt. He was sternly looking at his phone, doing some business.

Probably replying to an urgent mail or something regarding that meeting he went to earlier this morning. Maybe I can ask him more about his work later when I'm not such a mess.

His eyes were downturned, and there was a slight frown on his forehead. Jessica looked at him closely without intending to. He was extremely handsome and very attractive. She noticed his eyes were shaded under long thick lashes. His lips were drawn into a thin line and his face was in a frown, but he still managed to look handsome. He was a good-looking man, who was rich and capable, not to mention he was very good with words, having the power to charm even the most stubborn

of clients. Under different circumstances, she would be really into him.

Just like I was on my first night at Monte Carlo before I got myself into this massive mess and complicated everything.

Her mind again went back to the night before. The fact that Matt hadn't taken advantage of her reassured her to some extent, and she was able to relax a little. She knew she couldn't understand his motives for marrying her, but she decided she would wait and see what happens.

OceanofPDF.com

Just like Matt said, about thirty minutes later, the jet changed its trajectory downwards. Jessica felt the slight weightlessness you would feel just before landing. Just as the plane was about to touch the ground, she braced herself for the bump, but it didn't come. She was impressed with how smoothly the jet had landed. In addition to this being an exceptionally great jet, Jacob must be an exceptionally good pilot.

During the time it took for the jet to be ready to open its gates, Jessica looked out the window at the surrounding area. The weather had turned to a toned-down version of the sunny day they had witnessed in the morning. There had been a slight drizzle, which was what caused the turbulence earlier. The sun was still bright, but there were clouds occasionally covering it, and the air had that cool tone it usually does just after a fresh rain. The runway was wet in some places but dried up quickly under the sun. Jessica checked out the vast plain. It was a long stretch of road with green grass on both sides. Jacob announced that they were safe to get off the plane. Matt had walked over to the front of the jet and now came back to their seat.

"Ready?" he asked Jessica as he put out his hand for her.

"As I'll ever be, without knowing where I'm headed," Jessica said and took his hand. He seemed to be in a good mood about the whole—happy, even though she still couldn't figure out how or why exactly. Jessica watched him being cheerful with everyone but couldn't help herself from the dark

mood caused by her disturbing thoughts. She was quiet as they got out of the plane. Matt helped her out of the jet, and Natalie came close behind them. Jacob opened the luggage compartment from the side and brought her bags out. Natalie took them and started walking toward the-

Wait, is that a freaking limousine?

Jessica gaped at the car for a moment. She had known Matt was rich but hadn't stopped to think she'd be riding with him on a limousine this soon, and what a limousine it was! It was sleek black with three sets of tinted windows. Jessica didn't know much about cars, but this model looked like it had just been taken out of the port and driven straight out to pick them up. There was not a scratch or dent in the body of the magnificent car. As they walked towards it, she followed close behind Matt, who didn't notice that she was still gaping at his ride. Beside the limo stood its chauffeur in an immaculate black uniform. He took off his uniform cap and bowed his head as they approached closer.

"Good day, Mateo. Have you been waiting here long?" Matt greeted the chauffeur with a warm voice that suggested they were acquainted with one another. Mateo, the chauffeur, gave a wide smile at Matt and said, "No, sir. You arrived just in time. I got here only a moment before you landed." He opened the car door, and Matt helped Jessica in and climbed in after her. Mateo closed the door behind them as Natalie put in the luggage at the back, and after saying goodbye to her and Jacob, Mateo walked over to the driver's seat. Jessica took in the inside of the limo. It was lavishly furnished with everything you could think of inside a limo. The driver's seat was separated by a tinted window, which had an opening slot in the middle. A sleek but comfortable-looking black leather sofa stretched on the whole length on one side and curved around to cover some parts of the other side. The rest of the length of that side was taken by the door and a counter. The counter held a mini refrigerator, a flat-screen TV, speakers, a gaming console, and even what looked like to be a mini bar! Jessica was astonished at how all of it fit artistically inside the car without making it feel congested. She had never been inside a limo before, and she had never given much thought to

how it would be. She had assumed it might be crowded inside, but this completely changed her mind because it was pretty spacious inside even though the limo didn't look unnaturally big from the outside.

Mind-boggling, indeed. It is surprisingly very nice inside here.

She sat on one corner of the sofa across from the TV, and Matt sat right beside her. He must have given him pre-planned instructions because he didn't ask where to go. Mateo started the limo after they had seated themselves, without Matt having to say anything to him. As the windows were tinted, she couldn't look out at the passing scenery anymore. She suddenly felt the silence of the limo suffocating. On the jet, she had unknowingly been relieved to have something to do and was genuinely enjoying the view, but now that that was gone, she felt Matt's presence beside her in strong waves, and the silence grew thick between them. She knew Matt was happy, but she had been quiet. She doubted it would go unnoticed much longer.

"Hey," Matt said, as if on cue.

"Hey," she forced herself to reply after a gulp.

"Is everything alright?" Matt sounded not as happy now.

"Yes, it is," she lied.

"I don't believe you. You've been so quiet all morning. What's troubling you?" he insisted. He had touched her arm while asking her this question, and she felt his touch tearing under her skin somehow. She couldn't pretend to be carefree any longer. She was making both herself and Matt's mood gloomy with her worries.

"You're right. I am troubled," she said in a rush of air.

"With what? Tell me, Jess," Matt told her in a somewhat pleading voice.

Jessica took a deep breath. There was no way Matt would understand her concerns, but she had to let this out from inside her. She had to let this weight off her chest.

“I will not have sex with you,” she burst out after a moment.

“You... wo- umm, what?” Matt’s face was a mixture between confusion and nervous laughter.

He stammered for a bit. “What do you mean? I mean... I – well, I didn’t ask that of you. I mean not yet, I... well, we don’t have to think about that now. Maybe someday but not, uh...” he closed his mouth, opened it, and closed it again, then a slight amusement sparkled in his eyes before he asked, “Like, never?”

Jessica felt the blood rush into her face. She felt even more flustered than Matt was just now. She had not imagined this conversation going this way at all. She was starting to feel embarrassed now.

“I don’t mean never... I mean, I won’t have sex with you unless I want to. I know we’re married and all, and that you saved me from a life of imprisonment by offering to be my husband, for which I am grateful —I really am, but that doesn’t mean you own me sexually or that you own me at all,” she finished and took a long breath and slowly looked up at Matt. He looked utterly taken aback for a whole minute.

There. I have disappointed him. What was I thinking going on about this in here? What if I made him angry or something? What if he decides he’s been giving me way too much space and comes to claim his marital duties? Oh my God, what if tonight he-

“Jessica, relax. I won’t touch you unless you want me to. Why would you even let something like this trouble you so much? Do you think of me as a monster who would force myself on you? When have I given you that impression?”

Jessica didn’t know what to say. She had let her mind run away with imaginations and assumptions about Matt, without stopping to talk to him about it. She felt a little bad for jumping to conclusions about him. The look in Matt’s eyes said he was a little let down at her assumptions as well. Though she felt a little guilty, she felt deeply relieved and

reassured. She reached out and took Matt's hand, which he let her do without pulling away.

“Okay. Thank you, and I'm sorry. I am too stressed about this whole thing it seems,” she said in an apologetic voice.

Matt's face melted. He sighed and held her hand tighter, then didn't say anything. The limo drove on, and they sat there together, holding hands and not speaking a word for the rest of the way. It was unexpectedly sweet, and Jessica was surprised that she liked it. She let herself smile a little. She couldn't help herself because she felt so relieved.

Sometime later, the limo came to a stop, and Mateo's face appeared on the little sliding glass that connected his chamber to the back of the car.

“Sir, we have arrived at our destination,” he said and disappeared from the window. A moment later, the door was opened from outside, and the sudden sunlight that poured into the dark interior made Jessica momentarily blind. Matt got out of the limo and escorted her outside. She stood up and stretched a little from the long journey and used her hands to shade her eyes from blinding sunlight. As her eyes adjusted to the sudden brightness, she found herself in front of a huge mansion that stood tall ahead and blocked the sun. She stared at it, gaping again, and this time, not even bothering to hide it from Matt. He looked at her expression and chuckled, then took her hand again.

“Come, dear wife. Welcome to my family home.”

OceanofPDF.com

“*Y*our family home?” Jessica couldn’t hide her gasp. She took the whole estate in slowly. It was a vast land upon which the mansion was built in the center. It stood tall and proud and seemed to be very old, probably built many generations ago, yet it wasn’t old and shabby but vintage and classy. There were so many things to take in. There were what seemed to be orchards at the back, gardens, ponds, and benches. It really did look like something out of a noble estate from the historical romance books Jessica liked to read sometimes. She felt excited and intimidated at the same time.

This was his family home... It looks like a castle. So large, and I can't even process all the things surrounding it. I can only imagine what it will be inside.

She walked with Matt towards the main gate. There were a few stairs in the front of the mansion, which led to a grand entrance. The gate was very high with intricate designs. Suddenly, it hit her that this was the first time she would officially be introduced to his parents. They couldn’t be present at the hastily arranged wedding. Only Matt’s sister, Annabeth, was there as his family member. Other than that, there were just friends and staff who could attend on such short notice. Though Jessica told herself she didn’t care about such formalities too much, she couldn’t help but feel nervous at the thought of meeting her in-laws for the first time.

What if I mess up? What if I say something that I should not or let my nervousness turn me into a jittery clumsy mess?

That would be so embarrassing. I need to stay calm. Breathe, Jessica, breathe.

Jessica took a few deep breaths by the time it took for them to walk over to the main gate from the stairs. There were servants in well-pressed uniforms standing in a flawless formation in front of the main entrance. As they reached the gate, they bowed and greeted them. One elderly man in a black tailcoat and suit came forward and greeted them. He had white gloves on, and, over one eye, she saw a round frame with a chain. He looked like someone from an English period drama.

“Good morning. Mr. and Mrs. Miller. It is a pleasure to see you again, young master,” he said, his deep sunken kind eyes looking at Matt with a warmth that told Jessica he must have known Matt from his childhood. At the thought of Matt as a young boy, an unknown feeling of flutter resounded in her stomach.

“Reynolds! It has been ages since I last saw you! You’re still just the same as I remember,” Matt said with a wide smile. He seemed genuinely happy to see the man, then turned his attention to Jessica.

“This is my wife, Jessica,” he said, presenting her. She instantly felt shy and didn’t know what to do.

Do I bow? Do a little curtsy? No, that is so 19th-century...but he’s got a freaking butler.

Jessica ended up giving him a polite nod, and the butler smiled at her.

“I am Reynolds, the head butler. I welcome you to the humble Miller residence, Mrs. Miller,” he said with another bow.

“Oh, please, call her Jessica already. Now, enough with the formalities. Where is Mother?” Matt asked, walking inside.

“The mistress just went upstairs only a moment ago. She has been restless, waiting for your arrival. I haven’t seen her this excited in quite a long time.”

At the word “mistress,” Jessica became even more nervous. She couldn’t understand why making a good

impression on Matt's family mattered so much to her, but suddenly, it did. She wanted them to like her, to think of her as a good choice for their son's partner, even if their marriage was not the traditional one. She didn't know what she would feel if her in-laws didn't approve of her.

When did I become so invested in this? I sure as hell wasn't thinking these thoughts before marrying Spencer. In fact, his family didn't even approve of me. They didn't like me was an understatement, but it felt like they couldn't see us together.

They walked into the big drawing room, which was beautifully furnished with intricate floral designs close to the inspiration of the rococo art style. It was not as heavy as some of the heritage homes she had seen, but it wasn't the techy style of the modern era as well. It was a beautiful mix of vintage themes blended in with contemporary styles. In the center of the large room, there was a chandelier. Right behind it, on the opposite end of the entrance, was a grand staircase that led to the top floors. It was an extravagant work of art. It took Jessica's breath away with its antique beauty and grandeur. Layered with a maroon carpet, the staircase paired with the chandelier truly stood out in the room. On the left side, the wall was taken over by extensive floor-to-ceiling windows that let in the natural light. The curtains on the windows were a very light aquamarine color that gave a cool filter to the room. Jessica spotted a big fireplace and an arrangement of sofas in front of it. On one wall hung portraits of people she guessed were Matt's ancestors. Jessica found herself walking over to that wall to see the portraits closely. It was a mix of oil paintings and photographs, ranging from old monochrome ones to modern-colored pictures in frames. She found a few photos of Matt and Annabeth, along with an older couple that she guessed must be his parents—his family. It was a beautiful picture where everyone was genuinely smiling and not just posing for the photo. Jessica smiled as she studied it. Such a small but significant thing to have on this wall. She couldn't take everything all at once. She felt like she wanted to spend hours and hours just studying the interior of this place.

Suddenly, in a flurry of motion, a small figure rushed into the scene, and before Jessica could comprehend who it was, she felt herself embraced in a crushing hug. Annabeth's grinning face popped into her vision as she let go and ran towards Matt to envelop him in a crushing hug as well, but Matt was already waiting with his arms open, and he caught her running form into a bear hug.

A moment later, Annabeth let go and exclaimed, "Jessica! Matt! You are finally here. I have been waiting all morning, and I was so bored I think I ran a hole into Reynold's old head!"

"I had a meeting earlier this morning. I came right after I finished it," answered Matt.

"Jessica, how was the flight? Did you get bored with this dude? He can be awfully boring, especially if he gets to doing business on his phone," she said, eyeing Matt suspiciously.

"I can assure you, sister. I am not boring. Not when I want," said Matt before he gave Jessica a small wink. She rolled her eyes but felt the effects of that wink nonetheless.

"Let the lady speak for herself!"

"No, the flight was not bad. In fact, I really enjoyed watching the scenery from the windows. It was pretty comfortable," Jessica answered Annabeth's questions.

"That it is. The weather is so nice today, isn't it? Though I heard you faced some turbulence due to some light rain," said Annabeth.

"Oh, you know about that?" Jessica asked, confused.

"Yes, Natalie told me. I had told her to call me right after getting off the jet. I was terribly excited, you know," Annabeth said, unapologetically.

Jessica laughed. This was the Annabeth she knew. She had met Annabeth for the first time on her wedding day. She was the main reason why the wedding took place smoothly. She did so much work, starting from being the only family member present to going on emergency shopping for the bridal dress and shoes, even managing the decorations and overseeing that

everything went according to plan. She had flown out instantly to Matt's hotel on hearing the news of their sudden wedding and had wasted no time and effort in making sure her brother got everything in perfect detail. What Jessica was most grateful about was that Annabeth was so nice and friendly with her. Annabeth seemed like a very nice person in general, but she had accepted Jessica with a full heart, and Jessica was glad that she and Matt had such a great relationship. It made it easier for her to be accepted as his wife because his sister was such a nice bridge between them.

Even though she didn't like him romantically, it was still to her advantage to build a friendship with her husband, or so Jessica told herself.

Annabeth had told her stories about them growing up, how Matt was as a kid and how he was now beyond the persona. She gave Jessica some very important insights, which Jessica couldn't have gotten otherwise.

"Matthew!" came a voice from over the stairs, and Jessica looked up to find a woman hastily walking down the stairs. She was of similar body structure to Annabeth, and she even moved in the same restless fashion as Annabeth did, so Jessica guessed Annabeth got it from her mother, but that's where the similarities in their appearance ended. She had brown hair and pale skin. Her cheeks had spots of color, and she was breathing hard, indicating that she might have been hurrying to get to where they were. She quickly came down the stairs and, just like Annabeth did, was crushed into a hug by Matt.

"Mother!"

"Come here, you! It feels like I haven't seen you in so long. You should visit more often, you know."

"Mom, I was here just a few weeks ago," said Matt looking at his mother fondly.

"Still, my wish is to see you more often," said his mom and shifted her eyes toward Jessica. She instantly felt like she was going to melt right there.

“And you must be Jessica! I’ve heard so much about you from Annabeth and Matt over the phone. It’s a pleasure to finally get to meet you. How lovely you are! I feel terrible that I couldn’t make it to the wedding,” she said and hugged her as well. Jessica was taken aback by the hug. With Annabeth, she could understand, but being hugged in such a warm way by Matt’s mom was something she did not expect. They seemed to be a family of huggers and genuinely seemed really nice and kind people.

“Don’t say sorry! It was so sudden.”

“Annalyse. You can call me Annalyse,” she said and smiled.

“Annalyse,” repeated Jessica smiling back.

“Welcome to our home. I hope you find it to your liking. Oh, I almost forgot. You must be so tired. Reynolds! Reynolds, where are the refreshments?” she yelled at the old butler, who had excused himself to go to the kitchen.

“Coming, Mistress!” called out Reynolds, and a moment later, three servants came in carrying glasses of fresh lemonade, cookies, and extra sugar on another tray. Jessica gratefully accepted a glass of cool lemonade from a young maid in uniform. All the servants in this household wore uniforms. She usually liked a little bit of sugar with her lemonade, so she helped herself to some. She took a sip of the drink and felt the cool liquid slide down her throat and freshen her up from the inside. After the long jet flight, this was exactly what they needed.

They were made to sit on one of the couches in front of the fireplace, which was now empty of embers. Annalyse asked Jessica lots of questions about how the wedding went, complimented her on the photos she saw, and told her the wedding dress was absolutely gorgeous, to which Jessica said it was thanks to Annabeth. Both mother and daughter had that joyful attitude, and they rushed from one thought to the other like birds, always speaking fast and excitedly. Jessica found them both very charming. They had a way of growing into her.

They were in the middle of a conversation when a male voice greeted them from the door.

“Matthew. Hello,” he said.

“Joseph, honey, come inside and meet our new family member Jessica. She’s such a delight to talk to!” Jessica turned around, expecting to see the man in the family pictures of the young Matt and Annabeth but was surprised to see a different person. She was confused but managed to hide her expression, lest it should make the situation awkward. She stole a glance toward Matt to look for some kind of explanation but found his lips stretched into a thin line. Something told her that Matt was not happy at the arrival of this person.

But Annalyse called him honey, so that would mean it was his-

“Hello, Joseph. Jessica, meet my stepfather, Joseph,” Matt introduced them formally. Joseph shook Jessica’s hand and went to sit beside Annalyse. Annalyse looked as if she was madly in love with Joseph. To Jessica, the way they looked at each other, it looked like they were happy together, but she couldn’t understand the look of discomfort on Matt’s face. She decided she would ask him later when she got the chance.

Everyone drank their lemonades and chattered amongst themselves. Jessica felt welcomed warmly by Matt’s mother, just as she had been by his sister. Both Annalyse and Annabeth were exceptionally pretty, like the kind of doll-like beauty with petite-shaped bodies and adorable faces. They had that sort of excited chatterbox vibe and were always jumpy and talking breathlessly about one thing or another. Jessica felt glad that they were such nice people and had accepted her like one of their own already. It was easy to fall in conversation with them, and they always had something to talk about and keep the conversation going without Jessica feeling out or awkward. Joseph seemed like a nice person too. Though she was very curious to know more about him from Matt, Joseph was easy with the smiles and had a good sense of humor but never appeared to be overly exceeding. He maintained a sense of propriety and generally made her feel comfortable around him.

When they had had their drinks, Annalyse got up and said, “Okay, children, off you go. I can keep on chattering all day if I didn’t have things to do right now. I will go and see you after the lunch preparations. Matthew! You show your bride around the place. Make her well acquainted with this place, as she is going to be coming here a lot from now on.” She grinned at Jessica, who grinned back and left the room.

“Come with me,” said Matt and led her out the back door.

Can this even be called a back door? It’s like another grand entrance from the back.

The back door led out to the yard behind the house, which was just as beautiful as the front. The porch was lined with potted plants and blooming flowers, followed by wooden stairs. The view from here was also amazing. From a distance, she could see something like an orchard, with grape vines hanging in abundance. Matt took the lead and walked over to the orchard, followed close behind by Jessica.

“My mom likes you,” Matt said suddenly.

“Oh, your mom is such a nice person. I’ll be honest. I was a bit nervous before meeting her. I thought that she would not like me,” Jessica confessed.

“But why?” Matt asked, confused.

Jessica hesitated, then she fidgeted with the hem of the dress and looked up at him slowly. “I don’t know, but...I thought that since our wedding was very unconventional, your parents might not approve of me.”

“Even when I’m the one who practically blackmailed you to marry me?” he said with a cocky lift of his eyebrows.

Wait a minute. He’s enjoying this.

“Oh, so now you admit that you blackmailed me?” Jessica challenged him, lips twitching to break into a smile that she held back. They were almost to the orchard now. Jessica could see ripe grapes hanging from the branches. It looked like a scene out of a Greek fantasy land of the gods.

“Of course. Now that I’ve already made you mine, I can tell you my ulterior motives and sinister ways of getting what I want.” He stood his ground.

“You tyrant.”

“Oh, you have no idea.” His voice was low, close to a growl. He was very close to her now. They had reached the orchard and were standing inside one of the many aisles between plantations. Jessica realized that they had moved away from the sight of anyone in the house. This part of the orchard, in the middle of rows of grapes, they were basically hidden. She felt her heart begin to hammer inside her chest. Something in Matt’s voice made her blood run warmer, and the lack of enough distance between his face and hers wasn’t helping her breathe any better either. She should be feeling suffocated, scared. Just this morning, she had made bold and uninterested statements toward him, but right now, she was confused. The rational part of her brain told her they should keep walking, but another part of her brain told her to stay there for a moment longer, just as they were—bodies close, almost touching but not. They looked at each other for what seemed like an eternity, and then Matt broke away. Jessica let out a breath she didn’t realize she was holding. It took a few solid seconds to get her breathing to return to normal.

Matt cleared his throat and spoke first, “This orchard was built by my grandfather, who traveled around the world a lot. He spent many years living in Italy. When he came back home, he used to always say that he missed the orchard close to his place in Italy, so the next time he went to visit there, he brought back some seeds and started his own orchard right in our backyard.”

“It’s beautiful in here. Seeing it made me think of the Greek gods and their wine obsession.” Jessica laughed, and Matt joined her. “Oh, by the way, I wanted to ask you about Joseph.”

“Hmm... you noticed, huh?”

“It was hard not to. You looked like you didn’t like the man.”

“To be honest, I don’t. He’s my stepdad. My father died when Annabeth and I were pretty young. I’ve been managing the family business as soon as I was able. Mom was devastated, then this guy comes along, and you look at him, and you just know that he’s here for the money, you know? For the longest time, I couldn’t stand him at all. I wanted him out of my mom’s life and out of this place, but eventually, I learned to swallow my thoughts because I noticed he does make my mom happy, and I guess that matters more than his motives or my opinions regarding him,” Matt finished.

“I understand what you are saying, but I also appreciate you for coming to that decision. I saw the two of them together, and they did look happy together. It doesn’t matter that he came here for the wrong reason. What matters is that he stayed for the right ones,” Jessica said in a quiet voice. Matt nodded.

“You know what, let me show you around more. I have so many memories of this place. I grew up in this house, you know, before I moved to Monte Carlo for business. Annabeth and I used to play hide and seek in this orchard all the time. She had wanted a maze, but then my grandfather told her that we have a maze right here at home. Since then, she called this her own personal maze. We would chase each other through these rows and even get lost sometimes,” Matt said, a look of utter adoration on his face.

Jessica found that he looked young and boyish while talking about his childhood days.

Matt continued, “We used to have a nanny who told us ghost stories growing up. Both Annabeth and I loved her stories, and we claimed we weren’t scared at all. This one time, we made her take us to the orchard during Halloween, but it was a dark night, and we pretty much scared ourselves over nothing.”

“It sounds to me that you had a really nice childhood growing up,” Jessica commented.

“Yeah, I did. I sometimes think back on the days when I didn’t have a care in the world and miss my old self a lot.”

Matt drifted away, staring ahead into something Jessica didn't know. She saw that he was getting lost in thought and probably missing his childhood right then, so she tried to change the subject to cheer him up, and they took a turn and got back to the house, talking about many things randomly. Conversation with Matt was also easy when he wasn't trying to piss her off or tease her, and Jessica found out that he was a very friendly person. Maybe not as hyper as his mother and sister, but he was a cool, calm-natured person. They took a tour of the whole estate, and everything about it mesmerized Jessica. She spotted so many places where she would have loved to sit down with some coffee and a book, maybe listen to some music, or just simply doze off. Even if it was situated in a city, this place had the distinct vibe of the countryside inside its walls.

"It's almost time for lunch. Mom likes to have lunch with everyone at the table. Let's get you inside so you can freshen up a bit," said Matt and took her inside again. They kept on walking beyond the place they sat on earlier and up the stairs.

The second floor showed rows of rooms on both sides. Matt took a right turn, and they came into a huge room. It was furnished neatly and had that look of just enough that told the viewer that it belonged to a guy. The walls were a light shade of cool green that soothed her tired eyes. A big four-poster bed laid against one of the walls. The other end contained a cozy-looking fireplace, beside which was a bookshelf. Jessica was delighted at the sight of that. Matt noticed her staring at the bookshelf on the wall and smiled. He didn't say a word but walked over to that wall and started going through some books.

"I used to be a very organized book collector. This section contains textbooks about business and hotel management, which is what I majored in, so I have here all my textbooks from college," he said, pointing to the leftmost corner on the upper shelf.

"This section contains history and art," he said, pointing just below.

“Then there are the philosophy and other humanities books here, and here are all my fiction books, which is quite a lot. I have categorized them based on genre. As I already told you, Annabeth and I love horror stories, so I’ve got a good bit here. Next to these are my fantasy and science fiction. They are pretty limited, and I haven’t updated them in forever, and here are my classics. I’ve read all of these multiple times,” he finished and looked back at Jessica. She was lost, completely and utterly lost in the myriad of books. She would never have assumed Matt to be a reader. Being a reader herself, she cherished the chance of being able to sit by quietly and read peacefully. Being in nursing school and working full time to cover her expenses meant those chances were hard to come by, but when they did, Jessica relished in them.

“What’s your favorite classic among the ones here?” she asked him.

“Take a guess. You already know my favorite genre by now, so you should be able to guess which one could be my favorite,” Matt said with a grin and watched her carefully. Jessica pouted and thought for a moment. She scanned the shelves.

“I was going to say Dracula, but actually, I think it’s Frankenstein,” said Jessica after some thought.

“How’d you guess?” Matt was genuinely surprised and... impressed, maybe?

“Well, I searched through the classics, looking for anything horror, and the first thing I noticed was Dracula. It’s a masterpiece, but then I saw that the copy of Frankenstein was so battered, it must mean you have read it over and over again,” she replied.

“Wow, I love your analytical thinking ability, and yes, of course, you are right. Frankenstein is indeed my favorite classic.” Matt smiled.

“So, this is the room you grew up in?” Jessica asked, looking around. “It’s really nice.”

“Yeah. Come on, I’ll show you the balcony,” he said and walked over to the far side, which opened out into a large balcony. Jessica followed him and found herself standing on a balcony that overlooked the west side of the mansion. From here, she could see the whole western side of the estate. It was so huge. It was no doubt that Matt came from old money. This mansion had been in their family for multiple generations, and it was amazing that it was in such good condition even until now.

“Oh, hey, you can take a shower if you want. The bathroom is right beside the walk-in closet, and it’s been fully furnished in preparation for our arrival. Help yourself. Your luggage is here too.”

“Ummm, there’s just one problem,” hesitated Jessica.

“What?”

“I don’t have anything more to wear. I wasn’t planning on this trip to be so long, you know. I packed only enough for a few days, and now, I’m down to wearing my last dress.”

“Oh, right! How could I not have thought of that? Shit,” he cursed and looked down at his phone. “It’s still not too late for lunch. There’s a mall right outside the estate. Do you want me to pick something up for you real quick? I would have asked mom or Annabeth to lend you a dress, but I doubt they’d have the right size.”

“No, it’s okay. I’ll just skip the shower for now and just freshen up. We can go shopping after lunch,” Jessica said. Matt didn’t seem convinced for a minute, but then he nodded his head. “Okay. I’ll ask Annabeth to assist you.”

“Oh, no, I don’t want to bother her-” Jessica started.

“Trust me, any excuse Annabeth gets to go shopping, she’ll take it without a thought. You’d be doing her a favor instead.”

Jessica let out a giggle. He was right—that did sound like Annabeth.

“I’ll go down and see to some business,” Matt said.

“Okay. Shall we meet at lunch then?”

“Yes, see you down at the dining hall,” he said and walked out of the room with his phone.

Jessica went over to her luggage, took out her cosmetic bag, and went into the walk-in closet, which led to the bathroom. To say it was large would be an understatement. It was massive. It was like one of those walk-in closets she’d seen in the movies. She went into the bathroom, and it was just as lavishly furnished. She really wanted to take a shower right away, but she guessed she had to wait, so she quickly freshened up, touched up her makeup, and went downstairs.

Reynolds was directing a bunch of servants who had set up the table. It was a long one, with the two head chairs stretching far away from each other, and it was laden with a hearty meal. Looking at the food, Jessica realized she was famished. She had nothing but juice all morning, and now it was late noon. Annabeth, Annalyse, and Joseph were already at the dining hall. She looked around for Matt, who appeared there a few minutes later, and they all sat at the table.

Lunch was lovely. Matt’s family loved dining together whenever they were at the same place. At lunch, Matt told Annabeth about Jessica’s wardrobe crisis. Annabeth practically jumped up upon hearing that she was to assist her to shop for some dresses and whatever else she might need.

After lunch, Matt gave Jessica his credit card, and the two girls went shopping as planned. Jessica got herself a decent amount of clothes to last for the duration of their stay, which she didn’t actually know for how long, but she made a guess. Matt was right. Indeed, Annabeth was over the moon to be shopping with Jessica.

“You know, I’ve always been miserable because I missed out on so much because I didn’t have a sister growing up. Matt would obviously never do such things with me. I am so glad I got to do this with you. I can’t even begin to explain!” Annabeth exclaimed and bobbed up and down, her hands laden with multiple bags. Jessica had a really fun time shopping as well. The day went by quickly because she was

enjoying herself, and by the time they got back, it was almost time for dinner.

Jessica came back to Matt's room or their room, she amended herself and found him lounging on the couch. Seeing her, he sat up and asked her how the day went. She described the day, and Matt laughed and said that he knew this would happen.

"Do you want to go out for dinner? There's a really good restaurant nearby," Matt asked.

"Sure. Let me get that shower now, and I'll be ready," Jessica replied. Matt nodded and went back to his phone. Jessica took out an evening dress from her bags and went into the shower.

Having showered and changed into new clothes and put on some light makeup, Jessica was ready to head out. She came into the room to find that Matt had cleaned up as well. Suddenly, Jessica remembered that she had been occupying his bathroom, depriving him of the chance to use it.

"Oh, crap. I'm sorry. I totally robbed you of your bathroom," she said apologetically.

"Don't worry. I used the bathroom in one of the guest rooms. You ready?"

"Yeah, I'll just grab my purse."

Matt drove them out into the evening. The estate was situated a healthy distance away from the city, but they got there pretty fast as there was no traffic. Jessica enjoyed the car ride there. It was a nice winding road with beautiful scenes on both sides. They pulled up in front of a French restaurant, which looked grand from the outside. Matt escorted her out of the car, and they went inside. A table had been reserved for them by the window. Overlooking a crystal fountain, the view from the window was gorgeous. Soon, a waiter gave them two menus. Everything on it looked way too expensive for Jessica, who was used to cheap fast food to save time or a good home-cooked meal whenever she could. Matt noticed her hesitation and told her to order whatever she wanted. After some

thought, she chose *foie gras* for herself. Matt ordered *jambon-beurre* and *caviar* for himself. For dessert, he ordered *crème au caramel* and some wine to go with the main course. The waiter noted their orders, took the menus with him, and left them. Patrick Watson's "*Je te laisserai des mots*" played in the background. The room was lit up with chandeliers and lamps. The ambiance in the whole restaurant was really something else.

Jessica and Matt chatted a bit. Matt asked her more about herself. Jessica told him about her childhood, growing up with her parents, going to nursing school, and working full-time.

"Technically, I'm still on my wedding leave." Jessica let out a pitiful laugh and looked around. "You know it's been some crazy few days. I enjoyed a great deal with your family today, but it's going to take some time to get used to this—" she waved her hands in the air, "—lifestyle."

Matt waited for her to carry one.

"For example, the food in here is insanely expensive for one. I'm not used to that."

The waiter chose that exact moment to bring in their food. Jessica had to admit, though, it was expensive, and it definitely looked the part. She took a bit of her *foie gras* and let out a satisfied sigh.

"Though I have to admit, I do love the food," she said, chewing.

Matt was biting into his *jambon-beurre* and laughed. "I wanted to take you to the best place I know around here."

"You know, I would have been just as happy with the food if you had taken me to a cheap burger joint that sells delicious off-the-stove burgers. If the food is good, I don't mind anything else. You don't need expensive foreign dishes to win me over, though I appreciate it," she said.

"I'll keep that in mind. Maybe next time we can explore fast food trucks," Matt said, grinning. "Your job, when does it resume?"

"A week from now."

“You don’t have to work so hard, you know. You can focus on other things now that I’ll have everything you need and wish for taken care of,” offered Matt, sipping his wine.

“That’s very nice of you, and I’m grateful, but I really like my job. I love being a nurse at the hospital and helping people. At the end of the day, I need to keep myself going.”

“I do agree. It is something you need then,” Matt said with some hesitation.

“What is it?”

“Well, Spencer also works there,” he said with some concern.

“Apparently, he hasn’t shown up since before the wedding. I had talked to some colleagues recently, and they have no idea where he is, so I’m guessing he left the job and won’t be showing up there anymore,” she explained. To this, Matt seemed relieved.

Jessica was conflicted. Matt seemed concerned for her, but she didn’t know if she should start believing in the fact that he cared for her. She didn’t know if she was ready to get involved with someone that way just yet. She wanted to know more about her mysterious husband. All she knew was that she was endlessly fascinated by him.

“So, tell me more about your family business,” Jessica brought up after a moment of eating in silence.

“My family has been in the hotel business for as long as I can remember, maybe for a few generations. Most of my ancestors majored in either business or, in more recent times, hotel management like myself. Our hotel has been in the family for a long time. After my father died, it was chaos since there was no one of age to handle it. My mom did a great job, but I could see she was not enjoying it. It was something she had to do for the family, so I got my degree as soon as I could and have been looking after it ever since.”

“It must have been hard, losing your father at such a young age,” Jessica said quietly, looking into Matt’s eyes. She hoped the look in hers was enough to convey what she felt at that

moment which was a deep ache for the little boy suddenly forced to grow up too fast.

“Yeah, but Annabeth took it much harder. She was my dad’s favorite, not that I minded that. Annabeth is everyone’s favorite, even mine.” Matt chuckled. Jessica laughed along with him and agreed.

“Why do you like gambling?” she asked him, sipping some wine.

“Gambling is all about making the right guess. Being able to guess your opponent’s card correctly gives you this feeling of power over them, you know? It’s the thrill of the guess that I enjoy, and being a professional gambler, you’ll see that I’m very good at it.” He winked at her. She rolled her eyes but grinned at him.

Once they were done with their main course, the waiter brought in the dessert. They continued chatting about themselves, their lives, what things they liked, and whatnot. Jessica started to feel more comfortable with him as the night went on.

The dinner turned out to be very pleasant for both Jessica and Matt. They talked a lot, laughed, and just generally got to each other and enjoyed each other's company. They ordered another round of desserts because Jessica wanted to taste more of these expensive French sweets, and that pleased Matt a lot.

When they came back home, it was pretty late. Matt had made arrangements for him to sleep in one of the guest rooms, which made Jessica feel extremely guilty. She was invading his room, his closet, and his bathroom, and he was the one letting her stay there and moving to a different room. Jessica didn't know how to make it up to him. They walked together to his room, and Jessica entered it hesitantly. Matt had stopped at the threshold of the door. Though it was pretty late, she didn't feel tired at all. If anything, she felt like she was finally starting to be more and more awake and aware of her surroundings.

"So, uh... I guess this is goodnight. You should get some sleep," Matt said quietly.

"I'm not tired. I wanted to explore your bookshelf a little more. Is that okay?"

"Of course! You don't have to ask. Hey, you know what? Why don't I show you the big library in the house?"

"You have a whole library here?" Jessica was surprised.

"Sure, I do. The little shelf in my room only contains whatever I sneaked out from there. Come on." He grinned,

took her hand, and led her out of the room again. The hallways were dark and empty, and they ran. Jessica felt a wild kind of thrill as if she was a teenager sneaking out with a boyfriend after curfew. They came to a big wooden door, and Matt stopped to look back at her.

“Here it is,” he said, his eyes shining with excitement. Jessica felt just as excited herself.

He opened the grand double door and what lay inside took Jessica’s breath away. It was a huge room filled with shelves upon shelves of books. Jessica’s eyes were wide, and her mouth gaped open.

“Oh my god, Matt. This is...” She was at a loss for words.

“You like it?”

“Are you kidding? I love it! One could get lost in here and never want to be found.”

Matt guided her inside and let her explore the shelves. There were even moveable stairs to reach the top shelves. It was like the library in *Beauty and the Beast*, she thought. Jessica loved that movie.

Matt watched her as she went from shelf to shelf, picking out books.

“That’s an interesting stack you’ve got there,” he commented.

“My mind is spiraling out of control. I don’t know which one I want to read right now. I want to read them all!” she gasped, and Matt let out a hearty laugh.

“Relax, you can read them all in time.”

They got lost in the millions of books, laughing like young people and talking about their interests. Jessica was increasingly getting more comfortable with Matt, and he seemed to be very interested in whatever she had to say. Suddenly, she remembered the casino and asked him, “Can you teach me how to play cards well like you do?”

“I can. Clearly, you need some tutoring since you suck at it,” he said with a devilish smile, referring to the whole

Jessica-losing-all-her-money-at-gambling incident. She rolled her eyes and pretended to throw a book at him.

“Come with me,” Matt said suddenly.

“Where?”

“Come!”

They left the library, and Matt took her to another room but smaller and with a dark interior. It was like one of those private rooms where big businessmen have their meetings, with pool tables, bars, and cigar smoke. There was a card table at the center of the room.

“Tell me what you want to learn,” said Matt.

Jessica asked him everything that came to her mind, and Matt told her the rules patiently. She tried out a few tricks and failed, which caused him to laugh at the top of his lungs.

“Let’s play strip poker,” Jessica said, clutching her stomach and laughing.

Matt started to raise his hand in refusal, but Jessica interrupted him, “I dare you!” she said with a wicked smile. Matt’s face turned into one with equal mischief as his lips curled into a grin.

“I have not been known to walk away from a dare. Game on!”

They played a few rounds of poker, in which Jessica won all, so she was practically unaffected by the penalties, but the same couldn’t be said for Matt, who was losing at every hand. Jessica knew he was deliberately letting her win, but she was liking it a lot. Matt had already lost his shoes, his socks, and the coat he was wearing. The next thing to come off was his tie. Jessica anticipated her next win when Matt would have to take off his shirt. They played the next round, and this time Jessica lost, so she took off her vest and revealed the dress she was wearing underneath. Now. She was even more eager to win the next round.

When she did win another round, she looked at Matt with a flirty expression.

“Come on, take it off,” she said in a sweet voice to Matt, who was looking at her as if she was the devil and grinning. He faced her gaze straight on and slowly unbuttoned the top button of his shirt. His eyes were burning into hers, and his lips were slightly upturned in the sexiest smirk she had seen. Jessica felt something inside her stir—something that made her breath quicken and her legs feel unsteady. Matt was being deliberately slow in undoing one button at a time. The sensual appeal that had over Jessica was excruciatingly sweet. She itched to reach out and touch the skin that showed through the slit of his shirt. After what seemed like one eternity, in which Jessica felt tormented, Matt undid all the buttons and tucked his fingers under his shirt. Jessica watched him as he pulled the shirt over his head, his muscles flexing at the motion. The way the shirt glided smoothly over his skin made her shiver and bite her lip. His chest was smooth, save for some hair in the center, but he had the most beautiful six-pack she had ever seen on a guy. This told her that he worked out regularly as he was so fit. Jessica appreciated his body a lot, and Matt could see that. He saw that she had been watching him like a hungry vixen, and he liked that a lot. He gave her a smug grin. All Jessica had lost were her shoes and her dressing vest, but she was fine with that. She could go on winning and let Matt strip down even further.

A few more wins and Matt would have been completely naked. He was only in his pants. The master clock in the lobby rang loudly, indicating it was midnight. Jessica felt like she was in a strange fairy tale, and that midnight marked the turning point. Matt walked over to her and said,

“I think you should turn in for the night. It’s very late, indeed. Goodnight.”

Jessica felt disappointed that the night was ending already. “Where are you running off to? I’m not finished with you,” she said.

Matt’s lips were parted just a little. He wasn’t smiling, but the look on his face said he was in some kind of conflict. “If you carry on, Jessica, I don’t know where we might end up.”

“Why don’t you find out?” she said, not taking her eyes off his face, his lips.

“Jessica, I, we- I thought you had boundaries, and I don’t want you to do anything that might cross them. That you might regret.”

Matt was really close to her now. She could feel the heat coming off his body and see his chest rise and fall with every breath. Her own breathing seemed to be labored at the proximity to him. They stared at each other for what seemed like an unbreakable moment, their eyes darting to each other’s lips, slightly parted.

“It’s okay, I want this,” she said, inching even closer.

That was when Matt's resolve broke, and he closed the distance between them. He grabbed her face roughly and closed his mouth on hers. Jessica moaned in pleasure. She felt like she had been needing this all the time, all day and all night that they had spent together. Her body reacted instantly to his touch. She instinctively latched her arms over his shoulders, and he picked her up, never breaking the kiss. He kissed with a hunger that should have scared her if she hadn't been feeling the same way. She hooked her legs around his torso and kissed him back just as hungrily. Matt pushed her back against the card table, his mouth planting fiery kisses down her jaw and trailing her back to nibble at her ears. She pushed his body off the table while still kissing him, and he took that as a chance to lead her to his room, where Jessica would be sleeping for the night. They were a blur of arms and legs and hands brushing against skin and mouths devouring each other. Matt threw her on the bed and came down upon her with all his body. Jessica couldn't get enough of him. She pulled at her dress still in place, as she wanted nothing between her skin and his. Matt ripped the dress in one strong grip, and that made Jessica even more frantic. She tugged at the waist of his pants, but her movements were messy. Matt was kissing her out of her senses. He threw her dress to the floor and unhooked her bra without a flaw, then threw that away as well. Now, Jessica was only in her panties, lying down beneath him with her breasts in full view. Matt looked at her from above, and something in his eyes turned dark and dangerous. She could feel his erection poking at her middle, and she could feel herself getting drenched. Matt explored the length of her body with his hands, took one nipple to his mouth, and sucked on it... *hard*. Jessica let out another moan, both her nipples getting harder with pleasure. She tugged on his pants again, but this time, Matt stopped her.

“Wait, don't,” he said, out of breath.

Jessica gave him a baffled look, unable to form words. She was trying to catch her breath and missed his mouth on hers already.

“Jessica, I don't do normal sex.”

“Wh-what?”

“When I have sex, I’m a dom, and I don’t like being touched.”

Jessica looked up at him in surprise but didn’t have time to respond because Matt suddenly moved into action. He grabbed both her hands with one of his and brought her arms up over her head, leaving her body completely at his mercy. His grip was tight because Jessica was pinned down in that position. In that way, she couldn’t touch him at all, and then his mouth came down over hers again. He used his other hand to rub her breasts and nipples in a tormenting motion.

“Mhmm... Matt,” Jessica moaned in between kisses and hastily inhaled breaths. Matt’s mouth traveled to her neck, and he bit her there softly, which caused Jessica to almost come over the edge. She was very sensitive there. This was the most passionate make-out session she had ever had.

“Oh, you like that, huh?” Matt rasped, his eyes full of lust. He continued kissing and occasionally softly biting her down her body. She shivered with desire.

“Keep your hands over your head. Don’t bring them down,” he ordered. Jessica nodded. Matt let her hands go and used both of his to grab each of her breasts. He rubbed the nipples using his thumbs in a sensual motion while his mouth traveled downwards and was now licking her around the belly. The sensations this whole thing caused were off the charts. Jessica couldn’t help making pleasurable sounds and whispering Matt’s name over and over. She had never thought she would like being submissive to a man in bed, but with Matt, she was loving every second of it.

“Matt, please,” she begged. She wanted all of him—inside her, over her, around her. She wanted him so much at that moment it drove her crazy.

To her utter dismay, Matt lifted himself off her, leaving her suddenly devoid of the heat of his body. His hair was tousled, and the bed sheets around them were twisted up. Jessica laid there breathing hard, her body growing cold with every passing second.

“What-”

“I’m sorry. We can’t,” Matt replied, his voice husky. With that, he got up and left the room, leaving Jessica completely baffled.

OceanofPDF.com

Jessica had slept fitfully last night, tossing and turning in bed for most of the night. Being rejected by him in bed and left alone in the room by Matt was something she hadn't been expecting. In fact, she has been expecting quite the opposite and thought that she would have to be the one to reject him during sex.

The next morning, she woke up late. The maids informed her that Matt had already left for his office work and that Annalyse and Annabeth had gone out for a doctor's appointment. Joseph was also spending the morning working his own job. They hadn't wanted to disturb her sleep, as they figured she had an exhausting couple of days, so she needed the rest. Even though she woke up late, Jessica didn't feel rested. She was up until really late, and the bags under her eyes were proof of that. The maid had brought her breakfast in bed. She thanked her as she offered her a cup of coffee. After breakfast, Jessica took a shower and changed into a comfortable shirt and jeans. She wondered if she should call Matt but decided against it. She was alone in the big house and didn't know what to do.

No, actually, I'll be at the library. I could spend many hours there all by myself.

She looked over at the bookshelf in Matt's room and memories of them discussing Matt's favorite classic came to her mind. It seemed like a long time ago that they were laughing together. What had gone wrong? Why did Matt suddenly turn her down last night after they were so close to

giving in to their passion? A voice in her head said that maybe he was doing it for her because Matt had told her that he would not touch her without her will. What if he just wanted to take things slow? Jessica scoffed. In this era, men who wanted to “take things slow” were hard to find, so that couldn’t be it. Could it? Something else she pondered over was how Matt had shown her a vulnerable side of him last night. She had been so curious to know more about her mysterious husband. They had been getting along well yesterday, even starting to like each other’s company. His revelation about his sexual preferences had taken her by surprise, but it hadn’t been unpleasant. She quite enjoyed his way of getting intense, something she never gave much thought to. A wild part of her brain was excited by this prospect, but then the rational part of her brain was quenched by the reminder that he had left her wanting last night.

She shook her head and headed for the library. Going there was the best decision because it relieved her of her troubling thoughts. There was something about a room full of books that took her breath away. There was so much to explore, so many books to caress, and so many spines to run her finger along. She loved reading as a hobby, and the sight of books always delighted her to no end, so Jessica spent the rest of the morning exploring the library, learning its different corners, marking out books she wanted to get to, and finally, sitting down and reading.

She must have dozed off at some point because she was awoken by a gentle nudge to her shoulder. She woke up startled. The book resting on her chest fell out of the chair with a thud, causing her to look up. She instinctively thought it was Matt but was a little disappointed to see that it was Natalie.

“Sorry to wake you up, Ma’am, but you have been in here for a long time, so I was sent to check up on you. You missed lunch, so I brought a tray,” Natalie said.

“Oh, sorry. I guess I fell asleep. I was up late last night.”

“Mrs. Miller requested that you eat something, Ma’am.”

“Okay. That’s very kind of her. Are they back from their doctor’s appointment?” Jessica asked.

“Yes, they got back just before lunch and were tired, so they have turned into their rooms.”

“What about Matt?”

“I’m sorry, Ma’am, I got here after he had already left, so I don’t know where he went,” came Natalie’s apologetic reply.

“It’s okay, Natalie, thank you.” Jessica smiled and dismissed the servant.

She ate the sandwich on the tray and drank the orange juice. She had been hungry, but she didn’t realize that before eating. Finishing her food, she went out looking for Matt’s whereabouts. She asked the maids cleaning her room where he was, but they didn’t know. Finally, she asked Mr. Reynolds. He informed her that Matt had gone to his family office very early in the morning. He had lunch there because right after lunch, he had an important meeting. Jessica asked for the address of his office, which he provided her. She thanked the butler and went back to her room. She was done being in the house all day. She planned to visit Matt in his office and get the answers she wanted.

Jessica noted the address on her phone. She hurried back to her room to grab her bag and throw on a jacket. The weather looked cloudy and seemed as if it would get cold. One of the maids came rushing to her room, “Ma’am, should I call Jacob? If you could wait for just ten minutes, he can be here and ready the car for you to—”

“No thanks. I have already called an Uber,” Jessica cut her off, already walking out the door.

“But, Ma’am, the car is idle, and Jacob will be here soon.”

“I’m fine. I want to have some time to myself anyway. I’ll head out now.”

Jessica got out of the mansion. The Uber app showed that the car was right outside the gate to the estate, so she started walking.

Damn, this estate is long. I hadn’t thought of this at all. Now, I have to walk a mile to get to the car, and it would take even more time than to have Jacob come over, but what’s done is done.

By the time she reached the car, she was out of breath and sweating. She climbed inside the car and gave the driver directions to go to Matt’s office downtown. As she had predicted, the weather was getting colder, and only a few minutes after getting into the car, it started to drizzle.

Jessica stared out the car window, letting herself immerse in thoughts. She was extremely confused about everything—Matt’s intentions and her own feelings toward him. She didn’t

know what to call these emotions. Was she starting to develop feelings for her husband, someone to who she didn't even know that well but was married under dire circumstances? Was it possible that Matt wasn't the dark persona she had imagined him to be but was actually a good person from the inside? Even if that was the case, he didn't want her, not right now anyway. She felt an unknown ache in her chest at the thought of last night, about how she had laid herself bare in front of him, the lustful looks he'd given her, the way they had drowned in each other's lips, and the way he had touched her and woken her from a deep slumber after she had thought she could never feel that way again. It surprised her how strongly she had reacted to him, how her body had answered the calls of his. It surprised her how much pleasure she found when his need for her pressed into her body and made her react to him in the most carnal way possible.

She was thrilled and afraid of her feelings at the same time. She couldn't run on assumptions about Matt any longer. She had to confront him about everything that was eating away at her. She needed to ask him about last night in specific, why he didn't take her right then even when she had indicated that she was ready, but she also needed to ask him about this whole thing in general, why he had married her so hastily, and why he had been so adamant and so persistent about her. Was there something more at play here that she was clueless about? She needed to ask him the answers to all these questions right that instant. She had always been that way ever since she was a child. When she had her mind set on something, she didn't rest until she had achieved it. It was the same with her nursing career, and it would be the same now with her husband. She needed answers immediately, and she would do what it takes to get them.

The Uber reached downtown without facing any traffic jams. That was because the mansion estate was situated some distance away from the city. Right after entering downtown, Jessica got stuck in traffic. The drizzle had turned into a steadier downpour, and the streets were jammed with cars. She checked the map to see how far Matt's office was from her position and found that it was just around the corner. She

debated whether to wait inside the car and trudge through this traffic or make a run for it. After five minutes of impatiently waiting, she decided to make a run for it. She regretted that she hadn't thought to bring an umbrella. She thanked the driver, held her bag overhead, and sprinted towards the sidewalk. After turning the corner, she saw the building named "Millers Co.". It was a tall skyscraper, and it loomed in front of her into the city skyline. Jessica hurried to the lobby, where the reception desk was located, and asked the receptionist to see Matt. The receptionist, a short-haired woman in glasses and perfect red lipstick, looked at her with some hesitation.

"You will have to wait for a bit, Ma'am. Mr. Miller is still in a meeting."

"No problem, but could you let him know someone is here to see him?"

"I'll have to make a call to his secretary, Ma'am. Sorry, but who would you be?" she asked cordially.

"I'm his wife. I need to see him as soon as possible," Jessica replied.

The secretary seemed a little taken aback but otherwise kept her expression composed. Jessica guessed she had to remember that Matt recently got married. She didn't blame the woman, though. Even Jessica herself would be surprised every once in a while someone called her "Mrs. Miller."

"Sure, Ma'am. Please wait in the waiting room, and if you would like, should I make arrangements for you to uhh... dry up?" the receptionist asked hesitantly.

"Oh, yes, that would be amazing. Thank you! I had to walk the last block due to my car getting stuck in traffic, so I got drenched in the rain," Jessica explained, a little embarrassed. She had completely forgotten her state of being. She must have looked like a crazy person—all wet and dripping, then coming into this multinational company's building and claiming to be the wife of the boss. That must have been a whole scene from the point of view of the receptionist.

“No problem, Ma’am. Please make yourself comfortable in the waiting room. I will send in fresh towels immediately.” With a polite smile, the receptionist started making another call. Jessica turned towards the direction of the waiting room, which was across the hall. She started walking towards the room when suddenly a hand gripped her arm, stopping her in her tracks. She turned around, surprised, and felt the blood drain from her face.

It was Spencer.

OceanofPDF.com

“*S* pencer?!”

The grasp on Jessica’s arms was strong. She wasn’t sure if she was dreaming or if this was really happening to her. She had spent so many hours trying to get any news of his whereabouts but had not come up with a clue as to where he disappeared to. Their workplace had no idea where he was, and neither did any colleagues and mutual friends. She didn’t try to contact Spencer directly because she was extremely pissed at him, and not to mention, devastated over being left at the altar, but she had worried the same. She couldn’t help it. The betrayal he put her through couldn’t extinguish the general concern she had felt as one human to another, who had been friends for a long time.

They had known each other for a long time, and during that time, Jessica had believed him to genuinely care for her, and she cared for him too. Now that she thought about it, she didn’t understand if that was love. Probably not, but she did care for him as a friend, and she couldn’t detach herself from that part of her heart just like that.

Now, Spencer was back, and he was right there in front of her, holding her arms in a death grip that she doubted she wouldn’t be able to wring out of even if she tried with all her strength. Spencer was a large man, almost a head taller than her, and the body mass to go with it. A myriad of emotions was fighting to take control inside Jessica. She didn’t know what she felt at that moment—if she was relieved to see him after so many days of not having any news about him, sad for

everything that she went through, or angry because of all the trouble Spencer put her in, not to mention the humiliation in front of everyone on what was supposed to be the best day of her life. This was the man who she was supposed to marry and thought she was in love with not even a month ago, and she was living a completely different life from the one she had imagined. Seeing him so suddenly brought back memories of a life that she was thrust out of without notice and without preparation. Seeing him made her remember what a fool she had been, how she had been heartlessly deceived for so long, how she had believed him to be something he wasn't, how he hadn't hesitated to give her the final blow of humiliating her by leaving her in the worst way possible, and how he hadn't cared at all about what happened to her. Jessica felt burning rage rise up inside her that set her blood boiling.

Yes, the only emotion he can get out of me now is mad rage. I shouldn't have any other feelings for this bastard other than hatred. He doesn't deserve my worries or my tears shed over his worthless being.

“What the hell are you doing here?” she yelled at him. She tried to get herself loose from his grasp but failed to free herself. He only tightened his hold on her arms and glared at her.

“What am I doing here? What the fuck are *you* doing here?” he shot back.

“I don't have to answer anything to you, you deserter!” She couldn't help but feel a little hurt slip through her voice. Though she was kind of disappointed in herself for still having these unresolved feelings for Spencer, she couldn't ignore the fact that he had turned her life upside down without notice, which had affected her immensely. She needed some time to get over such a big change, no matter how much she told herself it was for the best, but that didn't change Spencer's demeanor a bit. In fact, he seemed to be getting more aggressive every second.

“I heard you went ahead and got yourself married to Matthew Miller. Out of all the people on earth, Matthew? Seriously?”

“What’s it to you?!”

“How dare you marry that bastard, Jessica?”

“You are in no position to question me. I wouldn’t have married anyone if you hadn’t left me at the altar.” She tried helplessly to get out of his grip.

She added, “And you know what? Even if that was devastating to me, now I know it was a blessing. Thank goodness I was saved in the last moment from marrying such a fucking liar!”

Anger flared in Spencer’s eyes. He was breathing heavily now, and when he spoke again, his voice was so vicious it almost scared Jessica. “You don’t know anything about him.”

“I know enough to understand he’s a better man than you ever were,” replied Jessica, refusing to back down.

“The things he has done, he does-” Spencer spoke.

“I don’t care! It can’t be that bad. I have faced much worse with you. You are a stranger to me, Spencer, and what Matt is and how much I know about him are none of your business. You lost all claim over my life the moment you decided not to show up for our wedding, and thank God ‘cause if you did, it would have been the worst mistake of my life.”

She felt the moment that something ticked off inside Spencer, breaking the last inch of control he had over himself. His face contorted into a silent sneer, and he tightened his hold on her even more, to the point where Jessica was physically getting hurt.

“Spencer, stop. You’re hurting me,” she managed to say, but he didn’t loosen his grip. She could sense a sinking feeling of dread that he was about to do something violent, and the fact that this surprised her surprised her even more. At this point, nothing about Spencer should be able to surprise Jessica. If he could hide his true self from her for so long, he could do anything. Being violent might be something she never expected, but now that his true identity was out in the open, this shouldn’t surprise her at all, except it did. It also

made her feel sorry for herself that she had been so blind all this time.

Just when Jessica closed her eyes and braced herself for an assault from Spencer, she felt the grip on her arm loosen all of a sudden, and Spencer was pushed away from her personal space. She opened her eyes to see two huge men holding a struggling Spencer back from attacking her. She was confused because she didn't know these people.

Are they just office security guards coming to my rescue? This was, after all, Matt's office.

Jessica couldn't be sure, but she was grateful they had stopped Spencer at the right moment before he had the chance to cause a violent scene.

"Mrs. Miller, are you hurt?" one of the men asked her.

Jessica blinked at him in confusion but answered, "A little on my arm where he held me. Other than that, I'm fine." She didn't know how they knew who she was. Thankfully, the one other man holding Spencer down answered her unasked question.

"We are your bodyguards. We were assigned to see to your protection by Mr. Miller. I am Nash, and this is George."

"Bodyguards? Since when did I have bodyguards?" Jessica asked in utter disbelief. She had never talked to Matt about this before. It had never even crossed her mind before that she might need them in the first place. She was just a nurse for God's sake. What use would she have for a bodyguard, let alone two?

"Since this morning, Ma'am. We were assigned to the duty to keep an eye on you and prevent anyone from causing you any harm, such as this one," Nash explained.

"Okay. Uhh... thank you," Jessica replied awkwardly.

"No problem, Ma'am," replied the bodyguard as they dragged Spencer away into another room. She had no idea what they would do to him. What did they do to people who violated their personal space and attacked their employers?

Maybe they'll give him a warning and let him go. Whatever they do, it's none of my business anymore.

Right about then, the receptionist called her name, and she was guided inside the main building by another staff member. Jessica followed him inside without another word. Whatever she had to say could wait until she met Matt because she had a lot to say. She was annoyed that he went ahead and assigned bodyguards to her without even consulting her about it first. Wherever she went, they would be watching her, and this morning, when she had thought she was on her own, she had been wrong because they had been following her without her knowing. She was not comfortable with anyone watching her so closely without her knowledge. It might have been different if she had known and agreed to them being her bodyguards. She didn't know if she was annoyed at Matt or grateful to him because those bodyguards did save her from getting assaulted by Spencer. Still, she was cross with Matt for not at least telling her about them first. Matt was going to have to answer some questions, and he would have to do it soon.

OceanofPDF.com

Jessica slowly took in everything in her surrounding with a growing sense of awe. Down at the reception desk, she had been too occupied with her stress and confusion to notice anything around her, but now that her head was cleared, she took in a good look at everything. It was breathtaking. She hadn't given much thought to what Matt's office building would look like, but this was surely not it. If she had thought about it earlier, she might have imagined something very modern and techy. In other words, without a lick of feminine touch to it, but as she walked deeper inside the building, she was pleasantly surprised. Everything was expensive indeed, but they didn't look artificial in any way. It all was well-maintained and well-used, from the looks of it. The decoration was modern, but at the same time, there were touches of vintage styles here and there, which created a perfect combination of both. On some walls, there were huge semi-classic paintings of flowers, beautiful scenes, landscapes, and to her surprise, space.

Interesting combination. I would never have imagined these two things to work together, but they are in perfect harmony here.

They took the elevator, which was glass enclosed on all sides. Jessica had only seen such modern technology elevators in movies. Being inside one for real, felt like a thrill, and she couldn't help but be fascinated. She could see the outside from all four sides and get a view of the whole building. The middle section was clear up to the top floor, and the offices she guessed were located on all four sides. You could look down at

the whole building from any floor if you stood by the banister, which she noticed was not metal but made of mahogany wood. This added to the vintage effect of the office. The elevator came to a smooth stop, and as the door opened, a doorman greeted their arrival on the thirteenth floor.

Wow, this is pretty high up. This floor must be where Matt's office is located.

The staff member gestured for Jessica to keep following him. She did, and they walked inside a hallway with a few rooms on both sides. It opened out into a spacious lobby with an expansive bare wall. The decoration on the walls was very minimal because there, in the center of the room, hung a massive chandelier from the ceiling. Jessica couldn't stop a small "wow" from escaping her lips. The room was dimmed, except for the chandelier casting it in a warm yellow glow, and the minimal designs on the wallpaper only added to its beauty. On one corner of the lobby sat a woman at a desk. She was on the phone, but upon seeing Jessica, she hung up and stood up to greet her.

"Good morning, Mrs. Miller. I just got a call from the front desk notifying me about your arrival. I'm Pam, Mr. Miller's secretary," greeted the woman from behind the desk. She was petite with strawberry blonde hair, and Jessica noticed that with that smile on her face, she was very pretty. She felt a pang of some unknown feeling in her chest.

Wait, am I jealous of Matt's pretty blonde secretary? No way... well, she does get to see him a hell of a lot more than I do, but oh well. What's it to me? He is my husband, and this is a marriage of convenience. I shouldn't care about such stuff.

Jessica returned her smile and asked, "Is Matthew in his office?" putting a little emphasis on the use of Matt's first name.

"Yes, Ma'am, he is. He just finished a meeting and should be back inside his office by now. Would you like me to call to let him know of your arrival?" asked the secretary.

"Ah, no thanks. I would like to visit him in his office," replied Jessica.

The secretary looked hesitant for a second but then put her smile back on. Jessica guessed she must have thought that since it was Matt's wife, there was no problem in letting her in his office unannounced.

Damn right, I'm his wife, and I demand to be let into his office without a formal announcement.

"Sure, Ma'am," she said before turning toward the staff member, whose badge Jessica noticed read the name 'Patrick'. "Please take her to the boss' office directly."

Patrick nodded and politely asked Jessica to follow him. They went towards the other end of the big lobby, which had a towering set of double doors. She had to crane her neck backward to take it all in. It was so grand. The doors were fully mahogany with intricate designs all over its body. It looked like something out of a royal palace, complete with a large bronze door knocker. She could only imagine what would lay inside, but she didn't have to for long because Patrick knocked on the door and a voice from inside called out, "Come in." It was Matt. Patrick left the handles and pulled the doors open. Jessica would have guessed that it would take a lot of strength to open them, but Patrick seemed to do it with much ease. They opened on the outside, and the view that awaited Jessica took her breath away, literally. Matt's office was huge.

No, huge isn't the word. It was humongous. Whoa.

Jessica's eyes grew wide as she took it all in. Two sides of the office were all glass from top to bottom, with the city line in full view. She could see the whole city from up here. It was so beautiful. The morning light illuminated the room, and there was not a single artificial light that she could see. Just the view alone would have been plenty beautiful, but that was not all the office had to offer. Another wall held a sizable built-in showcase covering, most of which was, again, made of mahogany.

How much mahogany does this one office have? That alone must have cost a fortune.

The showcase contained an artful decoration of books, files, and college degrees in intricate bronze frames. There was a fireplace at the center of it with a rug and a sofa set in front. A mahogany table held a variety of liquor in crystal bottles and a set of crystal glasses. There was also a 42-inch flat-screen TV next to the table. She guessed that this must be where Matt took visitors to sit and talk business. A wicked thought ran across her mind about the many other things that could be done here. She shook her head and finally looked over the only remaining side of the room, which held a big office table. Behind the table sat Matt, whose face was shaped in a wide-eyed expression upon seeing Jessica this early in the morning. He broke out of his shock, got up from the table, and walked towards where she was standing.

“Jessica, hey,” he said, sounding a little out of breath as if seeing her had taken his breath away. He thanked Patrick and dismissed him. Patrick bowed and left the office, closing the doors behind him.

“What are you doing here?” Matt asked when they were alone. He was wearing an elegant suit with a white shirt underneath. His tie was a little loose over his shirt, showing a bit of his neck. His hair was in its usual back brush with a few loose strands falling into his forehead. It still looked a little damp from his morning shower, and Jessica felt the urge to run her hands through his soft locks like she had the night before. The memory of last night made her flush from the heat. Matt looked extremely handsome in his elegant suit. She felt the stirrings of desire inside her, and the smell of his cool pine-scented cologne brought her senses to life, and she wanted to get closer to him. Matt must have recognized the look on her face because his eyes were equally glazed over with heat. Jessica could almost reach out and pull him toward her, but she held herself back because she was here to talk about important things to Matt.

“I... uhh, I wanted to see you. You left without saying a word this morning,” she managed to say in a voice that sounded hoarse. She cleared her throat.

“Oh, I had an important meeting early in the morning. It’s just with some foreign clients who had to catch an early flight. Did you have breakfast?” Matt asked.

“I did.”

“Come, sit down. Do you want something to drink? I’ll order some orange juice for you,” Matt said, walking towards the sofa near the liquor table.

“Matt, why do I have a set of bodyguards?” she asked, unable to hold the burning question in any longer.

“What do you mean? You have bodyguards to protect you from any sort of danger. Why else would you have them,” he said.

“I mean, why did you assign a bunch of bodyguards to me without consulting me first? Did you not think this was something you should have discussed with me before doing that?” she said, getting annoyed.

“Well, yes, I should have, but I didn’t get the chance,” Matt said as-a-matter-of-factly.

Jessica rolled her eyes. “We literally spent the better 14 hours on a plane stuck together with nothing better to do. You could have told me then, not a day after, I find myself being watched by two of your men.”

“I didn’t think of it while we were on the plane. It only occurred to me this morning, and I didn’t get the chance to talk to you before I left. I know I should have talked to you first, but, you see, I didn’t have a choice. You need bodyguards if you are to have protection, you know.” He looked a little apologetic and came closer to her, reaching out his hand to her. She looked at him and felt her annoyance dissolve. She gave him her hand and said, “Well, those bodyguards did come to use very quickly.”

Now, Matt was the one looking troubled. “What do you mean?”

Jessica bit her lip. She knew telling Matt about the incident just a few minutes ago would make him very angry, but this wasn’t something she could keep from him, “When I came to

the building, Spencer caught my arm. He was mad at me for marrying you, then spoke some shit about you, and I was equally mad at him. We got into a heated argument, and he was, well, he looked like he was going to do something violent. That's when Nash and George stepped in and handled him. I don't know what he might have done had he not been interrupted."

"WHAT? Spencer is here? Did he hurt you?!" Matt was suddenly furious. Jessica held his hand tighter.

"Hey, I'm okay. He didn't hurt me. As I said, the bodyguards got to him before he could do anything. Thank you for thinking of assigning them to me. I know I am annoyed that you didn't tell me first, but I'm also very grateful that you did 'cause I really do need them." She left out the part where Spencer gripped her so tight that it hurt her arm. That would only make Matt even more furious, and she didn't want him to beat up Spencer.

Seeing Matt's rage, she had no doubt he would do something to hurt Spencer back. Matt seemed to be very concerned about her well-being, and that was something that gave Jessica a large amount of pleasure. She didn't know why and when she started to feel this way, but she loved that Matt cared for her safety.

"I can't just let this go. He will take this as an encouragement to get closer to you again, and God forbid, if he hurts you in any way, I will make him regret the day he was born. I must retaliate for what he tried to do to you today." Matt's eyes were burning with unleashed rage, and Jessica got a glimpse of the man that Spencer had warned her about, but she didn't exactly find that a negative trait in Matt. In fact, it only made her feel a sense of satisfaction that her safety affected Matt this way.

"Hey, look at me," she said and touched his cheek. At her touch, some of the anger faded from Matt's gaze as he looked into her eyes. He held the hand that she placed over his cheek and inhaled. That seemed to calm him a little.

Jessica continued, “I am perfectly fine. I knew something like this would happen whenever or if Spencer showed up. I just wasn’t expecting him to show up so early after our wedding and this close to your turf. Showing up at your office? That was stupidity on his part, but now we know he’s out there, and we have the precautions to prevent his plans,” she urged her reassurance into him.

Matt didn’t reply to her. He was silent and indicated that whatever Jessica might say to confirm that she was fine, Matt would still have a plan to get back at Spencer. She just wished it wasn’t something that harmed him in any way. Revenge was a two-way sword, and she didn’t want anything more to do with Spencer if she could help it. She hoped Matt understood that too.

“Come, where’s my orange juice?” she said, putting on a cheerful smile on her face, trying to change the topic.

Matt called the secretary for some light snacks for them and went to his desk. Jessica explored the office showcase in the meantime.

Everything will be alright. We are together. We are safe.

Jessica only prayed that was true.

OceanofPDF.com

After making a quick call to his secretary and instructing her to send in some orange juice and light snacks, Matt showed Jessica around his office. Jessica was surprised to know that Matt had taken an active part in its decoration, a fact that Matt talked about quite fondly, and she was pleasantly touched to see how much thought Matt had put into it. Every little trinket and every frame displayed on those walls meant something to him, and that made her heart swell in a way she had never felt before.

“We have other offices in different places where the casinos and hotels are, of course, but this one is special to me,” he said, his eyes going over the books on the shelf. Jessica was standing beside him, both facing the wall.

“Because it’s close to home?” she asked, looking at him. Matt kept staring at the wall.

“Because it’s close to home,” he repeated. His eyes were distant, as if he were going over all the reasons why the office here was special, and Jessica couldn’t help but look away from him. In all the time she had known him, the more she was getting to know Matt, and she was realizing that underneath that bad-boy demeanor, he was actually a sweetheart. He let on a rough and tough image that he showed to the whole world, but the people closest to him saw what lay underneath, and she was slowly uncovering one thing at a time. What surprised her most was that it wasn’t the major things about Matt that slowly opened up her heart to him, like the fact that he was a billionaire or the fact that he seemed to own such a huge

enterprise of hotels and casinos making him one of the most powerful men she had ever known. No, it was the little things about him that made her fond of him more and more every day. Things like how he was so thoughtful of the people he cared about, how he spoke of his childhood with such a peaceful look in his eyes, and how he put a little bit of personal touch in the things that meant something to him. Even though Matt was still a mystery to her, she was beginning to love unraveling him little by little, and the fact that he was mysterious made her kind of excited. She was always looking forward to knowing something more about him, getting to see one more side of him that she never would have imagined him to possess. She was loving this journey of exploring him, all of him.

There was a knock at the door, and a staff member brought in a food tray. There was the orange juice she ordered, along with some bite-sized sausage rolls. Jessica was delighted to see the food because she loved sausage rolls. They bantered some and ate and drank. When they finished, Matt suggested they should head home since he was done with work for the day and had the rest of the day free to show her around the estate. Jessica agreed because it was already feeling like she had a long day and was glad to be able to go home and relax.

Reaching the mansion, they were greeted by Reynolds.

“Where’s everybody?” Matt asked, looking around.

“The lady of the house has gone out with her friend who came over just an hour ago, and Miss Annabeth, I believe, has gone back to her residence. She said her kids missed her and that she missed them and her husband,” answered Reynolds. Jessica felt a warm fondness for her sister-in-law. Annabeth was so energetic, cheerful, and fun that one would not make the assumption about her that she was a happy mother of three children. Her husband was a big-time lawyer who lived about half an hour from Matt’s parents’ house. Jessica loved kids, and she was good with them. He and Annabeth had made plans to let her meet Annabeth’s kids when they got the chance. Jessica was glad Annabeth had gone home because she had done so much for Jessica and Matt. Planning the

wedding in such a rush, staying present when Matt brought Jessica home for the first time, taking her shopping, and all that. It was a wonder how Annabeth could do all this while having three children.

Reynolds's voice cut through her thoughts, "Would the young master and his wife like some refreshments?"

"No, thanks, Reynolds. We just had some snacks back at the office but do offer them to the chauffeur, though. He has been on duty since the morning. That would be all," said Matt. With that, he led Jessica back into his bedroom and was about to leave for the other room he was staying in while she was here until Jessica called him.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"To my room, of course," he said.

"But this is your room."

"Well, yes, but now I'm doing fine in the other room while I offer my old one to you."

"Why? We are married. You should move back in here. I would hate for you to give up anything for me unless we can't absolutely share."

"Oh yeah? Like what?"

"Like the last piece of sausage roll."

This caused Matt to let out a laugh, and he said, "Who knew you loved those so much?"

"You have no idea. Sausage rolls were my go-to food when I attended nursing school, and I didn't have time to cook myself a proper meal."

"Oh, wow. You guys go way back," Matt said with a fake serious face that made Jessica giggle. She opened the door wider, indicating for Matt to come inside the room. He hesitated for a second then came inside and put his wallet, phone, and keys on the bedside table.

"Well, you are right. I guess I should move back in here since this is my bedroom," Matt said.

“What made you change your mind?” she teased, as she dropped her overcoat to the floor beside the door. Matt took off his suit, and Jessica noticed how his white shirt stretched over his toned chest. Something about plain white shirts made men look so hot, she thought to herself, or maybe it was just Matt who would look hot in just about anything you put on him. She suddenly got the mental image of Matt wearing a white shirt but drenched in water. She pictured the shirt becoming transparent and sticking to his fit chest and his torso, and that image caused her to heat up. She bit her bottom lip involuntarily.

That got Matt’s attention, and his eyes got a renewed spark that said he had caught on to her. With a smirk on his lips, he watched her as he slowly came closer. Jessica started backing up to the wall, but Matt kept advancing until she felt her back against the door. He put one hand beside her head on the door and leaned into her, his face dangerously close to hers. Up close, his eyes were one of the most striking ones she had ever seen. She was sure she could get lost in them, but his full lips were fighting to get her attention, and they won because her gaze traveled down to that sexy smirk on them. She knew Matt could see her reaction as clear as water, but she couldn’t help it. She was under his spell. Matt didn’t break eye contact as his other hand came up to grab his tie and loosen the knot around his neck, revealing more of his chest, then he brought his face to her ears and whispered, “It’s hot today. Don’t you want to open a few buttons?”

Jessica gulped and nodded, utterly helpless to the effect he had on her. At that moment, she would do whatever he told her, even give up the last piece of sausage roll for this man. Her hands were slightly shaking as she tried to get them to her top button, but Matt grabbed her hands. Slowly pushing them back down, he opened her top button. His hand reached down and opened the next few buttons with deliberate slowness. Jessica’s breath started to come a little faster as she occasionally felt the tip of his fingers make contact with her skin, which was sensitive at that moment, and each touch sent electricity coursing through her veins. She felt goosebumps on her flesh. Matt wasn’t smirking anymore but looked at her

with a savage hunger in his eyes, something said that he was enjoying his slow torture greatly and loved watching her squirm under his gentle touches. He hadn't even touched her really, but Jessica was already feeling her legs start to weaken, and then his hand pressed down on her chest, right over her violently beating heart, and she gasped at the heat of his palm over her skin.

This was torture. This was madness. What is happening to me? He isn't doing anything, and yet... I am gasping for air.

Matt took a few seconds to feel her raging heartbeat. She could feel his breath on her face, and his lips were so close they were almost touching hers. She leaned forward to close the distance between their lips instinctively, but Matt's hand came up to grab her by the chin as his mouth collided with hers, hard. She let out a moan in her throat as she answered his kiss with equal hungriness. With one hand still holding her face, he slid the other one around her waist and pulled her closer to him. As their bodies pressed together, she could feel his erection against her lower belly, and it made heat pool between her legs. She grabbed his neck and devoured his mouth, her hands buried in his hair. Matt ripped out the rest of her buttons, impatient to unbutton them one by one, and her breasts were in full view, the bra struggling to hold her hardened nipples. Matt didn't break the kiss while he unhooked her bra and threw it across the room, then he brought his mouth down onto one of her nipples, and Jessica let out another moan. This felt so good, so impossibly good. Her hands started to travel down his neck to touch his back, but Matt grabbed them in one of his and held them back against the wall. Jessica was pinned to the wall with her hands above her head inside Matt's fist.

"Matt," she moaned while he nibbled and tugged at her nipples, causing her an ache so sweet she felt like she could explode.

He gave a grunt, then picked her up into his lap with a swift motion, and took her to the bed. He laid Jessica on her back, and his mouth traveled south from her breasts to her belly. He licked her flesh, causing her to shiver in pleasure as

his hands made quick work of the skirt she was wearing. He pulled it down and threw it away, then his hand made it to the waistband of her panties, and he pulled them down as well. Jessica was now fully naked and lying on the bed as Matt paused from devouring her body to pull his shirt over his head. Jessica watched his magnificently carved chest, and it was all she could do not to reach out and touch him. Matt was only wearing his pants now, and he looked so handsome, pale light coming in through the window and casting him under a soft glow with his bare chest and black pants. Jessica reached out to unbutton his pants, but he again held her hands with one and with the other, then removed his belt. He tied her hands to the bed stand using his belt, and Jessica found herself completely in his mercy, her legs spread wide. He sat back and appreciated what he saw, the desire in his eyes perfectly clear.

“You’re so beautiful,” he said in a husky voice as he came down on her mouth again. Jessica let him devour her mouth again, melting into his passionate kiss. Even though her hands were tied up above her head, she felt safe with Matt. She felt protected in a way and knew she could trust Matt with her body. His kisses were hungry and frantic, which told her he desired her just as much as she did. She felt wanted —needed. His hand went down to her sex, and she let out a sharp gasp as he circled her opening with his middle finger, teasing and prodding, then he smoothly slid it inside. She felt her body jerk and her hips rise in response to it. Pleased with her reaction, Matt slid his finger in deeper and added another finger a second later. He started moving them in and out, invading her clit with his fingers. His other hand grabbed her breast and massaged her nipples while his mouth roamed her belly, licking and sucking. The torture was wonderful.



MATT WAS INTOXICATED BY HER SMELL. SHE HAD BEEN SO WET by the time he got her naked, and with a look at her moist core, he knew he was in trouble. The way she was tied up with his belt, legs spread wide and panting with desire, made it painful for Matt to contain it in his pants.

Soon, baby, soon.

The inside of her sex felt just as good as it had looked. He pumped his fingers in and out of her while his mouth tasted her full soft breasts. He could feel her getting tighter, bordering her orgasm. Just as he knew she would come, he bit her nipple a little harder, and that did it. She called out his name, and she reached her peak. Getting to hear his name on her lips as she was being pleased gave Matt such satisfaction that he felt himself almost slipping over the edge as well. Her face was contorted into painful satisfaction —her lips parted and eyes closed —as she tilted her head back and writhed under his touch.

God, she was so beautiful, and she was his.

He gave her a few more strokes before taking his fingers out and licking her in as she watched. She tasted heavenly, even better than he had imagined she would. He brought her forehead down on hers, both of them panting. He wanted so bad to fuck her right then, bury himself deep inside her until she screamed his name again and again. His throbbing cock was digging into the inside of her warm thighs, and it was torture because she was so close, so close to him, but he knew how he wanted to take this. He would let her want it, really want it with her heart before they had sex. He wanted to make love to her when she was ready to feel loved and love him back. He didn't want it to be just fucking for lust. He was patient, and he had high hopes that they would get there.

“I need to get a shower,” he said into her mouth as he placed another kiss and untied the belt around her hands. He then he tore himself from her warmth against the demands of his erection and walked into the bathroom. He needed a cold shower —a very, very cold one.

OceanofPDF.com

After Matt had left, Jessica lay in bed for some time as she heard Matt in the shower. She briefly wondered what would happen if she joined him in there. Would he welcome her, or would he keep his distance? If he did that, it would be awkward for Jessica. She pondered over how Matt had still not had sex with her. She had an amazing orgasm with his fingers inside her.

If he is so good with his hands, I wonder how he will be with his other parts —his mouth, maybe? Or his cock?

Thinking about his other parts made Jessica clench her thighs together. Sure, he had taken things a little further today by leaving her all hot and bothered after an intense make-out session the last time and not doing anything more. Today, there was progress between them, and she was content with that... for now. Sex would come soon, she thought. She didn't want to seem overly desperate, even though she did want it. She shook her head and decided to stay in bed and wait for Matt to finish showering so she could take one. It didn't take him too long. He came out of the bathroom, a towel wrapped around his torso and water dripping down his wet hair. At that moment, he looked like a Greek god, and Jessica was struck by how beautiful he was.

"Sorry to make you wait, but you can go take a shower now, and if you're up for it, maybe we could play some golf after lunch? We have a golf ground here," Matt said, using another towel to rub his head.

“Sure, if you will teach me,” Jessica said. She had never played golf before, and it was one of those sports that she assumed would be boring to her, but then again, this was Matt, and he could make anything entertaining. Most of all, she was looking forward to spending more time with him.

Jessica took a quick shower and was about to get dressed in one of the sundresses she had bought on her shopping trip with Annabeth when she noticed a pile of clothes on the bed. There was a handwritten note that said, ‘Your golf attire. I had them custom-made according to your measurements.’ She smiled at the letter and opened up the polo t-shirt and mini skirt set that were left on the bed. The outfit was cute, she thought. Definitely, something you would imagine one of those rich people playing golf in. There was also a flat cap, which matched the collar of the polo t-shirt. Putting them on, Jessica went down to the main living room. Matt was talking to a servant. He was also in similar golf attire, complete with sports trousers and a polo t-shirt. When he noticed Jessica coming down the stairs, he gave her a look of appreciation and invited her to lunch with him.

“Isn’t Annalyse back from her outing with her friends?” Jessica asked when she spotted only two plates set on the dining table.

“Ah, no. She’s grabbing lunch with them out somewhere. You don’t know Mom when she’s with her friends. It’s like a bunch of squealing high school girls. They would spend the whole day and still have no intention of returning home if you let them,” Matt said with a chuckle.

“It’s good that she has a fun friend circle. I hope she’s having fun,” Jessica said and let a servant pull her chair for her to sit. When they were seated, lunch was served. Jessica was in a good mood, and she realized she was hungry too because she devoured her soup. It was delicious. After lunch, she and Matt walked out to the golf grounds. It was a big field inside the estate that had perfectly mowed grass and a few sandy patches. Matt told her that he learned golf at a young age and was pretty good at it. He showed her the basics, and even though she wasn’t very good at sending the ball to its

destination, she was having a fun time learning from Matt. It was more about the time spent together and getting to know and see another side of Matt. The way his face lit up when he hit his mark, the way he was so patient with her, and the proud look on his face whenever she got something right were some things that she cherished, especially the way he came up behind her and guided her into holding the golf club in the correct way. Jessica was super aware of his arms going around her in an enveloping embrace when he was teaching her. She didn't mind it one bit as the fresh scent of soap and clean male invaded her nostrils. She had come to like the smell of Matt quite a bit and was able to relish in it even more now that they were getting physically closer.

They spent the rest of the day playing golf, and by the time they ended, it was almost sunset. Jessica had never imagined she would have so much fun playing golf. Both of them were sweaty, and their tummies hurt from laughing too much. Matt walked Jessica to their room, then left her to take a shower first and told her that he would use the other bathroom because they both needed to shower and get clean. She agreed and took a quick shower.

Ah, it feels heavenly. I'm so worked up after our golf-playing session.

Having had a refreshing shower, she realized that she was famished. She thought that Matt must be too, since they both had exhausted themselves playing and running around the golf ground. Just as she was drying her hair, a knock sounded at the door, and she opened it to find Matt. He was dressed in a navy-blue casual shirt with a couple of buttons loose at his neck. His hair, still damp from the shower, was messily handled back making him look so much younger than he did when he was all suited up. It took some of the edges off his bad-boy image, and Jessica felt a tug at her heart. He looked like one of those college guys that high schoolers crushed on and went on stolen dates with. She was not a high school girl, of course, and Matt was no college student, but she felt young at that moment and almost blushed like a schoolgirl.

Wait, do I have a schoolgirl crush on my husband?

Matt sensed her blushing and cocked an eyebrow.

“You look cute,” he said as he ran his eyes over her outfit. She was in a t-shirt that just read ‘OKAY’ and skin-tight black jeans.

“And ah, so do you,” she got out.

“You think I look cute?” he teased.

“Yes,” she said, blushing even harder.

“Will you find me even cuter if I take you someplace I used to go as a kid with my school friends?” he asked.

Jessica looked up at him. “Where? Another fancy restaurant?” she asked. She remembered the last time he had taken her out for dinner at an Italian restaurant with food more expensive than her monthly paycheck.

“No, not that again. Why do you look miserable? Seems as if you’ll turn green and puke,” he said and laughed.

“No, uhh... it’s not that. I was just asking,” she said, embarrassed that she had let her disdain for too-expensive restaurants show.

“Come. I’ll surprise you,” he said and offered her his hand. She took it and followed him out of the mansion to a sports car that waited just outside the gate. The car was a shiny red one, with an open top like the ones she had seen bad boys in movies drive.

Bad boy in a movie —such a fitting role for Matt. Of course, he would have a shiny red top-down sports car.

She didn’t even know what brand it was, given how she didn’t know much about cars.

“A sports car?” she said as she took in the fabulous car that Matt was walking to, a pair of keys jingling from his hands.

“Yeah. Since I’m taking you to a place I went to as a kid, I thought, why not get into full character? This was my pride and joy when I was in high school.”

“You drove a sports car when you were in high school?” she asked, not bothering to hide her amazement.

“Yeah, it was my senior year gift,” he said and opened the door for her. Matt helped her in and climbed into the driving seat. They drove through the estate, then continued downtown. Jessica was loving the ride in the car because she felt all the air on her face and hair. It was a wonderful experience. The weather was cool and perfect for a drive.

Matt pulled up in front of a small burger joint. There was a wooden signboard on the top of the door that read ‘McBurger,’ and it was lit up with neon lights. Two wooden windows on both sides of the door contained potted plants of various shapes and sizes. A signboard beside one window had the menu, which was very small. They went inside, and Jessica saw that the place was cute and decorated with neon lights and fairy lights strung up all around. There was a sort of rustic vibe to the place, and everything was put together from mismatched things, but somehow, it all worked to make the restaurant look charming. It was bustling with people, and they spotted one empty booth and quickly occupied it. Radio music played from speakers somewhere overhead.

“So, what do you think?” Matt asked after they were seated.

“I think this place looks very cozy and well-loved. Judging from how many people are here, I’d guess the food is good too,” Jessica replied honestly.

“Oh, yes. Wait ‘till you taste their house special,” he said and waved to one of the waitresses. They placed their order and waited for a few minutes. Their burgers arrived and smelling the food made Jessica remember with new vigor that she was starving. She took a bite, and it tasted amazing.

“Oh my God. Mmm... this is good,” she said between chewing.

“See, I told you. You’d love it. I instantly thought of this place when you said last time that you wouldn’t mind going to a cheap burger place with me. The food is amazing and cheap. I could eat a few burgers without hesitation.”

“Same here. Order one more for me.”

Matt laughed and ordered a second round.

“You know, I’ve been meaning to tell you,” Matt started.

“Yeah?”

“That you probably shouldn’t work in that hospital again,” he said.

Jessica was silent for a moment. “But I love working at the hospital, and you know, I love my job as a nurse,” she said.

“I know. I’m not telling you to stop working. I’m just saying that you shouldn’t work at your previous hospital anymore. Spencer works there, and he is not safe to have around you after what he tried to do last time.”

Jessica wanted to argue about it, saying that the hospital and all her colleagues were people she cared about, but eventually, she thought better of it and decided that Matt was right. Spencer being around her was no longer safe, and she couldn’t string around her bodyguards at a hospital.

“I understand. You’re right,” she admitted. “But I need to go there one last time to get my things and to say goodbye to the friends I made there.”

“Of course. Just let me know when you want to do that, and I’ll arrange everything. Should I prepare a letter of resignation for you?” Matt asked.

“No, I think it’s something I need to do myself, but thanks, though,” she said and reached out to squeeze his hand, then she added, “But do you think Spencer would be back to work, though? He hasn’t been there in a long time. Just disappeared, and no one’s heard from him. I don’t think they will let him work anymore.”

“That’s very likely. He is in some very deep shit. It does not seem that he will be back to work right now, but still, I’d like to have you completely out of harm’s way. Somewhere where I will be allowed to provide better security for you. We can’t allow any connections that Spencer might pull to get closer to you,” Matt explained.

“Wait. What do you mean? What did he do?” Jessica asked, puzzled.

“He kind of went off the rail with his gambling. He owes a lot of money to some big figures in the underground, and they want payback —with interest. Now that he has wasted it all, they are pissed. There are two brothers who own a huge enterprise in the illegal drugs business—the Coretti brothers. Everyone knows not to cross their paths. These are dangerous people, Jessica, and Spencer had better not show his face around, or he will be the one to be in harm’s way,” Matt said solemnly. Jessica’s mouth fell open in shock.

Matt continued, “And these people are not going to stop until they get their money back. Not only is Spencer in trouble, but those close to him are as well. He has put everyone around him at risk by being a stupid jackass and messing with the wrong people.”

“What exactly could they do to him?” she asked.

“Wipe him off the face of the earth, to put it lightly.”

“Shit,” she said. It was hard to imagine such things actually happening in real life, but who was she to know everything about the world? This was real, and this was how things worked in this business. It was dangerous territory, and Spencer was smack in the middle of it.

“This is why I want you to be all the more careful. I know you and Spencer have nothing more left now, but I can’t take any chances. They might not know. They might still come after you because of your previous ties to him,” Matt said, a look of genuine concern on his face.

“I know, but that is so unfair. I didn’t even know anything until now,” she said, looking down at her hands.

“Hey. I’m here. I will protect you,” Matt said and squeezed her hand. “Now, finish your burger.”

Jessica’s burger had gone cold, and the remaining hunger had evaporated from her stomach. In its place, all she felt was dread.

The following morning, Matt was in a good mood. Last night's dinner at his childhood favorite burger place had been amazing. Jessica seemed happy to be there and appreciated the joint as much as he did. He didn't realize how much he had unintentionally hoped for her to like it, and when she had indeed loved it, his heart filled with pride and joy.

The more he got to know her, the deeper he fell in love with her. He loved the little things about her, like how she liked her burger steak, how many spoonful of sugar she took with her morning coffee, what books she liked, and that sort of thing. Jessica was such a charming woman and so beautiful. The fact that she didn't brag about her beauty and seemed oblivious to the effect she had on the people around her was even more alluring for Matt. He had known she'd be amazing since he had heard about her from Spencer, but to actually get to know her was something else entirely. Her real beauty and personality beat every description he had heard about her a hundred times. She didn't know how obsessed with her he was. His eyes followed her around wherever she went. When they were in the same room together, Matt felt pulled toward her. He, never for one second, wasn't aware of where she was or what she was doing. It had become like an extra sense of his, always looking out for her. He would do anything in his power to protect her, as he could never let any harm come to her, and most of all, he was coming to feel so glad that he had married her, regardless of the circumstances the wedding took place.

Last night, he dropped Jessica to his room, where they had an intense make-out session. After which, he came back to his room to take another cold shower.

Damn, staying away from Jessica's bed is getting harder and harder.

Even though they hadn't done anything more than make out, it was enough to drive Matt crazy. She had seemed tired last night, so Matt hadn't taken things further. Matt had told her about their plans for today, and Jessica had been so excited. She told him that she had been texting with Annabeth the night before and that Annabeth told her that she would be visiting their parent's mansion with her kids. Her husband was away on a business trip, and it was time for the kids got to meet their new aunt. Jessica had said she loved kids, so she was excited to get to meet her new nephews and nieces. Knowing Annabeth, Matt was sure that nothing would make her happier than having found such a wonderful female figure for her kids. As much as Annabeth was cheerful and may come across as childish sometimes, she was fiercely protective of her kids. Matt remembered the time when Annabeth was choosing a nanny and the stress she went through. She only trusted a few people around them, those she knew to be good, and Matt had no doubt that she would let Jessica be one of those people. The fact that Jessica was looking forward to spending time with his family made his heart clench, reminding him that he had picked the right person for himself.



JESSICA LOOKED AT HERSELF IN THE BATHROOM MIRROR. SHE had a dreamless sleep the night before. She had been asleep within a minute of getting to bed after Matt had left the room. She took a quick shower and got dressed in a lavender blouse and white mid-length skirt, which she had picked out during her shopping trip with Annabeth. She was loving her new outfits. Jessica had always loved having nice clothes. Even when she was struggling to make ends meet all by herself,

pretty clothes were one of the things she tried not to give up. It made her happy.

A note on her bedside table read, 'Breakfast, second-floor terrace.' It was from Matt because she recognized his handwriting from the last one he had left her.

When did he put it there? He must have come in when I was in the shower.

She found Matt's habit of leaving little handwritten notes to her one of the cutest things about him. He could have just texted but seeing him put in this effort was something she found very charming.

When she got to the main hall of the second floor, she was told that Matt and Annalyse were out on the terrace. There was a table that had been set outside. The view alone was enough to make Jessica forget all about eating, but the table laid out a big breakfast, and Matt and his mother were just about to get started. They greeted her when she came out to the terrace.

"Good morning, Jessica! Sleep well?" asked Annalyse in her usual cheery tone.

"Yes. How was your day with your friends yesterday?" Jessica asked her.

"Oh, wonderful! What a bunch of lovelies my friends are. We were out all day, so I went to bed early last night because I was exhausted. I told them all about you, and they are all asking me to let them meet you at once! I told them that I was giving you some time to get settled into your new life and that they could wait." Annalyse giggled. She had fine laugh lines on the outer corner of her eyes, which indicated that she was a woman who smiled a lot. Jessica loved that about her, the fact that she was such positive energy to have around. Annalyse could light up any mood by just being in the room.

"That's alright. I would love to meet them sometime," Jessica said with a smile. She sat across Matt on the table. He poured her some coffee that she was grateful to take a sip of. Her day could not start without that first cup of morning coffee. They ate their breakfast, conversed about Annalyse's

wild adventures with her friends, and Jessica shared some of her stories from when she attended nursing school. Annalyse was delighted to hear anything she had to say. Matt was too because he seemed very interested in her stories. The three of them talked and laughed. When he asked for a helping of pudding, Jessica served it on his plate.

“You guys make such a good couple. You remind me of when I was young and had Richard by my side,” Annalyse said, giving them a look of pure admiration that made Jessica blush. Matt smiled a little sadly at the mention of his birth father and reached out to pat his mother’s shoulders. “Dad loved you a lot,” he said. After finishing his pudding in a rush, he got up, gave a quick kiss on Annalyse on the cheek, and announced that he had to go to his office. He said he had a lot to work on today and would be home late. After hearing that Jessica’s heart fell a little, but she was glad to get the chance to use this time to bond with Annalyse, who she hadn’t gotten to know that much since she came, and she was glad that Annabeth would be here later so that their day would be fun even though Matt wouldn’t be present for most of it.

Jessica hesitated a little before asking, “Annalyse, tell me about your first husband. From what little I have heard, he sounds like he was a wonderful person.”

Annalyse’s face took on a sad but softened look. Jessica noticed both Matt and Annalyse took on that same expression when they talked about the late Richard Miller. “Oh, he was a very wonderful person indeed,” she said. “The best husband a girl could ask for. Our marriage was arranged by our families, but we had a prolonged courtship, and Richard had used that time to make sure I was thoroughly in love with him. By the time we were married, I knew that fate had matched me with my soulmate. I felt like the luckiest girl alive. We were both young, and first love has its own special place in your heart, you know?”

Jessica wondered what it felt like to have such a strong bond with someone, what it felt like knowing you were in the right place with the perfect person in your life and loving someone with complete confidence that they were the one. She

had believed she loved Spencer for such a long time, but she couldn't recall ever feeling anything close to what Annalyse was describing, and it wasn't even that Spencer was the first partner she's been with. She'd had a few boyfriends before him, but she was too young back then for anything long-lasting, and she had never been in love with any of them.

Annalyse used Jessica's silence to continue, "We were in our early twenties when we got married and had Matt. Richard was an amazing father to him. Growing up, Matt treated him like his hero and admired him in every way he could. To him, his father was the best person in the whole world. Richard took great care of the kids —always made sure to spend lots of time with them and participate in raising them, even though we had a lot of servants who could have done it. Usually, that is how it is with families in our circle, but Richard made sure he was involved in his children's upbringing. We were a close-knit family, happy in our bubble, and Matt was always following Richard around."

"Yeah, I can already understand that he loves his father deeply," Jessica said.

"Matt was the best kid one could ask for. Even though, growing up, he had a lot of privileges, he was never arrogant. That was one of the things everyone will tell you about him, that he is very humble with the staff."

"Yes, I noticed that about him. Every person on the staff I've met so far seems to genuinely love and respect him. It is the same in his office and hotels," Jessica provided.

"That's because, growing up, we taught both our kids to treat the servants with respect and kindness. Matt just resonated with it perfectly because he is a kind person from the heart. He was the apple of the eye of his nanny, the butler, and just about everyone around the house. Of course, that rubbed off on Annabeth too. Both were well-loved by the staff because of how they treated them. I've seen a lot of my friends' kids turning out to be bratty and who have not an inch of regard for the people that serve them, not my Matt and Annabeth, though," Annalyse said, sounding proud of her kids.

Jessica smiled at her mother-in-law and said, “You have done such an amazing job with your kids. Both of them turned out to be wonderful people.”

“Thank you, my dear. You are quite a wonderful person yourself. I know I said it just a while ago, but I truly do think Matt did the right thing in marrying you. No one cares what circumstances he married in. The fact that he had the eye to pick out the perfect woman for himself makes me proud to think that I’ve raised him right,” Annalyse said to Jessica, her eyes, earnest. Jessica felt warmth spread across her chest.

“Oh, you over speak,” she said, feeling shy.

“Not in the least. I’ve seen the two of you. I’ve seen how you care for him even when you don’t say it, and I’ve seen how he is around you. It’s like he’s a different person now, more mature and responsible. Just like a man who knows that he loves his wife. Thank you for bringing that along with my son.”

Jessica didn’t know what to say. She was overwhelmed by such words coming from Annalyse. Just then, a voice behind them said, “What did I miss? Got here as fast as I could.”

Annalyse and Jessica both turned around, interrupted by Annabeth’s sudden voice. They were so lost in their conversation that they hadn’t heard her come up.

“Annabeth! You are finally here!” Jessica exclaimed and took Annabeth in a tight hug. Letting her go, she looked behind Annabeth and saw three of the most beautiful children she’d ever seen—two little boys and a girl who seemed to be older than them. Behind the children were two other young women, who she assumed to be their nannies. Annalyse got up and hugged her grandchildren. They were delighted with her and ran into her hug, all three of them at once.

“They are crazy for their grandma. She spoils them to no end,” Annabeth said and smiled, looking at her mother and children.

“Oh, hello there!” she called out to the children.

“Kids, come and say hello to your auntie. This is Jessica. Remember I told you about her?” Annabeth asked. The boys just stared at her with wide eyes, but the girl nodded. Annabeth introduced them, “This is Andrea. She’s five years old, and these are Ethan and Noah. They’re both three—twins.”

Jessica gently offered her hand. The kids hesitated at first, but then Andrea gingerly took her hand, and Jessica shook it. “Nice to meet you, Andrea. You have such a beautiful name.”

“Nice to meet you too, Auntie Jessica. You are pretty,” Andrea said in her little voice.

“Aww... do you think so, Andrea? Your auntie is really pretty, isn’t she?” Annabeth said and hugged her little girl. Turning towards Jessica, she said, “Wait ‘till they open up to you a little. You’ll have your hands full then. They’re such a handful. Right now, they are shy around a new person. These are Magda and Susan, their nannies. It would have been impossible to handle the three of them without them. The children love them, and they do a good job taking care of them.”

Jessica nodded politely to the nannies. Annabeth told them to see to the kids if they needed to go to the washroom after their car ride from home, and they took the kids and went downstairs.

“Did you have breakfast, Annabeth? If not, then please join us at the table,” Jessica offered.

“Oh, yeah. I had an early breakfast before leaving my place, but I would sure love some of that pudding,” Annabeth said as she sat down on one of the chairs.

“So, the nannies seem good. Are they the ones that look after the kids when you’re not around?” Jessica asked, taking a bite of pudding.

“Oh, yes. They are the best. I had to select them after so many tests, and there were so many applications too. Let me tell you, Jessica, selecting a nanny is not an easy job. It’s been one of the most difficult decisions I’ve had to make as a

mother, but I'm glad it worked out because they're very good with my kids."

"Not only did she stress herself out, but she also stressed the whole family. I had to go over there to calm her down after she had rejected a nanny for like the millionth time, and her prospects were not looking good to find a better one," Annalyse added.

"Yeah, looks like it."

"When you have babies, I will tell you all the tips and tricks," Annabeth said, giving her a wink and giggling. At the mention of babies, Jessica coughed.

"More grandchildren!" exclaimed Annalyse.

"Are you fine? Sorry, didn't mean to startle you, dear," Annabeth said a little apologetically.

"No, it's fine. Just hadn't thought of kids yet." Or ever, Jessica thought. Matt's children. Her and Matt's babies. The thought seemed too foreign and too distant right now. Of course, she would love to have kids someday, but right now, when things between her and Matt were still very new and in the process of developing slowly, the thought of kids made her stomach queasy. Annalyse excused herself when her phone rang. "Sorry, gotta take this. It's Joseph."

Seeing this as an opportunity to change the topic, Jessica said, "Tell me about your husband."

"Oh, he's the best —a wonderful husband and an amazing father to our kids. Carlisle just left for a business trip this morning, and I already miss him terribly," Annabeth said and smiled. Jessica saw that she was in love with her husband very deeply, and it warmed her heart.

"How did you guys meet?" she asked.

"We were high school sweethearts. He's actually a couple of years older than me and was in Matt's year. They are good friends, and that's how I got to know him actually because he would come to see Matt quite often, and I would be there too. The three of us spent a lot of time together," Annabeth told her story, and her eyes took on a look of dreaminess as she spoke.

“Oh my god, you married your high school boyfriend! That’s so cute,” Jessica said.

“Aha. His family is one of the shareholders in our business, so you can imagine that our parents were thrilled that we were together. When he left for college, I was still here, and we had to do long distance for a bit. Those were the hardest months of our relationship. We only met on holidays and vacations, and it was all I could do not to prevent him from leaving, you know?”

“Yeah, long distance is hard.” Though Jessica hadn’t had a serious long-distance boyfriend, she could imagine the things the distance would prevent the couple from doing, and she couldn’t imagine dating anyone that way. She was impressed and amazed by how much effort Annabeth and Carlisle had put into their relationship to work. “But I am so happy that you guys worked it out,” she added and smiled.

“Thank you. When I was done with college, we got married. We married pretty young since we were in love and had been dating for years. Our parents gave us their approval, so we didn’t see any reason to wait any longer, and marrying him was the best decision ever because now I didn’t have to stay away from my best friend slash love of my life.” She giggled and did a cheerful gesture with her hands.

Jessica took a glass of water and did a fake cheer. “To successful marriages,” she toasted.

“To successful marriages!” Annabeth cheered, and they downed their water, then looking at each other and burst out laughing. Jessica was so happy to have found a friend in Annabeth. She loved her like a friend and sister, and she was grateful to Matt for bringing such wonderful people into her life.

“So... Annabeth, I was thinking that we should take the kids out somewhere today. That way, I’ll get the chance to bond with them, and they will have a good day out of it,” Jessica said.

“OMG! Yes, that’s a great idea! What do you suggest?” Annabeth clapped her hands.

“Hmm... I was thinking of some amusement park for kids. Would Ethan and Noah be okay with it?” Jessica asked.

“Of course. They probably can’t get into the rides for bigger kids, but with the help of Magda and Susan, they should be just fine.”

“Awesome. I’ve heard there’s a huge indoor park for kids at the big mall down in the city. Let me just make sure they’re open today,” Jessica said as she looked up the number on Google. She dialed it, and the man on the desk confirmed and that it was open, and that was safe for toddlers as well. Feeling excited, both Jessica and Annabeth got up to get ready to take the kids to the park.

The kids absolutely loved the amusement park. It was perfect for them. Andrea looked like she was having the time of her life. Even little Ethan and Noah had a great time. Jessica bought them stuffed toys and candy, and they loved her for it. Andrea was quickly talking to Jessica, calling her ‘pretty auntie’ instead of Auntie Jessica, and Jessica was loving the little girl. She saw that once she got over the initial shyness, she was just as friendly as her mother, Annabeth. Jessica wanted to do everything she could for these little kids. At one point, Annabeth went, “Jessica, are you putting yourself on the list of people who spoil these little devils? There’s Mom, there’s Matt, and now, you?”

“I aim to be at the top of that list, Annabeth. Just you watch,” Jessica said, laughing.

“Oh damn, watch out kiddos,” Annabeth said, also laughing. Jessica wanted to be that sort of aunt who spoils her nieces and nephews and who the kids adore. She was already in awe of the children. They even did a video call with Matt to show him just how much the kids were enjoying, and Annabeth fake complained about how his wife was spoiling her kids. Matt gave Jessica a nod of approval, and that made all of them laugh.

After a long day at the park, then catching something to eat, they returned home. The children had so much fun, and

they all fell asleep on the car ride home. Even Jessica and Annabeth were feeling exhausted.

After coming home, Jessica found Matt in their room on the phone with someone. At her arrival, he finished the call and hung up.

“Hey, you. How was your day?” he asked.

“It was great! Though I’m so tired right now,” Jessica said. Even though she was tired, she was still elated from the day she had, bonding with Annabeth’s children and strengthening her bond with Annabeth herself.

Matt looked crestfallen. He said, “Too tired for me too?” he said, doing a puppy dog face. Jessica could almost melt when he made that face.

“Hmm... I don’t know. That depends,” she said, playing along.

“Dear, wife. Are you trying to gamble with the pro gambler?” he said, his eyes teasing.

“Maybe you have competition now, ‘pro gambler’ husband,” she said with a wink.

Matt came close to her, and she inhaled his fresh male scent. He must have showered after coming home. Jessica, on the other hand, had a long day and was in need of a shower before she could feel fresh, but that didn’t stop her from leaning into him.

“But yeah, I do want something from you. Answers,” she said. Matt stiffened up just a little but didn’t let it show on his face. He had his nose to her temple as he said, “What about?”

“I... I want to know why you are the way you are in bed,” she said.

“You mean how I’m so amazing?” he kept teasing.

“I mean, why you won’t let me touch you and why you always make sure my hands are out of the way,” she explained. Jessica wasn’t complaining, though. She realized that she liked being submissive in bed and loved it when Matt was dominant and ruled over her body. It was hot, and she

craved it, but she also wondered why he was like that. She wanted to know the reason, as knowing it would make her know him better. She was sure by now that Matt did have feelings for her, and she realized she did too. She didn't know what to call these feelings, not love anyway. That would be too soon, but she *felt* for him. She was just waiting to see where these feelings would lead them.

“But baby, don't you like my hands? They sure do love you. I know they love worshipping your body,” he said as he slid his hands inside the back of her shirt and roamed her back. The touch was so comforting that she let out a satisfied moan. She closed her eyes and leaned into his touch.

“But Matt, I – mhmhm, I want to know you. I want to get closer to you, and the way I can do that is to touch you,” she said as she slowly tried to move her hands down his neck, “to have you in bed, fully, inside me,” she said into his neck. She was starting to feel lightheaded and was losing the energy to hold this conversation. She could just let go and be sucked into the bliss of their bodies touching each other.

“I'm a mystery. You're going to have to go a long way to unravel me, baby,” he said right before he took her mouth with his. Jessica found those words so hot that she let herself go and gave in to him. With their mouths locked together, she could only concentrate on this moment and on Matt. She didn't mind waiting for a bit more. She was willing to let Matt take his time and tell her these answers when he was ready.

That night, she let Matt please her again with his hands, and it was amazing, just like the last time.

A few days later, just like they had discussed, Jessica went to the hospital one last time to pick up her things. Matt accompanied her, and of course, he wouldn't let her go without her new bodyguards. Jessica was somewhat nervous going back in there after what seemed like so many days. Even though it hadn't actually been too long, she felt like her working at this hospital days was a lifetime ago. Mentally, she had started to see that life as the 'before' and her life now as the 'after'. The border here was getting married to Matt on that crazy weekend in Monaco.

Of course, there's a before and after to my life now. The changes are just too drastic.

As Jessica used her ID to punch her way in and let the bodyguards and Matt in after her, she suddenly felt all eyes on her. Everyone had stopped what they were doing to watch her go by. She felt a little self-conscious, but she couldn't blame anybody. If she was on the other end, she would stare too. You don't just walk into your former workplace with a pair of bodyguards and a new billionaire husband in tow. Her letter of resignation had been sent and approved by the authority, so she was officially done with this place, and all that was left was to pack up her things and say goodbye to her friends. Matt gave her some space as she met with her colleagues and friends. She hugged them and wished them the best of luck in their life, they got emotional and promised to keep in contact via social media, but Jessica knew that would not happen. Eventually, they would get distant and lose touch. That's just how these things worked, and she could not do anything about

it. Her life was way too different now. She came out of the hospital with a heavy heart, but looking at Matt, she decided to only focus on the good things. She would be starting a new job soon, but for now, she needed a break to clear her head and decide what to do from here on out.

When she reached Matt waiting in the lobby, she asked him, “Is this true that you are part owner of this hospital?” Jessica had found out about it just a few minutes ago when she had gone to the head of her department to get the formal leave from her boss. She was surprised when he told her that Matthew Miller’s family owned a huge share of this hospital. She shouldn’t have been surprised, though. They seemed to own everything in this city.

“Yes, that’s true,” Matt said as a matter of fact.

“Is there anything in this city that you don’t own?” she asked, rolling her eyes, which only made Matt even cockier.

“Of course, there is,” he said, then they climbed inside the car and headed home.

Jessica had been late in telling her parents that she got married in France. She had dreaded the conversation because she knew they would be extremely disapproving. “You don’t just get left at the altar one day and then get married to another man in a casino the next. That’s just too crazy!” her mom had yelled. Her father had been so shocked that he refused to talk to her at first, but eventually, she convinced them that this is for the best and that she was alright. Her parents questioned her about Matt. They were worried their daughter was blackmailed into marrying some stranger, but Jessica had assured them that she had done it of her own free will. Though they weren’t happy about it, they had to accept it because, according to Jessica, what’s done is done. However, when her mother learned that Matt was a billionaire who owned almost all the big casinos around the world, she was impressed. Now, she insisted on a dinner get-together with Matt where they would meet him officially. This was the thing that Jessica was stressed about now. She hadn’t told Matt about the invitation, but she knew the sooner she got it over with, the better, so after dinner that night, when they were in Matt’s bedroom, she

decided to bring it up, hoping Matt wouldn't need much convincing. After all, he had to meet his in-laws at some point. To her surprise, Matt had agreed to meet with her parents without any hesitation.

“Sure, let's have dinner with your parents. I am looking forward to meeting the people who created such a wonderful person,” he said and kissed her on the forehead. Jessica's heart swelled with affection. Matt was a sweetheart all the way through.

During that weekend, they took his private jet to New Jersey, where her parents' house was located. Being back in that city, Jessica felt nostalgic. As they were driving there, they passed Jessica's high school.

“This is the school I went to, and this neighborhood is where I spent most of my childhood. I have so many memories here. It almost feels like a dream that I'm back here after so long,” Jessica said, looking out the car window. She was lost in memories of her youth.

“It seems to me that you had a wonderful childhood,” Matt said. “I should love to hear all the stories about it.”

Jessica just smiled at him and said nothing. She was having a bit of a moment.

When they reached her parents' house, Matt seemed to be calm, but it was Jessica who was low-key freaking out. What if her parents disapproved of Matt? What if they were mean to him, or worse, embarrassing? Jessica took a deep breath and rang the doorbell. A few seconds later, the door sprung open and Jessica's mom, Margaret, appeared on the other side with a huge grin on her face. Jessica sent a silent prayer to the heavens. This was going to be a long evening. Knowing her mom, she knew she would be over the top.

“Jessica, come here!” her mom squealed and pulled Jessica in for a hug. Her mother's embrace helped loosen a few knots in Jessica's stomach, and she relaxed a little.

“Mom, this is Matt,” Jessica introduced.

“Hello, Matt. Welcome to our home. I’m the mom, but you can call me Margaret,” she said and shook his hand. They were let inside and into the living room. Jessica looked around for her dad but not having seen him, she asked her mother where he was.

“Oh, he just went into his room, he’ll be here,” her mom said quickly. Just then, her dad walked into the room, and Matt got up to introduce himself. They shook hands and then sat. Before the situation could get uncomfortable, her mom suggested they all get to the dinner table, where she had cooked them a wonderful home-cooked meal. Dinner was laid out on the table, and Matt helped Jessica into a chair. Margaret served them all some food. Upon tasting the first bite, Matt said, “This soup is really good.”

“Thank you, dear. It’s a recipe passed down in our family. Please, try some more,” said Margaret, trying to pour more soup into Matt’s bowl, who was trying to politely decline it.

“So, Matt,” Jessica’s father said, “Why don’t you tell us more about how you and Jessica met and *fell in love*,” he said the last part with deliberate emphasis.

“We met at my casino, where I saw her gamble like I’ve never seen another woman before, so I stepped in, and before I knew it, I was ready to marry her,” Matt said with confidence. He wasn’t one to be intimidated by anyone.

“That is so romantic! It sounds like a movie, where a young girl falls in love with a handsome rich man and they get married and drive into the night!” her mom said with a dreamy expression while squeezing Jessica’s hand as if she expected Jessica to swoon and squeal. “What a catch honey,” she not too silently whispered to her and winked.

All Jessica managed to say was a sharp whispered “Mom!” with a glare. Her mom was being so excessively sweet towards Matt and so over the top about expressing her delight at Jessica’s marriage to a ‘rich man’ that it was embarrassing. Jessica knew her mom would be like this.

“Do young kids these days marry after only knowing a person for a day? Things sure were different back in my days,”

her father said and went back to his soup, his disapproval clearly showing on his face as much as his words.

“Dad, please-” Jessica started, but Matt interrupted her.

“I do not know how things were back in your days, or how they should be now, but I did know before marrying Jessica that she was the one. I don’t need years of getting to know your daughter that I wanted to marry her. I realized that in just one night when she played poker with me. I have never been so sure of anything else in my life, so say what you will, Sir, but she is my wife now, and we are perfectly happy,” Matt finished with a hint of finality in his voice that suggested he was done being picked on about his marriage. Everyone around the table was silent, each person wearing a different expression. Jessica’s mom looked at him with an unconcealed look of amazement and delight for her daughter. Her dad seemed to be looking at Matt with a new kind of respect even though he didn’t make it obvious, but Jessica knew her father and knew the meaning behind that look. Matt had won over some part of him with his intentions regarding his daughter, and her dad approved of that. Jessica was looking at him like nothing else mattered in the world. At that moment, she was feeling a million things in her heart, all of them letting her affection for him grow.

Dinner went a little less uncomfortable after that, almost smoothly. Of course, Jessica was constantly on the lookout for more of her father’s disapproval, but he seemed to contain those feelings to himself for the rest of the night. Matt talked about his business and touched a little on how many different things his family owned. When it was revealed that he is also part owner of the hospital Jessica used to work at, her mom again let out a squeal. “Oh my god! This is fate wouldn’t you say?” Jessica rolled her eyes and let out a small chuckle. Her mom was embarrassing, but she was only just wishing the best for her daughter. After dessert, Matt and Jessica took their leave. Just as they got into the elevator, Jessica said, “I’m sorry you had to go through my dad’s inquisitions. He’s only worried about me making a hasty decision.”

“No, please, don’t be sorry. He’s doing what every other father should do, which is looking out for his precious daughter,” Matt reassured her. Jessica smiled up at him, feeling in her heart that she also had made the correct decision in marrying him, even though the circumstances of their wedding were unusual. She liked him even more now, and every day her feelings for him grew.

OceanofPDF.com

Matt was in his office after being done with a meeting the next morning when his phone rang. He didn't recognize the number, but since they were calling him on his personal phone, they must be someone he knew closely. Anyone else would have called his office phone and would have had to get through his secretary. He picked up and spoke, "Hello."

"Matt," the voice on the other end said. Matt's mood turned sour just like that.

"Spencer. What the hell do you think you're doing, calling me on my phone?" Matt said, feeling pissed.

"Look, Matt, can we leave everything behind? Look, man, I'm sorry about the other day, but I've been going out of my mind. I owe so much money to so many people, and now, they're all after me. I literally don't know how to pay them back." Spencer sounded annoyed and impatient, and it was clear that his sorry meant nothing. He was only doing what he needed to do to get his way, and this made Matt even more pissed.

"So, what do you want from me?" he asked.

"I need some money to hold back the Coretti brothers. You know how persistent they can be, so when can we meet up to make the exchange?" How dare that Spencer have the audacity to call him and ask for help when just a few days ago he had tried to assault his wife? Who gave him the right to assume that Matt would agree that he's already asking for a date to

meet? Matt was so pissed now that the hand holding his phone was shaking.

“Listen, you washed-up son of a bitch, I am not giving you any money. Whatever trouble you’re in, you brought this upon yourself. Now, before trying to set dates about an exchange, know your place, and don’t call me here again.” He was about to hang up, but Spencer yelled at him to wait. Matt added, “I have nothing to do with you anymore. I married Jessica, and now, she’s mine. You’re no use to me anymore. Whatever your business is, that’s not my problem.”

“You have some nerve! Without me, you wouldn’t even know Jessica existed. Had I known you had the hots for her when we were dating, I would have brought her along so that you could have her for a night or two, out of pity for you,” Spencer said.

“You fucking-” Matt started.

Spencer cut him, “You owe me for Jessica, and don’t forget that you betrayed me when you married the woman I left on the altar not two days ago, or are you forgetting that she was my fiancé first? I don’t mind that you get it on with my leftovers, but I want my payment.”

“Jessica is not an object that I will pay you for her. She was never yours, to begin with, you asshole,” Matt ground out.

“You know, she was, but now that she is your wife, she will be in trouble if you don’t do as I say. If you don’t pay me, I will harm her,” Spencer threatened.

Matt threw back his head and laughed. “If you think you can get even within ten meters from her, you are mistaken. I will not let any harm come to her. I have the power to protect her from the likes of you. Didn’t you get that message the last time you came near her?”

“How are going to protect her if I tell the Coretti brothers about her? Even you can’t stop them when they want something. They will come for her. They might even kill her or worse...” Spencer said. He was extremely desperate at this

point. He was suggesting unspeakable things that Matt could not even handle thinking about.

It took him an impossible amount of resolve not to lose control and smash the phone against the wall at what Spencer was suggesting. He could not let him know how a direct threat to Jessica affected him. He tried to sound cool when he said, “She’s my wife. What good would she be to the Coretti brothers? Their beef is with you, not me.”

“But what if I told them she was my fiancé just last week? Maybe I could let a lie slip out that I’m still in love with her. If they get even a hint of someone important to me, they’ll come for her throat.”

“You wouldn’t dare. After all, she was your fiancé and your girlfriend for a long time. Surely, you care about her enough to not put a death issue on her?” Matt asked, trying to keep his tone casual as if he was talking business and not something that made him want to puke his guts out.

“I couldn’t care less about the bitch. I will give her up to the Coretti brothers. See how you like it then.”

“You know what Spencer? You’re a fucking coward. Take your bluffing mouth somewhere else. I don’t want to be bothered about you anymore,” Matt said, and he hung up the phone.

Matt

“We’re going to Las Vegas?!” Jessica asked, bobbing excitedly on the bed. She gave Matt a crushing hug, and he laughed as he tried to wrestle away from her grasp.

“Yes. I thought we needed a getaway from the city life stress, so we’re going there this weekend. Are you excited?” Matt asked.

“Um... hello Mr.-I-was-being-crushed-under-my-wife’s-crushing-weight-just-a-second-ago-cause-she’s-too-excited? Of course, I’m excited!” Jessica said and jumped off the bed. “I need to start packing! It’s tomorrow,” she said and ran into the closet. Matt lay there with one hand under his head. He hadn’t told Jessica about the whole Spencer threatening her thing. He had doubled up protection around her even though he thought Spencer wouldn’t actually do it. Jessica would be uncomfortable knowing what Spencer had said, and Matt didn’t want to dampen her mood, especially since she was so excited to get out of New York just as he was. He needed to leave the city and its toxicity to clear his head.



JESSICA

The next morning, Jessica got up and showered. She had packed a light bag the night before, right after Matt had announced their trip. She was very excited to be able to get

away with Matt, where he wouldn't leave for his office while she was away from him all day. In Vegas, she would have him all to herself.

And gambling. Don't forget the gambling.

After a quick breakfast and a cup of coffee, Matt took her out to the helipad, where his private jet was waiting. Jacob greeted them, and Jessica smiled at him. They boarded the jet and took off around 9 am.

Matt let Jessica have the window seat again. She was grateful for that because she loved being able to watch the sky and the cityscape as she flew. She was touched that Matt remembered. On this flight though, she wasn't as distant and silent as she had been on their previous one. She did look out the window a lot, but she and Matt had a healthy amount of conversation and laughing fits as well.

At around 5 pm, they arrived at LAS. A car was waiting to pick them up, and she remembered the chauffeur, Matteo. She greeted him, and he drove them to their hotel.

Arriving at their destination, Matt helped Jessica out of the car. "Welcome to The Grand Hotel and Casino. This is one of my hotels in Las Vegas and where we'll be staying for the weekend."

Jessica was starstruck as she took in the grandeur of the massive building in front of her. Its design was beautiful, and she noticed many neon lights all around it, which no doubt would be lighting up the place like a Christmas tree at night.

"Wow, this place looks grand alright. The name is fitting," she remarked as she followed Matt inside. The main lobby had a huge chandelier hanging from the center. The walls held classical paintings of monumental proportions. There were a lot of marble designs on every inch of the wall she could see. The reception desk itself was a thing to behold. When the receptionist saw Matt, she stood up and greeted them.

"Please, let us show you to your penthouse suite, Sir," she said and appointed a footman to help them to their room. Another footman brought the luggage from the car handed

over by Matteo. All Jessica could do was ogle at the fancy decorations of the hotel. She had never seen something so grand. Their penthouse suite was just as spectacular as Jessica had imagined. Located on the top floor of the hotel, which was the 25th floor, it was huge, and it opened up to a balcony overlooking the whole city. Jessica walked up to the edge and could not hold back her gasp as she looked down at the view. Matt walked up behind her and held her. After kissing her neck lightly, he asked, “Do you like it?”

“Matt, I-” Jessica started but needed a moment to continue. She was so mesmerized. “I don’t think I have ever seen something more beautiful than this. Standing right here with you is breathtaking. I feel like I’m on top of the world,” she said.

“It’s my greatest pleasure to make you feel this way, baby,” Matt said. “Now, come. Let’s get ready and go down to the casino. You’ll love it there too.”

They freshened up after their journey, and Jessica changed into a deep green satin sleeveless dress with jeweled beads on the sleeves. She had this dress from before meeting Matt, and putting it on made her feel like she was meeting him again for the first time. The setting of the casino added to that effect. Matt was dressed up in a suit, which made him look breathtakingly handsome, as always, and together, they went to the main casino room. This time, they didn’t even have to pay a fee because, of course, why would they? It was Matt’s hotel. The casino room had a dome-like shape, where there was a huge chandelier while the surface of the ceiling reflected the lights in small squares, which gave the whole room a very distinct look. Casino tables were scattered all around the room, which was a bustle of activity as many customers gambled and numerous waiters constantly served drinks and light snacks. Jessica wasted no time going to one of the tables, which made Matt chuckle.

“You sure are the perfect wife for a pro gambler,” he said.

“Aha, so now, come. Let’s do some gambling, she answered with a wink.

They spent a long time drinking and gambling. Jessica could let herself loose without any hesitation because she felt protected at Matt's side. Last time, even though she thought she was having fun, she was devastated, but this time, she felt no worry. She relaxed with Matt and let him teach her some tips and tricks about gambling. She was a quick learner and had a talent for it because she learned whatever Matt taught her on top of what she had learned from her grandfather. They had a great time gambling together.



MATT

After what seemed like an hour or two of gambling, Matt had lost track of time, he excused himself to go talk to one of the staff. He went into the back room where the managers were. After having talked to them and one quick visit to the men's room later, he returned to his table with Jessica. On his way back, he bumped into a man and would not think anything of it, but suddenly, he recognized him. It was Lorenzo Coretti, one of the very Coretti brothers that Spencer was on the run from.

What is he doing in my hotel? This is not good.

He hurried over to Jessica's side. He was trying his best not to let Lorenzo understand that he had recognized him. His eyes followed Lorenzo's huge figure across the room. The man walked over to one of the tables, and there was another guy of similar built and looked very much alike—Lucio Coretti, elder brother of Lorenzo Coretti. The infamous Coretti brothers were here in his hotel at the same time he was here with his wife.

Okay, maybe it is nothing. These guys gamble all over the world, so this must just be a coincidence. Plus, they're after Spencer, not me.

Matt was distracted and missed what Jessica had been telling him.

“Sorry, what was that?” he said.

“Matt, I asked you if you were feeling okay. You look like you have seen a ghost,” Jessica said.

“No, it’s nothing. Just a little distracted. Had to take care of some admin business back at the manager’s office. Don’t worry about me,” he assured her.

“Okay, if you say so, but you know we could just turn in for the night. I wouldn’t mind giving up the gambling tonight for the better option of getting your undivided attention,” she said, clinging onto his arm and speaking to his neck.

Her words made him hard.

Damn woman.

“Mhmm... I definitely would like that much better,” Matt said, kissing her on the top of the head. He looked over to where the Coretti brothers were and noticed them staring at him from across the room. Feeling uncomfortable, he got up with Jessica and protectively held her to his side as they went to their penthouse suite.

Jessica had no clue what was going on, and neither did Matt, but he hoped it wasn’t anything bad and it was all just a coincidence.

OceanofPDF.com

Jessica was slightly drunk as she and Matt got into the elevator to go up to the 25th floor to their suite. She was in a good mood and alone in the elevator that she couldn't help but lean closer to Matt.

“You smell so good, husband,” she said.

Matt chuckled. “You too. You always smell good.”

They were about to kiss when the elevator opened, and a couple came in. Jessica felt impatient because she just wanted Matt at that moment, and she could tell that Matt felt the same. She couldn't wait to get to their suite as soon as possible. The elevator opened at their floor, and they walked up to their suite. Matt was taking out his keys when Jessica said, “Matt, hurry up.”

Matt sensed her desire, and in a rush, unlocked their door. She stumbled in and threw her shoes away. She heard the door close behind her, and as soon as she turned around, Matt's mouth came down on hers. She readily kissed him back with equal intensity. Seeing her response, Matt picked her by the thighs and hastily carried her to the bed. They were both slightly drunk and Jessica found the taste of Matt's mouth on hers even more intoxicating than all the alcohol she had consumed. He laid her down on the bed and pressed down on top of her, deliciously close. One of his hands cupped the back of her head while the other one held one of her thighs, lifting it up so that his midsection pressed onto her. She felt his erection digging into her, and desire made her insides warm. She

hooked her hands inside his shirt and was going to run them over his back when he stopped them.

“Matt, please. Let me touch you. I want you so much, just please,” she pleaded.

“Jessica, I can’t,” Matt said, and he sounded genuinely in pain.

“Why? I will do as you ask, but I just want to know why,” she said.

“It’s a long story. You don’t want to know,” he said.

“But I do. Don’t you get it, Matt? I do. I want to know the reason so I can understand you better. You have to let me in. Let me be closer to you. I crave for you so much/ Please, Matt,” she said as she grabbed his head back down and kissed him again. When they finally broke the kiss, Matt sat up beside her. For the longest time, he was silent. Just when Jessica thought he was not going to tell her anything, Matt spoke.

“Her name was Bella. I met her at the park where the cool kids used to hang out after school to catch a smoke or get high and stuff. She wasn’t from our school because her family couldn’t afford it, but she was always there, hanging out with kids from our school. At first, she was introduced to me through a mutual friend of ours. We started talking, and pretty soon, I was falling for her hard. Back then, I thought I loved her. I was just seventeen, and this girl suddenly made me feel all these different feelings. We dated for a few months. At the start, she was great —good girl with good grades —and our relationship was progressing smoothly, but she started to hang out with some of the bad crowds out there—some kids who were into illegal drugs and always getting into trouble. I tried to convince her not to spend time with them, but she would just tell me not to worry and that she wasn’t doing anything too rough., just the occasional recreational use. I was a fool, so I believed her. One day, I found her passed out in an alley, so I brought her home and tended to her. The next morning, when she woke up, she was very sorry, cried, and promised me she would never hang out with those people again. I believed her

again. I was someone who saw the best in people, you know, and because she was my girlfriend, I took her word for it. That day, we were in bed together, and things were getting heated up. Whenever we were together, she liked to be very dominant, and I let her because I liked it. That day, she tied my hands back, and when I was in a vulnerable position, she attacked me. I hadn't noticed the knife she carried with her. She stabbed me twice with the knife because she wanted to steal money from me for drugs. She had made sure she was in my room and that I was restrained. She took my wallet, my watches, and whatever expensive thing she could find around my room and left me, all bloody and passed out from the pain and shock. Annabeth found me. You can guess everything that happened later. I was rushed to the ER and had to get stitches in my back. The scars don't display the level of pain and shock I went through, but they're a living reminder of that horrible day. Ever since then, I haven't been able to let any partner touch me in bed. Whenever I feel a touch on my body, I am taken back to that day when she attacked me. I have tried to get rid of these thoughts, tried not to have this reaction, but I can't help it, Jessica. One touch and I'm back to that position in bed, tied up and helpless. A few years later, I got the news that she had died from an overdose."

Jessica was shocked into silence. She was having trouble breathing after hearing Matt's story. She imagined a young Matt going through such a horrible experience, and her heart broke for him. She couldn't imagine living through the trauma that it caused him.

"Oh my god, Matt. This is unspeakable. I'm so sorry," she said in a broken voice. Her chest was physically aching. All she wanted was to touch him, hug and soothe him, let him know she was there for him, and that she would do anything, give anything for him, but that was the one thing she couldn't do.

"No, I'm sorry. I know you don't deserve this, but I just can't control it," Matt said, putting his head into his hands. Jessica felt insufferable sadness seeing him this way.

“Please, never say sorry to me for this. I can’t imagine what you went through, Matt. I’m sorry I insisted that you tell me the story. I’m sorry I made you relive those moments in your memory,” she said.

“You would have to know eventually,” answered Matt.

Jessica pulled his face up and stared into his eyes, hoping she could convey all the sincerity she felt in her words. “It’s completely fine, you know? It doesn’t matter if I don’t touch you in bed. Just having you to me is enough.”

“Why are you so kind? Oh my god, why?” Matt said and closed the distance between them. Jessica gently laid down on the bed, guiding Matt over her, careful not to touch his back. Matt was gentle on her, and she could feel the sadness roll off him like a physical force. She whispered into his lips, “It’s okay.”

“But it’s so unfair that only I will touch but you can’t touch me,” he said.

“I don’t mind. You can touch me all you want,” she said and deepened the kiss. Matt groaned into her mouth and started to undress her. First, her dress slid off and then he made quick work of her panties. Pulling himself up, he threw off his shirt and unbuckled his pants. Noticing that he was also pulling off his pants, Jessica’s breath quickened. He took his boxers off and revealed all of himself. This was the first time Jessica had seen him completely naked, and the effect it had on her was instantaneous. She was soaking wet, and she couldn’t believe that what she had been craving was finally happening.

Was he going to stop now? Or would he continue?

The answer to her thoughts was answered when Matt reached out to the bedside table and produced a condom from the drawer and put it on. She was panting now. Watching her reaction, Matt smiled and came on top of her again.

“I’m sorry I held back for so long. I just wanted to ease you into the next stage of our relationship, but no more. I can’t resist you any longer, baby,” he said and kissed her hard. One

of his hands traveled down between her legs, where she was already dripping.

“Baby, you’re so beautiful when you want me,” he said. He started stroking her with a finger. His mouth left hers, then took in a nipple and bit it. She moaned into a pillow.

This feels so impossibly good.

“Matt... mhmhm,” she moaned as she slowly licked his way downwards. He kissed and nibbled on the inside of her thighs. Jessica didn’t know how she was living through this intense torment. Her pussy was soaking wet, and she needed him inside her now. She felt his mouth on her most private part, and as his tongue prodded inside it, she almost lost it.

“Matt, this is torture,” she choked out. He devoured her with his mouth, his tongue teasing her folds and licking inside her opening, then suddenly, his came back to hers, and she tasted herself on him. He positioned himself between her legs, and slowly, the tip of cock entered her. The pressure was painfully relieving. She was so slippery by the time he entered her that it didn’t even take him long to be buried inside her. With one swift thrust, he was inside her.

“Ahhhhh...” she said into his neck. It was like the world finally clicked into place.

“Jessica, you’re so tight. God, every inch of you is so beautiful.” He stayed like this for a few seconds, then began moving in a slow rhythm. The movement was so deliberately slow and sensual that Jessica guessed that she wouldn’t last long. She dug her hands into the bed and bit her lips to prevent herself from screaming. Matt’s low grunts and moans were so sexy to her. She was inside a living, breathing capsule for torment. Sex had never felt so good before. Maybe it had been worth it, waiting for so long.

“Matt, please., she moaned, and he started to move faster. With every stroke, he hit a deeper spot in her that was never explored before. She felt the pressure inside her build up.

“You don’t have to restrain yourself, baby. You can scream if you want,” he said in between grunted breaths. She stopped

biting her lips and let loose whatever she felt out loud as Matt started to move faster and faster, and then, she came. It was like a million exploding stars that shook her to the very bottom of her soul, and she screamed out his name. Her core gripped his cock tightly as Matt kept thrusting into her, nearing his own climax.

“Oh, Jessica,” he moaned as he also came. Foreheads pressed together, they were panting hard, their breaths mingling with each other. He stayed inside her and kissed her long and slow.

“That was the best thing that ever happened to me,” Jessica said. She felt Matt growing hard inside her again and feeling that turned her on instantly. Matt looked at her eyes wickedly.

“Want to go for another round already?” he asked with a grin. Jessica’s answer was a bite to his lower lip and an upward thrust of her hips, causing him to go deeper inside her. More than happy to oblige, Matt carried on.

OceanofPDF.com

Matt

Matt felt his phone vibrating under his pillow. He glanced at the clock and saw it read 6:00 am. Frowning, he saw that it was an unknown number.

“Hello?” he said, his voice groggy from sleep.

“Matthew Miller, we have a proposition for you,” said the voice on the phone.

“Who is this?”

“It’s the Italian guest at your hotel that you met last night.”

Matt was instantly alert. The Coretti brothers. He got out of bed, careful not to wake Jessica and stepped out into the balcony. “What do you want?”

“The money that Spencer owes us.”

“Then why are you asking me?”

“It has come to our attention that you were his collateral. Since he can’t be found at the moment, we have decided to take it from you.”

“What Spencer owes you is not my problem.”

“It is when we have eyes on that pretty new bride of yours.”

Matt’s blood chilled at the mention of Jessica. Before he could say anything the voice on the phone said, “If you know

what's good for you and your wife, you will wire us the money within the hour.”

Matt saw no point in arguing after that. These brothers would never listen to reason. He sighed and said, “Understood. Send me the address,” then hung up. Coming back to the room, he looked at Jessica. She was naked under the covers, one leg poking out. She was clueless about all the happenings with Spencer and his failed gambling. Matt thought that he would like to keep it that way. Once he sent the money they asked for, they would hopefully leave him and Jessica alone. He left a note for Jessica saying he had gone out, then arranged an urgent meeting with his accountant and left the room.



JESSICA

Jessica woke up to an empty bed. She found the note Matt had left her ‘Out to handle some business. Be back soon, beautiful.’ and smiled. God, how she loved those small handwritten notes from Matt. She brushed her teeth and took a shower. She hoped Matt would be back by the time she was done with her shower, but when she got out of the bathroom, he still wasn’t back. Confused, she dialed his phone, but he didn’t pick up.

I wonder if I should dial again or if he is busy in a meeting or something important?

She decided to wait a bit more, so she grabbed some water from the fridge and fixed herself a bowl of cereal for breakfast. She prepared coffee on the French press and tried watching some TV to kill time, but her mind was restless.

Where was Matt?

She glanced at the clock. It had been more than an hour since she had woken up. Feeling bored, she decided to go down to the main lobby to check it out for herself. Maybe someone working there would know where Matt went so early in the morning, so Jessica got dressed in a golden dress and

did her makeup lightly. She grabbed her phone and keys, then unlocked the penthouse door. She then let out a scream, which was quickly cut off by a cloth clamped around her mouth. The chloroform in the piece of cloth kicked in, and her body went limp at the hands of her attacker.



MATT

It had taken longer than Matt had expected for his accountant to arrange the huge sum of money requested by the Coretti brothers. He checked his phone and saw a missed call from Jessica.

Shit.

He hurried back to their penthouse. The door was locked, so he used his key to get in.

“Jessica, I’m back,” He called out, But there was no sign of her in the bedroom. He checked the bathroom in case she was taking a shower, but she wasn’t there as well. He called her number, but it was turned off.

Shit. Shit. Shit.

He looked out on the balcony, then came back and double-checked the suite. Jessica was nowhere to be found.

OceanofPDF.com

It was still early in the day. The hands on the clock on the bedside table pointed to 7. The sun hadn't even begun to shine at its full capacity. It was as if it was also having a lazy morning and didn't want to rush to start the day. Matt was standing in the middle of the room, breathing hard. He had done several searches of the whole place, trying to find Jessica. The room was completely empty. Matt was the only person in the entire suite. He had looked for clues in the hopes that they would lead him to her but found nothing. For a second, he thought that this couldn't possibly be happening. He had just wired the money to the Coretti brothers. Surely, they wouldn't break their word and take Jessica against their agreement. Not even they would be stupid enough to cause such unnecessary conflict and dare anger Matt's family. After all, the Coretti brothers had a worse reputation than Matt, but they were all but barking pups when it came to the position of his family in the community. Still, where was Jessica? Why was she not here where he had left her?

He tried her phone again. It was probably the fifth time in a matter of a couple minutes that he had called her, but it always rang and rang until that machine-automated voice told him that he had reached her voicemail. Jessica hadn't even bothered to put her own voice message there. She had just kept on using whatever setting came with the phone. He was in the bedroom now, and as he held the phone to his ear calling Jessica, he felt something vibrate under the sheets. He frantically felt the bed, and his hand found a phone under the messy sheets. He took it out and saw that it was Jessica's. It

showed six missed calls from Matt and a text message from the phone server. She had left her phone back in the suite, so whatever plans Matt was forming to track her down through GPS tracking services were squashed with that. He felt the urge to throw the phone across the room but controlled himself at the nick of time and threw it on the bed aggressively.

Shit.

Although the TV was playing in the background, Matt couldn't hear anything louder than the sound of his heart beating in his chest and the ringing in his ears that suggested rising panic. He had never felt this way before under any sort of situation, and he had been into a lot of them, but nothing had ever been as bad as the possibility of Jessica being in danger. Nothing had ever shaken him ever so hard that, for the first time in his life, he was actually scared. He couldn't even conceive the idea of something bad being done to her. He just couldn't. He told himself that if she had indeed been kidnapped by the Coretti brothers, they would gain nothing by causing her any harm. They had to know that to get anything in return for a hostage, they had to make sure the hostage was untouched, but this logic didn't help Matt's raging heart one bit. He could tell himself nothing to ease the blinding panic that gripped his heart and made him forget all reason.

Fuck, I'm scared.

Matt shook his head, trying to get the negative thoughts out of it. He couldn't think of the worst-case scenarios right now. He had to think straight and cook up a plan and fast.

Think, think, think. What can be the course of action for me now?

This was something Matt always asked himself when he was under pressure and needed to make a quick decision. He urged himself to calm down just a little for his brain to start working again after the terrible shock.

The bodyguards!

Matt took out his phone from his pocket again and dialed the number of one of the bodyguards assigned to Jessica while

he was away. Originally, Nash and George were designated to be her bodyguards. They were some of the most trusted people in his employ. Although, just this morning, he had taken them with him when he went to transfer the money because they had previous experience with such dealings, while he entrusted his own bodyguards with the responsibility to look over Jessica for the small window of time Matt was away.

The phone rang for a while. Matt was getting angry and was about to hang up when someone picked up the call.

“Mr. Miller, this must be you. Hello, I’m Lucio Coretti,” said a deep voice with an Italian accent from the other end. Matt was instantly alert, and his hand gripped the phone tighter.

“Where is she?” he ground out.

“Perfectly safe, not to worry,” replied the elder Coretti brother. “And so is your sorry excuse of a bodyguard. You know, for one of the most influential families in the business, you guys sure have very poor protection services. Might want to improve on that next time.

“You will be sorry if even a hair on her head is misplaced,” Matt said, fuming into the phone.

“Don’t worry, Mr. Miller. We are not stupid. Like I have told you before, we do not want any unnecessary trouble with you Americans. Keeping in alignment with that, we have made sure your wife and her two bodyguards are kept out of harm. The bodyguards are currently sleeping their way to heaven. Pretty comfortable if you ask me. My men didn’t even break a sweat in giving them a whiff of the chloroform, and they went right under, but we have made especially sure that your wife, Jessica—that is her name, right? We have made sure she is perfectly safe.”

“If you even dare to just-” Matt started, but Lucio cut him off.

“I know, I know, blah blah. Do not waste my time with your puny threats, Mr. Miller. We intend to have a hostage for as long as the collateral takes to successfully give us the

money, which, for your information, has not reached us yet. We will let you have Jessica after you have transferred it to us successfully. I see no point in engaging in meaningless conversations with you. As you can guess, I am not into small talk with Americans, and now, have a good day.” With that, Lucio hung up the phone. This time, Matt really did throw his phone away and roared in rage.

I will make them regret doing this. I will make them pay for taking Jessica.

He bellowed into the room, trying to let the rage off his body. He punched the pillows and, finally, perched on his bed, heaving, and putting his head in his hands. This day could not get any worse.

OceanofPDF.com

*M*att was lying on his bed with a girl hovering over him. His breath came in quick huffs as he felt her body press down on his—her soft curves were hugging his sharp edges. She ran her hands over his chest and his back, and the sensation that swept across his whole being when she dug her nails into his flesh was almost enough to bring him down to his knees. He was entranced in her presence, completely caught under her spell. He kissed her mouth, face, neck, and jaw. He nibbled softly in her ears as she giggled and squirmed at his touch. She moaned into his lips, and that made him hard under the constraints of his pants. The girl slowly lifted herself up and pulled off her shirt. Matt sucked in a breath as she lowered herself on him, shirtless. He grabbed her breasts and heard her sigh of pleasure.

“Yes, baby,” she cooed into his ears. He unhooked her bra, took one nipple into his mouth, and sucked. She threw her head back and gasped out his name. Her hands were holding his head to her chest, fingers tangled in his hair, and he sucked on one nipple, then the next.

“Bella, I need you right now,” he whispered.

As an answer, she tugged at his shirt. Matt took it off in one swift motion. She watched him with wicked eyes and laid her palm flat over his chest.

“Let me take control today,” she said, biting her lower lip. Matt nodded. She trailed her hand down over his chest and torso, then stopped at his belt. She unbuckled it and twisted it in her hands, looking at him mischievously. Matt was

breathing hard, feeling impossible desire almost to the point of pain. She understood his reaction and looked to be pleased with it. With this, Bella pushed him down over the bed and held his hands over his head. Using the belt, she tied his hands to the headboard. Matt lifted his face to hers and kissed her. She kissed him back with a hunger that surprised even him. He was allowing himself get lost in the kiss and under her touches all over his body. He was so lost that he didn't notice when she opened her eyes and made sure that his hands were securely tied. He didn't notice when she slowly reached out her right hand to her bag that sat on the bedside table and silently opened the top chain, and he didn't notice when she took a small pocketknife. What he did notice was the sudden sharp pain in his side. His eyes instantly flew open, and for a moment, he was utterly confused about what he was feeling. His body was so aroused that it was confused with this interruption. He couldn't even process what was happening when she stabbed him again. This time, though, he let out a yelp. Bella's face had changed from a sensual seductress to a contorted glare. She had the pocketknife held at his throat now.

"Don't fucking move a muscle, or you will be bleeding through your neck," she hissed. Matt was sure he couldn't, even if he wanted to. He was going into shock. His brain was not thinking clearly, and he couldn't grasp what had changed in a matter of a few seconds. One moment they were making out, and the next, she had stabbed him twice and was threatening to slice his throat.

"Be-Bella?" he stammered.

"Where's your wallet?" she asked, pressing the knife into his throat with force. Matt was wide-eyed but managed to move his head to point toward the dresser where his wallet lay. Beside it sat the Rolex watch he had taken off after bringing her home. Her eyes lit up at the sight of these things.

"Good, now stay where you are," she said and carefully got out of the bed. She didn't even bother to put on her bra as she pocketed the wallet and the watch from the dresser, and then she looked around the room and caught sight of the closet

door, which was left a bit ajar. Matt was a messy kid like any other teenager and didn't bother closing every door or keeping everything locked in his room. She walked across the room and pillaged whatever she could from his closet. Only after she had packed the loot inside her bag that she hastily put on the bra and her shirt back on. Matt was steadily feeling more fatigued. He was losing a lot of blood, and the shock of it all was making his pressure fall dangerously low. He felt every fiber in his body just wanted to shut down. There was this force over his body that kept dragging him down. Even as he lay on the bed, he was feeling like he was falling deeper. His vision started to blur and darken. Eventually, he lost his senses. The last thing he saw was her grabbing her backpack as she ran out the door. She didn't even look back at him, and then everything went black.

Matt was enraged beyond words. He couldn't think properly. He was having flashbacks of that fateful night that had changed his life forever. His first love, Bella, had tied him up to the bed, made him completely vulnerable and unable to protect himself, and stabbed him before stealing his money.

Fuck, why am I thinking about that night right now? I need to get my thoughts straight.

Even as he said these words to himself, he knew why. He knew there was a pattern to all the bad things that were happening to him right now. Jessica was kidnapped because he had been the one who had messed up. He knew it was because of Spencer, but that was only the end of it. The whole thing was much bigger than that. Jessica had no idea what was even happening. She had no part in this dark and dangerous game they were all playing, and yet she was the one bearing the damage. He felt terrible. He was the one who had been involved with Spencer. He was the one in business with him. Matt had a keen eye for judging people. He always made sure not to enter into any kind of business with anyone who he wasn't absolutely sure about. Spencer had never struck him as the solid and reliable kind, so why had he agreed to be his collateral in the first place? What was the reason behind this faulty judgment on his part? What had made him forget his

usual sharp senses and intuition and still go into business with Spencer?

Jessica.

The voice inside his head seemed to mock him. It was all about Jessica, all for Jessica. She was the thing that had been on his mind when he had agreed to partner up with Spencer. She was the one he had been pining for all this time. He hadn't admitted it to himself all this time, but he had felt it in his gut that he just needed to get closer to her somehow, and that had made him break his own codes. Now, she was the one in the line of harm, and she was the only one completely innocent in all of this. If something happened to her, Matt could never live with himself. He was the one that got her tangled up in this mess. The Coretti brothers didn't want anything to do with her, but it was all just to get back at Matt. Matt felt the bile rise in his throat. It wouldn't be the first time he would lose the woman he loved over dangerous men. He had lost Bella to the likes of these people, but also, Bella was the one who had gotten herself tangled up in the dark side, while Jessica was completely uninvolved. She didn't deserve this. She didn't deserve him.

Shit.

He got more flashbacks of the past. He remembered how he felt the night Bella had stabbed him, but even worse, he remembered how he felt when Bella was eventually been killed in the mess. Back then, he hadn't been the one responsible for these, but he had lost her all the same. It didn't matter who was to blame. He had lost her. He couldn't save her, and God forbid he had tried.

That day, Annabeth had found him unconscious in his room. There was a lot of blood. She had screamed in horror at the top of her lungs, but Matt had been oblivious to the world. When he had woken up, he was in a bed in a private cabin at the ER. His mother and Annabeth had been sitting on both sides, faces streaked with tears. His mother hadn't started dating Joseph back then, so it was just the three of them. Annabeth had only been a child of fourteen. She had been shaken after the death of their father, but one look at her face

and Matt knew that she could never take the loss of her big brother. He had felt his heart break in so many different ways. It was the pain of being betrayed by your first love and the even worse pain of putting your family through such hard times after everything they had been through already. It had taken a few weeks for Matt to fully recover from his wounds. The stab wounds were deep and done by an unprofessional, which caused the knife to cause even more damage to his tissue. The doctors had told him that he was lucky no major veins were cut, but Matt didn't feel all that lucky. He felt like he had the most miserable luck that any seventeen-year-old that could have ever exist could have. When he was discharged from the hospital and marked as recovered, he didn't feel recovered at all. The damage done to his heart and his mental state would go on to haunt him for the rest of his life. It did haunt him to this very day. He would never be able to be himself in bed without the ghost of Bella stabbing him. He would never be able to trust anyone completely with his heart or his body ever again, but he had felt like he could have that with Jessica, or at least he had hoped for it. Now, if something were to happen to her because of him, it would completely break him beyond repair. Not even Bella's untimely and painful death held an inkling of the damage he would take if he lost Jessica.

He remembered, back when he had recovered, that he had taken some time off from school to settle down—to not jump out of his shoes every time someone unfamiliar came close. When he finally went back to school, he had gotten the news that Bella was no longer coming to hang out at the park anymore. She had moved to the darker parts of the city with even worse people. Matt had thought that he wouldn't care what happened to her anymore, but he was not very surprised to find that he still did. Even though he couldn't get closer to her, he still couldn't help keeping tabs on her on where she was staying and what she was doing back then. He had used his family's spy network to keep tabs on Bella. He didn't know why he did that. Maybe it was the only way for him to cope because he didn't know how to let her go. That's how he found out that she was dating an underworld drug lord. Matt had looked up his profile and felt disgusted. The man had to be

in his thirties and dating multiple young girls all at the same time. They were all underage. Bella was only sixteen. Matt didn't even know if he could call that dating or just keeping underage girls at his side. Sex in exchange for drugs, and all of those girls were deep into the addiction. He felt sorry for all of them and wished there was a way he could save them, but what could he have done, being only seventeen himself? Still, he had tried to save Bella. He had watched her lose her dignity again and again, and at one point, he couldn't bear to watch from the shadows any longer. He had tried to reach out to her, to make her see reason and to help her in any way he could, but all his efforts had been in vain because the drug lord had high security around him at all times. Other than that, Bella didn't want to be saved because the moment she had gotten the hint that Matt was trying to contact her, she had made sure that he wouldn't be able to. The message was loud and clear. *Leave me alone.* Matt didn't know what to do. Eventually, he stopped trying so hard. However, he had always kept some sort of intel on her whereabouts, just in case. It had been three years since the incident of Bella stabbing him. His life had almost come back to normal, with the exception that he was still haunted by her memories. It had changed him in ways that couldn't be seen from the outside, but the wounds were deep within his soul. Soon, he graduated high school and got into college. He had almost forgotten about and gotten over Bella—almost.

Matt had gotten the insider news that Bella had become pregnant. It was the drug lord's baby. He couldn't understand the emotions he felt when he got to know about it. Jealous? Angry? No, he was just a little sad, but nothing compared to what he felt about what happened after. Within a few weeks of the pregnancy, Matt's spy network reported back to him that things had gotten very bad with the drug lord and another gang in the area with a younger leader. It was predicted that trouble was stirring between the two gangs. When they threatened to harm Bella, her so-called boyfriend didn't even bat an eye and told them to do whatever they wished and that he didn't care. The gang members weren't kidding, and Bella was shot dead right on the spot. The father of her unborn child didn't even flinch when her body hit the floor. Hearing this, it was as if someone had shot Matt instead. He still hadn't been able to

process the fact that Bella was pregnant with the drug lord's child, but the news of the death was too much for him to take. He broke out in a fit of rage and smashed his hand into the hardwood of his door. The pain did little to put him out of his anger.

They killed Bella and her unborn baby. They will pay for it.

And pay, they did because Matt made sure the drug lord and the gang they were in a conflict with were completely decimated from that area. Until that point, Matt had only used his family's connection just to assign a spy to keep track of Bella's whereabouts, but this time, he was done playing. He would destroy these dangerous men who had no regard for not one but two innocent lives, so Matt had done everything in his power to make sure they could harm no other lives this way and that no more young girls like Bella could get themselves trapped in a similar situation. His family was one of the biggest names in the underworld, and even though Matt's father died when he was very young, Matt was no stranger to what kind of power he wielded, but he soon realized that wiping out two gangs did not bring him any sort of mental peace. It did not help him feel any less sad for Bella, even though she had refused him at every turn of the way. This revenge felt disappointing and only drove Matt into a deeper state of keeping his feelings suppressed—until Jessica. He was starting to get out of his suppressed state with her around. He was finally starting to feel like he was capable of loving someone and maybe even being loved back. He had bartered a part of his soul when he had ordered those gangs to be destroyed, and for Jessica, he would do it all over again. He didn't care what it did to his soul. He would make them regret ever taking her in the first place.

Matt was still fuming with anger when he urged himself to get up and do something about it. He wracked his brain again for the best possible thing he could do in this situation.

Spencer.

He dialed Spencer's number. It kept on ringing until it went to his voicemail. He tried a few more times, but Spencer wasn't picking up his phone.

"Ugh, fucking bastard!" Matt shouted into the phone. He was going to have to force Spencer to answer him. Matt was not going to go easy on him. He was the one who probably had some clue as to how to find Jessica. Matt grabbed his wallet and phone and ran for the door. Nash was right outside the door where he had instructed him to be. On his way, he called George to ready the chopper on the terrace. Matt got there as fast as he could and found that George had prepared the private helicopter with the flyer already seated in the front. Matt nodded to George and climbed up, followed by Nash and then George.

He gave them Spencer's address, and the chopper took off efficiently, wasting no time. Matt felt like he couldn't even wait for the few minutes it took them to get from the hotel to Spencer's apartment in Vegas. By car, it would have taken much longer. They landed in the helipad closest to Spencer's place and rushed into the car waiting there. George didn't protest when Matt signaled for him to hand over the car keys. He took the driver's seat, with George on the passenger's side

and Nash, sliding into the back seat. He pulled out of the helipad and sped onto the main road, heading for Spencer's apartment. When they reached it, he didn't even bother to knock or ring the bell. He had his bodyguards knock the door down. Nash remained to guard the door while Matt and George barged in.

The apartment was dark and stank of stale food and alcohol. There was a messy clutter of unwashed dishes over the basin. Things were strewn all over the dusty counter. What a pathetic loser, Matt thought. There was light coming from the bedroom, and Matt headed straight for that door. The room turned out to be even messier than the rest of the apartment. The blinds were drawn, and the only light illuminating the room was a yellow bulb at the center of the ceiling. The bed was unmade, with clothes and other objects taking up every inch of space. There was the stagnant stench of sweat and alcohol in the room. Upon a quick inspection, he found Spencer lying on his side at the foot of the bed. Matt's temper flared again upon seeing the complete disaster of the man. He hauled him up by the collar of his t-shirt and shook him violently.

"You miserable piece of shit!" Matt bellowed. Spencer only held his head low, not responding to Matt's shouts. This enraged him even further, and he punched him hard. Spencer made no move to stop the blows that came next. Matt was so angry he lost count of how many punches he landed on Spencer's face and stomach, but all Spencer did was cry. He was so weak that he couldn't even hold his body up straight. His legs gave away, and he fell to the ground. Matt guessed that the bastard had probably drunk himself to the point of collapsing.

"Where is she?" Matt asked him. Spencer cried some more.

"Where the fuck is my wife?" Matt yelled louder, getting closer to Spencer, who reeked of alcohol.

"What do you mean?" Spencer managed to say weakly.

"They took her!" Matt was getting impatient with him.

“I don’t know what happened to Jessica!” Spencer cried.

“Tell me where to find the Coretti brothers, or I swear to God, I will end your pathetic excuse of an existence!” Matt yelled back.

Spencer kept on sobbing. Matt was disgusted with him and slammed him back into the bed. Suddenly, Spencer weakly spoke up, “I think I know where they might have taken her.”

“Where?”

“They have a place here in Vegas—a mansion. That’s the only address I know of,” Spencer said. His face was bruised and bloodied from all the punches Matt had thrown at it. His lips were cracked, and blood dripped down his chin, but he didn’t seem to notice. He really did look far gone.

“Write down the fucking address, and don’t pass out before I get all the information I need out from you,” Matt spat at him.

Spencer managed to find some paper and was looking for a pen when George handed him one from his pocket. He jotted down an address into the paper and handed it over to George.

“I know where this is,” George said, reading the note.

“Let’s go,” said Matt. After turning toward Spencer, he hissed, “I’m not done with you. You are coming with me.” Spencer started to protest but was hauled up by George, who was a whole head taller than him and possessed a bulging body. With one last disgusted look at Spencer, Matt stormed out of the room. Nash and George helped bring Spencer along with them to the car.

This time, he let George drive him because he had to make some urgent calls before reaching the Coretti brothers’ mansion. Spencer was locked into the back seat with Nash.

There was no way I’m going to let this bastard out of my sight until I find Jessica.

It took them an excruciating ten minutes of trudging through Vegas traffic and finally reaching the mansion. It was a huge, well-lit place that looked to be a sunny spot for the usual Vegas partying crowd that turned toward a home party rather than gambling at the casino. Judging from the sound coming from it, there indeed seemed to be a party going on. Matt instructed Nash to bring Spencer with him.

“Stop right there,” came a deep voice. A security officer with a serious-looking face and a walkie-talkie stopped them at the main gate. Matt signaled for Nash to let Spencer go ahead.

“We’re here to meet, Lucio. We have business,” Spencer said. Matt noticed that sometime during the car ride, he had wiped the blood from his face and was now looking somewhat decent and not like someone who had just taken a dozen punches from Matt.

The security member looked him up and down for a few seconds and let them through. He must have recognized Spencer.

There was a pool at the side of the mansion where a bunch of people was smoking, drinking, and splashing around in the water. Matt didn’t like the look of the crowd and wished that Jessica was safe wherever she was. Music blared from the massive speakers placed all around the pool. It looked like a college party, except the people here were much older and were probably doing worse things than what was usual for college-going kids. Matt scanned the poolside for any sign of

Jessica. Before he had looked around himself, a voice cut through the music.

“Matt!”

The sudden rush of relief he felt right at that moment was almost bordering painful. It was Jessica’s. His head jerked toward the direction her voice came from, and he spotted her running towards him by the poolside. Matt ran toward her, and she crashed into his arms as he enveloped her in a tight hug, breathing her in.

“Oh, thank God you are safe,” he said into her hair, holding her tight.

“Of course, I am. Where have you been since this morning?” she asked, concerned. “I was coming to look for you down at the main lobby, but I must have fainted because the next thing I knew was that I was brought here by your bodyguards.”

“What? Okay, you have it all wrong, and Jessica, there’s something going on here that you need to know.”

“Babe, what’s wrong? Why do you look so distressed? What are you talking about?” asked Jessica, oblivious to the whole situation going on around her. She seemed to notice Spencer right then, and her eyes went wide. “What is he doing here? And what on earth are you guys doing together?”

Matt didn’t reply right away. He figured he should go to a more private place to have this conversation with Jessica and tell her that she had potentially been in life-threatening danger. He didn’t want all the poolside party people to know their business, and he also figured that Jessica needed to sit down and have a drink when she learned the truth.

“Come with me. I’ll tell you everything.”

Frowning, Jessica followed him inside. The wide-open double doors led to a massive drawing room, which was relatively empty except for a few people lounging on the sofas. Matt found an empty couch by the corner of the room, away from the ears of strange people, and sat her down. Spencer and Nash followed them.

“Okay, first of all, you need to know that the people that brought you here were not my bodyguards,” Matt began. “My bodyguards were drugged and put to sleep, and so were you. You fainted because they most likely made you sniff chloroform, and then they brought you here as a hostage.”

Jessica’s face took on a look of horror. “What? Who is this they you are referring to?”

“The Coretti brothers, Lucio and Lorenzo. They’re some of the most dangerous people in the underworld. They took you hostage to force me to pay them.”

Jessica just gaped at Matt. He continued, “They were in a business negotiation with Spencer here.” He looked over at Spencer and glared as he spoke. “But Spencer couldn’t make good on his word and didn’t pay them what he owed, so they came after me because I was his collateral previously. When they heard that I had recently gotten married, they threatened me by using you. That’s where I was this morning. I was making arrangements to send them the money that Spencer owed them, but they got to you before the transaction was complete.”

Jessica put her hand over her mouth in shock.

“Baby, I’m so sorry. I should have never brought you to Vegas. That’s where they saw me and us —together —and made the connection. If we hadn’t crossed paths with them, none of this would have happened.” Matt put as much sincerity in his words as he could. He meant these words. He wished Jessica could understand what he felt. Jessica was too stunned to speak. Matt didn’t blame her. She was clueless about the whole situation, and naturally, such big and shocking news would require time to process.

“God, if anything had happened to you, I couldn’t have lived with myself. Jessica, I’m so sorry,” he said and took her hands.

“I know, Matt. I trust you, but I wish you had told me,” Jessica said.

“It just happened this morning. I got a call, and one of the brothers threatened me. I didn’t want to take any chances, so I immediately went to make the arrangements. I didn’t get the chance to tell you everything, and, to be honest, I didn’t even realize it would get this far.” Matt explained and buried his face into her lap.

“It’s okay. It’s okay,” Jessica repeated into his head. “Since Nash and George were to be with you, I couldn’t tell the difference when your bodyguards were swapped with the Coretti brothers. I thought they were there to guard me, so I didn’t protest when they said you had told them to bring me here. I was under the impression that this was your family’s mansion. I was so confused to find a party here, and I was so worried, Matt. I thought you were in danger,” she said, holding his face.

“You’re with me now, and I will get us out of here,” Matt said, then he remembered that Jessica was still confused about what Spencer was doing here. “I went to Spencer’s apartment and got the address of this place from him. That’s how I found you. The security here recognizes Spencer, so they let us in.”

“Looks like the love birds have found each other. How sweet.”

Matt and Jessica jerked their heads in the direction of the voice. The man speaking came into view. He was tall and muscular, with thick curly hair and a tattoo disappearing down his chest. He wore chains on his neck and a pair of sunglasses hanging low over his eyes. He looked at the bunch and smirked.

“We had a deal. I wire you the money, and you leave my wife the fuck alone, Lucio,” Matt said.

“So, we did, but you see, my brother Lorenzo is a very cautious man. He didn’t want to take any chances, in case you went back on your word, and it seems like he was right because we did not receive any payment yet,” Lucio drawled on. He looked over at Spencer, who let out a whimper and tried to back away, but Nash held him in place by the collar.

“And we have the star of the show right here. Where have you been hiding, little mouse?”

“Please, just let me go!” Spencer cried.

“Oh, no, no. You are the one we have been looking for. I should thank Matt for finding you for us,” Lucio said and gave an evil smile that sent Spencer almost running for cover. He was terrified of this man.

“What do we have here?” another voice interrupted.

Lucio didn't even turn around to look at the man. He said, “Come, little brother, look at this entertaining show. We have all the players of this game right here.”

Lorenzo Coretti made his way from inside the house to the drawing room. The two brothers looked very similar, with the same muscular bodies and tattoos covering their chests and arms. Lucio appeared to be an inch or so taller than Lorenzo, but Lorenzo had a more demanding presence. While Lucio looked laid back and mischievous, Lorenzo had a look of seriousness about his person that differentiated him from his older brother more than their physical appearances did. Everything about this man screamed that he didn't tolerate bullshit, and true to Lucio's words, it seemed like he didn't like to take chances either.

Jessica stiffened a little when Lorenzo walked over to them. Matt had his arm over her protectively and held her tight. “You don't have to worry. This isn't going to be about us for much longer,” he assured her.

Lorenzo came to stand beside Matt. Matt stood his ground, refusing to back down. Spencer looked positively ill, being in the presence of the two brothers he had been running away from all this time.

“Spencer, you are in trouble,” Lorenzo said. “But first, Mr. Miller, where is the money that you promised us this morning?”

“I told you that you will get it. I made the arrangements just this morning. You didn't have the right to kidnap my wife,” Matt said.

“She was kept here very comfortably, as you can see. However, I cannot say the same if we don’t get the payment by tonight. I don’t like unnecessary delays, Mr. Miller,” Lorenzo said. There was an unspoken threat in the way he said these words. Lucio shook his head and grinned at everyone.

“Wiring over that much money takes time.”

“That is not our problem. You have until tonight.”

Matt glared at Lorenzo, took out his phone, and called his secretary again. She assured him that it was already under process and that by any minute now, the transaction would be complete. Matt cursed silently.

It was already taking too damn long. I just want to be done with this and get out of here.

A few minutes passed by in uncomfortable silence as Matt waited for the call of confirmation. Lucio had walked out to the pool to talk to some people while Lorenzo had seated himself on another sofa and was keeping a keen eye on all of them.

Just then, Matt’s phone rang again, and he picked it up.

“It has been done. I am mailing you the transaction ID as we speak. The mail is a timed one, so check it immediately before it deletes itself,” Matt’s secretary said over the phone. Matt nodded and hung up.

“It has been done,” He announced. Lorenzo checked his own phone and seemed to be satisfied with the statement. Both he and Lucio walked back to them.

“I have transferred the promised two million dollars that Spencer owed you into your given account, and I am also leaving Spencer here with you,” Matt said, taking Jessica’s hand and leading her out of the room into the back lawn of the mansion. A helicopter sounded in the background. It was steadily descending on the lawn, which the people had cleared out after seeing it approach. He turned around to face the brothers and shouted over the noise.

“This should be the end of it and the last time I ever see your faces. If anyone of you brothers or Spencer ever show

your faces to me again or even think of getting near my wife again, it will not be wise for any of you. I will not be as forgiving. Don't forget who I am or my family," Matt said in a roaring, menacing voice. The helicopter had landed on the lawn. A large man armed with a big rifle came down the stairs and stood at the foot of the chopper, awaiting a command from Matt. Matt stared defiantly at the brothers, letting the threat in his words sink in. Lucio was still smirking, but Lorenzo stared back at him with equal intensity. Nash had left Spencer with the brothers, and it looked as if he was ready to puke his guts out. Matt couldn't care less about what would happen to Spencer. He took Jessica's hand and led her to the helicopter. The man with the rifle helped Jessica into the chopper, and Matt went in behind her. They were flying right after Jessica settled into a seat.

"Fly back to the suite that we are staying in," Matt ordered the pilot.

"Are you okay, honey?" Matt asked her. He could tell that she was shaken from what had just happened, but she gave him a meek smile and nodded. Matt said nothing but just pulled her in his arms tightly. They watched as the helicopter flew higher and higher into the air, leaving the Coretti brothers and a very distressed-looking Spencer far behind.

Jessica felt like she had the longest day of her life, and it was only two in the afternoon. True to Lucio's words, she had been kept comfortable at the Coretti brothers' mansion, but more than that, she hadn't even known what was going on, and something about the place seemed off to her. She had been under the impression that it was Matt's family mansion, but the people occupying it did not look like his family or friends. Not that Jessica knew any of Matt's family and friends other than his mother and sister, but still, shouldn't either Annalyse or Annabeth have been there? And why were the people all doing inappropriate things like doing drugs?

She had been in a state of confusion and wandering at the side of the pool, looking for anyone she might recognize or for Matt or Annabeth to arrive through the main gate. That's when she suddenly spotted Matt walking into the house. She had felt so much relief in seeing him that it made her body instantly take flight. She had run into his arms at full speed, and Matt had embraced her as if his life depended on her. She didn't care where she was or who surrounded them. At that moment, the only thing that mattered to her was Matt, and she was just relieved that they had found each other. Whatever came after, they would handle it together. As long as she was by Matt's side, she felt safe and secure, like that was where she was supposed to be.

After that, when Matt had explained the whole situation with the Coretti brothers, Spencer, and her unbeknownst to her kidnapping, she felt shocked, yes, but also it quickly passed, and she realized that these things happened in this life. She

was the wife of someone whose family name held more fear and respect than the worst drug lords she had watched in the movies. What did she expect? Some conflicts were meant to rise, but for now, she was glad this one was over and behind them now.

However, Matt was very restless.

“Jessica, are you sure you are alright? They didn’t make you eat or drink anything without your knowledge?” he asked.

“No, Matt. I hadn’t even been awake for too long before you came,” she said.

“But it’s just so unusual that they would be that accommodating, especially to the wife of the heir to the biggest enterprise in the underworld,” he said, his brows furrowing in.

“Well, but they were. I don’t know why. Maybe they really didn’t want to start unnecessary conflicts like they kept saying and because me being the wife of the heir to the biggest enterprise in the underworld was why they most likely made sure I wasn’t harmed.”

Matt didn’t seem convinced. He was looking out the balcony. They had returned to their suite, and Matt had made sure Jessica had showered and had something to eat. Now, they were on the bed, cuddling, as the TV played silently in the background while Jessica tried her best to assure Matt that she was fine, but he didn’t seem convinced. Jessica turned sideways to look at Matt.

“Hey, hey, Matt. I’m absolutely fine.”

“I was so scared, Jessica. It shook me so hard that I can’t stop worrying about anything ever happening to you,” Matt said in a small voice.

“I know you’re worried, but you can’t always be worried about me this way, baby. It’s not good for you,” she said softly.

“I can’t even imagine what you must have felt when they made you sniff chloroform,” he said, his eyes haunted.

“Actually, I don’t remember much of it. The last thing I remember was getting out of the suite to go find you, and then blackness. When I woke up, I was already at the mansion, and the Coretti brothers told me they were the bodyguards assigned to me today, and since I hadn’t seen the new bodyguards, I assumed them to be telling the truth. I didn’t even know I’d have bodyguards here in the first place since we were on a vacation,” Jessica said.

Matt looked guilty, and Jessica felt sorry for him. His intention with the bodyguards had been to ensure her safety, but it had backfired in the worst way. She couldn’t even imagine what Matt must have been feeling. She had initially protested the idea of having a bodyguard, but now, she fully understood why she did need them. She only wished that Matt would be completely open to her about everything, so she didn’t get taken aback when such a situation arose.

“Matt, it’s not your fault. I know you only wanted my safety above everything else. Please don’t blame yourself for what happened,” Jessica said.

“But if I had been even more careful, this wouldn’t have happened,” he said.

“No, it still would have. If the brothers wanted to take me, they would have. You know that.”

Matt was silent.

Jessica continued, “tell you this. We can both compromise. I know now that I do need a bodyguard, and I’m sorry it took so long for me to realize that, but I do now, so I want you to promise me that you will not keep anything from me. We can handle such conflicts better together when I’m fully aware of what’s happening around me and to me. I don’t want to be kept in the dark anymore, Matt. I want to know when you’re assigning me a bodyguard and who it is. I just think it would work better that way.”

Matt thought about this and finally gave her a nod. “I will assign you a new bodyguard, and you will know who it will be, but promise me you will always keep your phone with you. It’s the only way I can track you in case you get kidnapped,

but I will make sure that never happens again. I promise, Jessica.”

Jessica was touched by how sincere Matt’s words were. More than his words, his sincerity showed through his eyes. It was heartwarming to see his vulnerable side. Matt was shaken up so badly that he still couldn’t calm down. Even though Jessica wished none of this had happened, she couldn’t help but feel pleased that Matt cared for her so much—that it was her who had brought out such a vulnerable side of Matt. It made her feel loved, important, and powerful in some ways. She felt that her heart was expanding out of control with love for Matt.

Jessica noticed that Matt was looking at her intently, so she reached out her hand and touched his cheek. He leaned into the touch and closed his eyes. Jessica couldn’t resist him any longer. She closed the distance between them and kissed him on the lips softly. Matt sighed and melted into her kiss. His hand came up to hold her face while Jessica’s hands took hold of his hair and pulled him closer to her.

“I want you,” she whispered into his lips in between kisses. Hearing her say these words, Matt’s body instantly grew harder.

“Oh, Jessica, I want you. I want you so bad,” he said. His arms held her closer to him. She kissed his mouth with a newfound hunger. He smelled so good—he always did. She trailed kisses to his cheeks, then his jawline. Her fingers were tangled in his hair, and Jessica’s mouth traveled to his neck and licked the hot skin at the base of his throat. Matt’s hands traveled down her back and cupped her hips, grinding her to him and making her feel the hardness between his legs.

Jessica didn’t break the kiss as her fingers fumbled with the buttons of his shirt, unbuttoning each one as she went. Matt met her halfway, yanked the shirt from his body, and threw it across the floor, then he hooked his hand under her shirt and took it off as well. The bra came off in a matter of seconds, and they were both topless, groping and kissing each other like their lives depended on it. Matt nuzzled his face between Jessica’s breasts and inhaled her scent. This sent

goosebumps down her spine, and heat pooled at the core. He took one nipple into his mouth and sucked. The other one was cupped in his hand, and he was gently stroking it, almost sending Jessica over the edge. He kissed and licked down her belly until his mouth arrived at her pants, which were still on.

“Take them off,” Jessica told him. Without wasting any time, Matt was doing away with her jeans. Jessica kissed him on the chest. She trailed kisses down his body while unbuckling his belt, and her fingers worked quickly to unbutton and unzip his pants. She pulled his pants down, underwear and all, revealing his bulging erection. Matt was panting, watching her with anticipation. She gently took his cock into her hands, and he sucked in a breath. She started stroking him.

“Oh, Jessica,” he moaned.

Jessica stroked faster, then she gingerly took him in her mouth and sucked.

“Fuck, Jessica, you’re killing me.”

She smiled around him and kept taking him deep into her throat. Matt threw his head back into the pillows, and his hand was fisted in her hair. When she came up for breath, Matt pulled her face to his and kissed her passionately. Jessica sat on top of Matt’s lower belly. Their bed was right under the natural light coming in from the balcony. The sun had hidden itself behind the clouds, giving the weather a cool tone. In that light, Matt looked like he was one of those sexy creatures in a paranormal movie. He was so beautiful that it made Jessica’s heart ache. From her position over him, she could see the tiny freckles on his nose when the light hit it just right. His hair was tousled and messy, her handiwork, and he was looking up at her with eyes like molten ice, swollen lips slightly apart, skin flushed from the heat, and breaths coming in fast successions. Jessica could not contain the swelling in her heart.

“Let me make love to you,” she said, taking his face into her hands and making their foreheads touch. It wasn’t like Jessica to take control in bed like this. With Spencer, it had

always been the same, monotonous, and him doing whatever he wanted, but with Matt, Jessica felt all these new desires that she had never felt before. She loved when he was dominant, but she also wanted to take control. She wanted to experience everything with him, and right now, she wanted nothing more than to worship him, to pleasure him, and to make him feel loved.

Matt's eyes were hazy with desire. He traced his palm over her thighs and reached the center of her legs. Jessica moaned as his fingers touched the moisture there and prodded inside.

"Baby, you are so wet," Matt said as he stroked her in there softly. Jessica couldn't concentrate beyond the place where his fingers touched her. It was difficult to even think. Her knees started to feel weak. Matt searched around the bedside table for a condom.

"It's okay. You don't have to. I want you raw," she said.

"Baby, are you sure?" he asked.

"I'm sure. I trust you," she said.

With that, he took her by the hips and adjusted her over his cock. She felt his tip poking into her core. Adjusting it with her hand, she pressed it into her vagina. Matt slid in without hesitation. She had taken him inside before but not in this position. She gasped at the sudden intrusion. He was even bigger and longer this way, and he hadn't even been buried fully.

"Am I hurting you?" Matt asked her. She shook her head. She wanted this. She slid him in deeper until he was completely inside her, then he started moving. His hands grabbed her hips, guiding her over him until Jessica found her rhythm and moved with him.

"Yes, baby. Oh my God, yes," Matt grunted as he pumped into her. He burrowed his face into her breasts and kept his hands on her hips. The myriad of sensations was overpowering. His hands on her hips digging into her flesh, his mouth on her breasts, and his cock slamming into her were driving her crazy. She felt the muscles in her core start to grow tense as

the pressure built up. Just before she thought she was going to explode, Matt leaned up from the bed, lifted her, and placed her on the bed, reversing their positions. Before Jessica could even comprehend this, she was on her back beneath him. She ran her hands over his back. Matt tensed for a bit but relaxed.

“I want to touch every part of you,” Jessica said between ragged breaths. She kissed his lower lip, and she roamed his body. This was the first time Matt had let her touch him during sex. The thought alone was enough to make her give in. Meanwhile, Matt was thrusting into her harder than ever, building up the torment inside her by leaps and bounds until she could not take it anymore.

“Matt!” she gasped as she felt her insides shatter into a million starry pieces. Matt kept on thrusting for a few more seconds until he met his peak, and his body shuddered as he poured into her.

“Ohh!” he moaned as his body spasmed a few times before they were both still on the bed, breathing hard and bodies sweaty from the intercourse.

“Matt, I love you,” Jessica said, still panting.

Matt was still inside her with his face burrowed inside her hair. He lifted his head to look at her with surprise, then his face broke into the most genuine of smiles, and he said, “I love you too, Jessica. Gosh, I love you so much,” then kissed her.

“Jessica, what do you think about moving in together?” Matt asked when they were snuggled up together in bed. I mean, we are married, and I’d figured we should get a place of our own unless you want to live at my family’s mansion, which is fine by me. Whatever you want.”

Jessica was silent for a moment, thinking this through. It was true that she had been wondering about this for a couple of days now. Everything had happened too fast. Things with Matt had been happening all out of order, but she honestly didn’t mind that. She was in love with the person she had married. She liked to think that she got lucky in life when she found someone like Matt, who loved and treasured her and would do anything for her.

Before the whole wedding sham with Spencer, Jessica and Spencer hadn't officially been living together, even though they did spend a lot of time with each other, mostly at Jessica's place. Jessica still owned her apartment back in Pennsylvania. Spencer also used to live in Pennsylvania, and having been colleagues, he spent a lot of nights at her place. Jessica had assumed they'd move in together after they got married. She had been living there and working full-time as a nurse, but now that she wasn't doing that job anymore, the apartment didn't really have a purpose, which brought her back to what Matt was asking.

"Yes, I would like that very much. I was going to free my apartment back in Pennsylvania anyway," she replied.

"Do you want to go back to Pennsylvania, though?" Matt asked.

"No."

"Are you sure? You don't have to consider anything for me, you know. I could live anywhere as long as you liked it there. It doesn't really matter to me. What matters to me is your happiness, and since you have lived there for some time now, I don't want to uproot you from your life," Matt said.

It was funny, Jessica thought, how she didn't even have a life to uproot in the first place. Until now, she had always felt like she was a ghost, just drifting from place to place. Pennsylvania had never been her home, not really. She had grown up in New Jersey and went to Pennsylvania for work. Since she didn't work for that hospital anymore, there was nothing tying her to that state. She didn't even know if New Jersey was her home. Sure, it was the place she was born in and where her parents still lived today. She visited her parents from time to time when work allowed her, but that was all. Her home was where her heart was, and now it was with Matt.

"No, it's okay. I don't have any ties there anyway. Besides, I don't think I am too enthusiastic about going back to the place where I shared a life of lies with Spencer. My life is with you now, Matt. I want to start over—all new and fresh. Look

for a new job and go wherever it is you're at," she said, looking at him intently. She meant every word she said.

She saw Matt's eyes soften. He took her into his chest and hugged her tightly.

"I love you."

"It would seem so," she replied and felt his smile on her forehead.

"How about we continue what we were doing just a while ago?" she asked with a wink.

The answer to her question was Matt taking her mouth into his back again. They ended up spending the whole day in bed.

OceanofPDF.com

Jessica ended up living at Matt's different places for the next few months. He had apartments and suites all over the US. Since he travelled a lot for business, he kept a place for himself in most of the major states. Jessica went with him, and they made a tour out of it. They were in their honeymoon phase. They couldn't keep their hands off each other. Though Jessica wanted to get back to working as a nurse, it was almost the end of the year and holidays were coming up, so Matt suggested that she wait until the next year to start a new job. In the meantime, they could take some time to themselves, travel, and have a good time. Jessica couldn't agree more. She really needed this reprieve after the rollercoaster that her life had been for the past few weeks.

It was November, and they were currently at California, having arrived there a few days ago. After a lazy morning in bed, Matt was in the shower when Jessica heard her phone ping. It was her mom texting her to tell her to be home for Thanksgiving. "Your father will not admit it, but he's very excited to see you and Matt again. Do come to have dinner with us this year. We miss you, baby girl."

Jessica smiled and shook her head at the phone. She texted back, "I'll talk to Matt and let you know. I miss you guys too. For real."

"Who you texting?" Matt asked, coming to the bedroom wearing a towel.

Jessica gave him a look that suggested she liked what she saw. "Just Mom. She has invited us over for Thanksgiving."

Think you want to go?”

“Yeah, sure,” Matt said.

“But what about your family? Don’t they also want us for Thanksgiving?”

“They probably do, but they’re getting Christmas, so I guess they can do without Thanksgiving.”

Jessica grinned. “Okay then, I’ll let Mom know we’re coming. She said Dad is super excited too.”

Matt places a kiss on the tip of her nose. “I love seeing you get excited about something, but your dad? Excited? That’s going to be interesting.”

“Hey, don’t tease. You know he was only trying to be protective,” Jessica said with mock offense.

Matt chuckled. “I know. If I had a daughter as beautiful as you, I’d be worse.”

“Stop flirting,” she said, lips twisting into a smile.

“You like it,” he said.

Jessica caught one end of the towel and yanked it away.

“Hey!” Matt yelled. “Now, you’ve done it,” he said as he advanced upon her, in all of his male naked glory. Jessica shrieked and tried to scramble away, but he caught her.

The week after, Matt and Jessica were all boarded up on Matt’s private jet. Jacob greeted them from the pilot’s seat.

“Hello, Jacob. Happy Thanksgiving!” Jessica greeted him.

“Happy Thanksgiving, Mrs. Miller and Matt,” he said politely.

“Oh, please. You need to start calling me Jessica already. We meet like every few weeks.”

“You heard her,” Matt said from his seat.

Jacob laughed and agreed. It took six hours for them to reach New Jersey from California. While it had been cold in California, New Jersey was even colder, and it was snowing heavily, delaying their flight by almost an hour. The turbulence

was pretty consistent. Matt held Jessica all through the way even though she assured him she was okay. When they arrived in New Jersey, Mateo was already waiting for them with the Audi. He drove them straight to Jessica's parents' house.

Jessica wore a maroon full-sleeved velvet dress with gold lining. She had on a fur coat on top of that, paired with fur boots.

"Are you ready?" she asked Matt as they stood outside the door. Matt gave her a thumbs up and a smile.

"Okay. Here goes," she said and rang the doorbell.

They were both surprised when it wasn't Margaret, but Jessica's father, David, who opened the door. They were even more pleasantly surprised when he smiled at them.

"Dad!" Jessica exclaimed and gave him a hug right away. He hugged her back, long and tight. "I missed you so much."

"Baby girl, I missed you more," he said and smiled at her, then he looked at Matt, who was reaching out his hand. David shook it and smiled at him too.

"Matt, come in."

They were let in, and they hung their coats on the coat rack.

"Where's Mom?" Jessica asked.

"Oh, she is in the kitchen. She has prepared a feast for us tonight," David replied.

"Does it include her famous recipe for turkey?" Jessica asked dreamily.

"Of course, it does!" came Margaret's voice. Jessica and Matt turned towards the kitchen where an apron-wearing, big-grinned Margaret was just taking off the oven mitts from her hands. The house smelled amazing, and Jessica was taken back to the years of her childhood when this familiar smell was an everyday, common scenario. She suddenly felt a gripping emotion in her chest. She walked over to her mom and hugged her.

“Mom, I missed you so much,” she said into her hair.

“Oh, my dear, so did I,” said Margaret, hugging her back. When they broke the hug, Margaret had unshed tears in her eyes, which she wiped with discretion, but they all could see that she had gotten emotional. Jessica herself was struggling to keep her emotions in check after seeing her parents after so long, which was funny because she had gone for longer periods without visiting her parents, but something about this occasion seemed different. She felt like a grown person now, a woman with her own universe visiting her parents. She shook her head and tried not to get emotional before they even got dinner started.

“How was your flight? Did you get here directly?” Margaret asked.

“Yes,” Jessica answered.

“Oh, then you must be tired! I have prepared Jessica’s room for you guys to stay in. You can go up and freshen up before dinner.”

“Thank you, Margaret,” Matt said politely, and Jessica led him up the stairs to her old room. She opened the door and was struck by how perfectly the room was preserved. Margaret had kept everything as it had been when she had lived here.

“Cute room,” came Matt’s voice.

“Yeah. It’s still the same. Wow.”

Matt walked in and put his wallet and sunglasses on the dresser. He wandered over to the wall, where a bunch of photo frames showed Jessica’s various stages of childhood.

“You were such a cute kid! Chubby even.”

“Hey, don’t make fun of me!” Jessica said laughing. “I was positively fat, though.”

“I think all kids should be all cute and chubby when they’re kids. It just makes them a hell lot cuter,” Matt said. Jessica wandered over to the bed, which held the bedsheet she had loved growing up. It was blue with silver stars. She ran her hands over it and felt nostalgia hit her.

“Do you need a moment?” Matt asked, coming over to her and caressing her head.

“Yeah, I think that would be nice,” said Jessica smiling up at him.

“I’ll use the restroom,” said Matt and left her to her thoughts.

Jessica took in every inch of her room. It was almost as if she was back to those times when this room had been the center of her world. She had always been kind of a lonely kid. Reading by herself in her room had always been a kind of a comfortable thing to do for her rather than being in a socially uncomfortable situation. She also loved painting every once in a while, even if she wasn’t the best at it. She did it to calm her nerves. Her dad had always encouraged her to do anything that allowed a creative output of energy. She thought of those times and smiled. One of the walls held a bunch of her paintings she did as a kid. Her mom had always been adamant about keeping them, even though Jessica had argued several times to throw them out. Now, she was glad she hadn’t.

Having freshened up, they went back downstairs to find the table already set up. Margaret was putting the last few pieces of cutlery beside the dishes.

“Let me help,” offered Jessica.

“Sure, honey. Can you pass me the tissue paper from over the oven?” Margaret said and Jessica complied.

Matt went to the living room, where David was setting up a karaoke machine.

“Karaoke?” he asked.

“Yeah. It’s a little tradition of ours. We take this machine out every Thanksgiving,” David said.

Matt was amused. For him, the idea of karaoke had been limited to Japanese restaurants and in a private room with his college friends, a few drinks, and calamari fries. He never would have imagined it to fit in family dinner at Thanksgiving. It was so different and so refreshing than what he was used to.

“Dinner’s ready!” came Margaret’s voice from the dining room.

“After you,” David said. Matt obliged.

The dining room smelled heavenly, and Jessica couldn’t wait to dig in. Her family was never one to sit around the table and offer prayers before a meal, but today, she felt like she should turn in a prayer of gratitude. She sat next to Matt, across from her mom. David sat on the other side at the head of the table.

“Margaret, you really went to all of this trouble and prepared so many things all on your own,” Matt said.

“It’s nothing for me. I love cooking. Please, start! The turkey is best when it’s fresh out of the oven!” she said, and they all started eating.

Jessica had helped her mom set up the plates, where there was a generous serving of mashed potatoes, sauteed vegetables, and a huge piece of roasted turkey. They ate in silence for several minutes because all of them were so hungry and the food tasted divine.

Matt was having a great time, Jessica noticed.

“Dear God, Margaret, this is the best roasted turkey I have ever had in my whole life.” Matt said in between mouthfuls. Margaret beamed under the praise, whereas she had been treating Matt as the rich businessman he was last time they visited, but tonight, she was treating him like a son-in-law. Jessica was glad for the change.

Dinner went by pleasantly. For the most part, David was silent, but this time he wasn’t spearing Matt with disapproving glances. In fact, he was listening to what Matt had to say intently, and even putting in a few words of his own from time to time. Jessica knew her father, so she understood that he needed at least a few meetings with someone to open up. Matt mostly talked about their travels together, growing up with his family, and a little bit about his business, which Jessica noticed he didn’t dwell into too much. David seemed to really like that Matt was a family man. He had always been one to

believe that a man's first and foremost priority should be his family, so this particular thing about Matt seemed to impress him.

It was after dinner when David really showed a bit of his true self. Jessica's father loved karaoke with the family, and tonight was no different. He brought out some old-school songs, which Jessica had loved singing on that machine growing up. Margaret and David went into full duet mood, and Jessica couldn't help but laugh at the top of her lungs, even Matt was having a really good time. He was paired up with Jessica in the next round to sing a song from the 90s that Jessica had mastered in her teen years. She easily sang it, but Matt made a fool out of himself. Everybody laughed at his silly mistakes, including him. He didn't seem to mind it at all. In fact, to Jessica, it seemed like she had never seen him laugh so heartily and in such an unrestrained way. He always maintained this mature and in-control persona—always the calm and collected businessman, a leader, and a boss—but to be able see such a natural side of him singing at the top his lungs, not caring that he has no idea what the lyrics are, and confidently making mistakes made Jessica's heart warm. After what seemed like hours, they all were too tired to play any more songs. Jessica suggested that they turn in for the night.

Up in her room, Jessica took a warm bath with Matt. There was nothing sexual in the way he gently washed her back and let her wash him. They were comfortable with each other enough to have a non-sexual bath together, Jessica realized, and because they were so tired that night, they cuddled under Jessica's favorite comforter and slept in each other's arms.



JESSICA FELT A COOL FINGER POKE HER NOSE. SHE OPENED HER eyes against the sunlight pouring in through the window. The blinds had been opened, and it was a bright day outside, though the winter chill was setting in. Jessica yawned and squinted at Matt, who was already up and about.

“Wake up, sleepy head.”

“What time is it?”

“8 am.”

“What?” Jessica said, alert. She usually woke up at 6 every morning.

“It’s not even that late, Jessica. It’s cold, and you are back to your childhood home. You deserve to sleep in late.”

“I’ve slept late enough,” she said as she quickly went to the bathroom to brush her teeth. “Where are you going, though?” she asked Matt, who was getting ready as if he planned to go out.

“Your dad’s taking me fishing.”

Jessica poked her head out of the bathroom, mouth full of foam from the toothpaste as she asked, “How did that happen?” Only it sounded something like “hao rid dat aebbun”

“I woke up pretty early, went down to get a drink, and ran into your dad. He offered to take me fishing to the nearby lake. Apparently, there’s a lot of fish in this season, and your mom is packing us breakfast as we speak.”

“Wow.”

Matt kissed her on the cheek and left. Jessica put on a comfortable hoodie and went downstairs to see what her mom was doing. She found her seeing off David and Matt, who were had a big basket and fishing tools inside David’s truck. Matt looked excited to go fishing. Jessica smiled as she waved them bye.

“Come inside. It’s so cold. There’s freshly brewed coffee in the pot,” Margaret said.

“Mom, you didn’t have to do all that alone. You could have just woken me up.”

“And why would I do that? You’re here after so long, and I want you to rest up. Besides, I’m only following my usual morning routine, nothing extra.”

Jessica poured herself a cup of steaming coffee and sat beside her mother on the big living room couch. She was

feeling well-rested after a long time indeed. There was something about being back home and staying a few nights, and, most importantly, not have to worry about some impending work or another. The morning went by lazily. Margaret and Jessica talked about how things were between her and Matt and how she was taking some time off from work to travel with him to his various state mansions.

“Did you decide where you want to get a house?” Margaret asked.

“Not yet. It depends on where I get a job,” Jessica said before taking a sip of her coffee.

“It’s nice to see you finally getting a break. You’ve been working for as long as I can remember. Even before graduating, you always had multiple part-time jobs.”

“Yeah. It’s actually refreshing to not worry about work all the time and be lazy.” Jessica and Margaret both laughed.

At a little before noon, David and Matt came back. True to David’s word, they had a lot of fish. Matt was positively beaming with delight. Apparently, he had caught more than a few fish, and that was something he took great pride in. He and David seemed to be more comfortable around each other. When Matt had gone inside, Jessica quickly took her father to the side.

“Thanks, Dad,” she said.

“Always,” was what he said.

That night, they made barbeque out of the fish the men had caught in the morning. It was another heavenly meal with Margaret’s special barbeque sauce and Jessica’s homemade fruit salad. They put out chairs and a table over the small balcony on the second floor of the house. By the end of the meal, Jessica was feeling like it had been the best decision to come visit her parents. She was glad she had pushed through the lingering uncomfortable feelings from last time and had decided to come here to give them all another chance. Things weren’t completely perfect, and Jessica didn’t expect them to

be either. It was still too soon, but the progress they made over the two nights here was something.

She was even sweeter to Matt in bed that night. They made love to each other, taking the time to drag it out nice and sensual, and then they had fallen asleep in each other's arms, wrapped under her comforter against the cold of the night. Even during her sleep, Jessica had the warmest of smiles on her face, and she suspected that so did Matt.

OceanofPDF.com

The month of December brought about snow and a white winter wonderland. Jessica had always loved the snow, even though there were multiple times she had cursed the cold all through her life. Still, winter was a very wholesome time for her, and it was even more wholesome with Matt. They returned to Matt's family mansion in New York for the Christmas. This year, there was going to be a huge company party at their estate in honor of the CEO, Matt, getting married. Jessica was equal parts nervous and excited. Annabeth had told her that it was going to be a high society-themed party, with elegant dresses, gloves, dance cards, and everything. Jessica had never been to such an event, but she had read about them plenty in those historical romance novels that she loved. She couldn't believe she would be going to a party held in a similar fashion, let alone absorb the fact that it was being thrown in her honor. She told herself she needed to prepare for it in the best possible way. She asked Annabeth to come to the mansion at least a few days before the party, so they could go dress shopping together and Annabeth could help her understand what to do.

While she was on the phone with Annabeth, telling her to try to come early, she heard Matt's amused chuckle. She rolled her eyes. After hanging up, Matt said, "You are very invested in this."

"Of course, I am! I've always dreamt of such a party. It's like a scene from a historical movie," Jessica said with excitement.

“If I had known you love these balls so much, I would have arranged one sooner,” Matt said, tracing his finger down her cheek.

“Don’t worry, the timing is perfect, and I have just enough time to prepare for it. I just hope Annabeth comes earlier than she had planned. I have so much to do!”

Matt laughed at her enthusiasm. “In times like these, I thank the Lord I’m a man.”

“Well, you don’t even know what you’re missing out on,” said Jessica. “All these preparations and the effort we put into it are part of the fun ride.” She grinned at him.

“I grew up around enough women in my life that I understand that, but I’m good. Thanks,” Matt said, laughing.

Annabeth arrived the day after. They still had a few days before the party, so Jessica was grateful that Annabeth was here early. They went to shop for a dress, shoes, and accessories that went with it. The two ladies got a matching set of gloves for themselves and Andrea as well. The little girl was beyond with delight herself. Like her mother, she loved shopping and the whole idea of an elegant party seemed like a dream to her. She demanded that she needs a princess gown and a tiara. Jessica made sure she got everything she wanted. As for Ethan and Noah, they got matching little tuxedos, complete with bow ties and shoes.

“I can’t wait to see them all dressed up. They’ll be so adorable!” Jessica exclaimed.

“I just hope Ethan and Noah can pull it off to the end of the night without spilling food or worse, their vomit into the suits,” said Annabeth wrinkling her nose, then they both broke into laughs. They spend most of the day getting all the shopping done and let the kids play at the indoor park for a bit while they grabbed some food. The kids absolutely loved their new aunt Jessica by now, especially Andrea, because Jessica always vouched for whatever the little girl wanted, and Annabeth eventually had to give in. Ethan and Noah were too young to get these, but nevertheless, they recognized Jessica now and liked being with her.

Everyone around the house also put a great deal of effort into preparing for the Christmas party. It had started snowing, and the whole estate quickly turned into a white winter wonderland. Jessica had thought the mansion being so big and all would feel too cold, but among the flurry of activity happening for days at a stretch, it warmed up the place. Annalyse was always running on her toes, looking after the preparations. There was always something that needed her attention—be it grocery for the menu, cleaning every spot of the mansion until it was spotless, or making the seating arrangements for the guests. Jessica made sure she helped Annalyse as much as she could, but there were some things about a house only the mistress of it living there for many years could know, and Jessica respected that. Still, she stayed available nearby in case she could assist Annalyse with anything.

The lands of the estate were a beautiful white. The small pond had frozen to ice while the benches and the vineyards were all covered with snow, giving it a look of fantasy, like something out of a fairytale. Floral decorations had been made to adorn the benches and the low hanging trees. There were many kinds of fairy lights strewn across the branches and the benches. Food tables had been set up at various spots around the gardens for guests to have refreshments at the ready. A little stage had been set up, where Matt would toast to the party.

Matt had been extremely busy with office work for the past couple of days. Jessica was also occupied with helping Annalyse prepare for the party, but she also missed him. He had to go to the office early in the morning and came back late, tired, by which time usually Jessica was also spent from the day's excursions.

On the day of Christmas, they all gathered together at the table for breakfast. Jessica had gotten gifts for everyone. She had also made sure to get Andrea, Ethan, and Noah things that they would love and packed them into boxes. After they had gone to bed, she and Matt had snuck out and laid them under the Christmas tree with a lot of candy. Jessica waited for the kids to wake up and find the gifts. Ethan and Noah were too

young to get out of bed and find the gifts themselves, but Andrea would be over the moon when she found out what Jessica had gotten her.

A little after 9, a high pitched “Yaaaayyyy” came from the Christmas tree, which told Jessica that Andrea had found her master doll house. Jessica smiled into her coffee. She had taken great care to pick out gifts for her and had paid attention to the little girl’s every demand and wish to know what she could get her. Andrea came running out to the balcony where the adults were having breakfast, followed by her nanny.

“Mommy, look! Santa answered my wish! He gave me a big doll house! Now, I can put all my dolls in here!” Andrea pumped her little fists into the air and jumped around. Her face was one of pure joy, and just seeing her made Jessica feel warmed to the soul. She smiled and saw that Matt was watching her with a look of contentment in his eyes. She grinned at him and said, “That’s amazing, Andrea!”

“Do you know what that means darling?” Annabeth asked.

“What, Mommy?”

“It means that you have been a good girl last year. Will you promise to be a good girl this year too? If you do, then Santa will listen to more of your wishes next Christmas.”

“Yes, Mommy! Yes!” Looking up at the sky, she yelled, “I promise to be a good girl this year also, Santa!”

That earned her a laugh from everyone at the table. The whole Miller family adored little Andrea.

All the necessary things they had ordered for the party arrived within lunch time so that they could get ready right away. Annabeth had ordered fresh flower corsages to arrive just before the event.

Jessica was pleased with her dress. She wanted a Victorian-style one, with elaborate lace designs. The dress was exactly how she wanted it to be, in the most delicate of aquamarine colors. She got ready and got help from a maid to do her hair. When she put on the gloves, she looked like

someone who'd stepped out of a period piece. She even felt that way as she looked at herself in the mirror.

A knock sounded at the door, and Matt's voice came from the outside, "Jessica, may I come in?"

Jessica knew this politeness was more for the maids than for her because Matt knew she wouldn't mind even if he barged in on her naked.

I mean, there's nothing he hadn't seen.

Jessica blushed at the thought and thanked the maids before answering Matt, "Come in."

The door gently opened, and Matt's form appeared at the entrance of the room. If it was possible to fall to the floor and weep, Jessica would do so because that was what she felt when she saw him. His hair was brushed in a sideways, wind-swept style that left one side of his hair so sleek. He was wearing a black tailcoat with a white ruffled shirt underneath. On his neck, he had on a cravat that completed his elegant, Victorian era look. Just the sight of him tugged at her heartstrings so strongly that she felt weak in the knees. Matt seemed to be equally starstruck at the sight of her. His eyes roamed all over body, taking in her elegant hair, the dress, the gloves, and all. He looked to be dumbfounded for a second, just like Jessica was sure she looked staring at him. For a moment, they stood there together until Matt broke the silence.

"You uhh... erm," he cleared his throat, which had suddenly gone dry, "You look beautiful."

"As do you. You are beautiful," she said in a little gasp. Matt slowly walked towards her, and as he did, she could start to smell his cologne, and it made her mind go crazy. Matt had his lips slightly parted as if his breath had quickened a bit as he moved in closer.

Their faces were inches apart now, and she could feel his warm breath on her hair, and it sent shivers of desire down her body. She couldn't describe how the slightest, even the barest contact with this man could have such magnitudinous effects on her. She found her breath quickening as he came closer.

“Jessica-” Matt began, his hand hovering just beside her face. Almost touching but not quite. Jessica felt tormented, teased, and tortured. She couldn’t help but lean into his touch, and the point of contact felt so charged that she almost felt a stinging sensation.

“Matt,” she breathed.

Matt traced his palm from her cheek slightly down at her neck. She instinctively tilted her head sideways to allow better access. He brought his face down on to her neck and took a long sniff and sighed, then he licked the spot, sending literal shivers down her spine.

“You are intoxicating. I can’t stop myself,” he said in a low voice.

“Then don’t stop,” she said, eyes closed and feeling his lips on her neck.

Matt closed his mouth over hers, but the kiss wasn’t demanding or full of wild hunger. Rather, it was deliberate and sensual. It was the elongated foreplay that came before. It was the build-up to a slow burn tale of passion.

“I want you,” he spoke.

“Then take me.”

“We don’t have enough time.”

“I don’t care,” said Jessica and started to unbutton the ties in his pants. She was so mad with desire she couldn’t think straight. It didn’t matter to her right then that they had a party to attend to in a short while. In that moment, all that mattered was Matt and the intense desire to be one with him in every way possible. She wanted to rip all his clothes away. This barrier between them and the difficulty of removing these obstacles only worked to drive them both crazier. Matt hooked his hands her each of her thighs and hauled her up. He backed them up and laid her ass on the top of the vanity. Having secured her there, he descended to come to the same level as what was between her legs. He hooked his finger under the waistband of her underwear, pulled, and teased at it, but never removing the whole thing. That made the torment far worse.

“Matt, please.”

“Shh...” he said and kept on the slow progress. He teasingly inserted one finger into her and took it out, leaving her wanting more.

“Matt—uhhh” she moaned, eyes closed, head falling backwards. Matt’s hand continued his slow and deliberate teasing of her clit while his face came down to the inside of her left thigh. He placed softest kisses and did a bit of licking and sucking on the tender skin there. Slowly, his kisses traveled north. Jessica was so wet she could not stand the burning desire at her core. She whimpered. Finally, Matt’s mouth came close to her clit, and he placed deliberate sensual kisses around it.

“Matt, please. I beg you,” she pleaded, but he wasn’t being kind. He continued the torture for an agonizing number of seconds before his own erection grew too hard to be ignored any longer. Suddenly, in a flurry of motion, he stood up from his kneeling position between her legs. His hands undid the rest of his pants, revealing his ready erection for her, and before Jessica could utter another word of plea, he had placed himself in between her legs. Her panty was still on, but Matt was holding it to the side with his hand. This created a scratching sensation around her private parts which intensified her desire even further. She was so wet that his cock slid right in easily, all the way to the core of her being. She gasped at the sudden mass that was now inside her, but the moment was replaced with a growing need for friction. Matt was also beyond any sort of control now because he had stopped with the teasing and was ready to get rough now. He slammed into her with enough force that it shook the vanity, on which he had placed her. Jessica cried out his name and various blasphemy but urged him to go harder and faster. They were so turned on and so ready for each other that it didn’t take long for them to come in one of the most intense orgasms either of them had experience before.

“Fuck, Jessica,” he said as he shuddered and poured all of him into her. Jessica’s orgasm sent her toes curling and her thighs latching on his ass for dear life. Her nails dug into his

hair, and she lived her moments of ecstasy. He pumped in a few more times before they stopped moving and panted into each other. It felt like their breaths had become one, that they had become one.

“Holy shit,” Jessica said, and after a few more seconds, they both stood up and hurriedly retrieved their underwear.

“Your cheeks are flushed. I love that I put that color on you,” Matt said after he had put back his pants. Jessica blushed. She quickly went to the toilet to clean up. Matt noticed that her flower corsage had come loose and fell to the floor. He picked it up, and when Jessica came back out, tied it to her wrist. Within ten minutes, they were all ready and put together to go to the party, utterly sated and relaxed.

The guests had all arrived and were gathered at the central hall. Matt held out his hand, and Jessica took it as they made their entrance over the top of the central stairs. Jessica’s eyes adjusted to the crowd in the room, and it was a little bit humbling. The whole company had been invited to this dinner, and Jessica heard from Matt that almost everyone had come. This event was something they did every year or once in two years as a means of bridging between the employee-employer relation. Matt’s friends and acquaintances were also invited. The central hall was washed in the golden light of the chandelier, and everyone was dressed in elegant Victorian era clothing. The guests had received the option of masks that they could wear if they liked. Most of the people chose to wear the masks, and so, it looked like a themed party from the 1800s. Waiters were among the crowd, carrying trays of wine goblets, lemonades, nuts, and a few other light snacks. People were socializing with one another, and the masquerade aspect of the dinner made it even more thrilling.

Upon the arrival of the host couple, everyone hushed their conversations as they looked over the stairs, where Jessica and Matt had appeared. Matt led her to the front of the stairs, where a mic had been placed for him to address his guests. He came to stand in front of it, and with Jessica at his arm, he took the mic and said, “Welcome, everybody, to my yearly company party. This year, we are here together to celebrate a

special occasion, which is my wedding to this beautiful young lady here, who is the love of my life.” He kissed Jessica on the cheek, which sent the crowd sighing and swooning. A lot of ahh’s and aww’s could be heard from the crowd.

“Thank you for coming here on our special celebration. That is also why, this year, we have a historical masquerade theme. I am extremely glad to see that you all have put so much effort into keeping in alignment with that theme. You all make a beautiful scene. If I were a painter, I should have liked to paint this moment.” This sent more cheers from the crowd. A waiter came in with a tray carrying two champagne glasses. Matt took one and passed another to Jessica.

“So, I raise this toast,” Matt said, raising the glass high into the air for everyone below to see. “To honor new beginnings and a long and wedded life.” Looking at Jessica, he continued, “I toast this to the amazing life that I hope you would be kind enough to grant me with your presence,” And the crowd cheered even louder. Jessica had thought that was the end of it, but Matt wanted to finish with a little more. “And I toast this to the amazing people I am blessed to work with and for more success and prosperity in the future.” With that, he finished his speech and took a big sip from his champagne. Jessica followed and so did the whole crowd.

The evening went by smoothly. Matt introduced Jessica to a lot of his business partners, trusted employees, acquaintances, and friends. It flew by in a flurry of socializing, smiling, and making small talk with people. On another day, Jessica would have felt exhausted in such a big social gathering, but tonight, she felt loved and appreciated. Every one of Matt’s company’s people were genuinely happy for him and were kind towards Jessica. Some of them even referred to her as “Ma’am,” which she instantly corrected. Annabeth and her husband, Carlisle, danced to a few songs until someone teased them for being a couple in their honeymoon phase and asked for a dance with Annabeth. She blushed deeply but accepted and that got a big laugh out of the people surrounding this scene. Even little Andrea was having the time of her life in her princess ball gown and tiara. She was dancing with one person and then another tirelessly. If she had a dance card, it

would be full of letters on both sides and maybe even down her hand. Ethan and Noah were in their trolley going around meeting and greeting people. Jessica was impressed at how calm and collected the babies were, which told her they had probably been to many of such functions since they were born, which made them immune to them.

After the dance, everyone was invited outside for the refreshments and dinner. There was a number of tables set up and a long buffet table that held the dinner for the night. The dishes were uncountable, and since it was a buffet-style dinner, everyone could pick and choose what they wanted to eat. It had grown dark outside, so they turned on the fairy lights and lamps placed at regular distances beside the tables. The light was enough to see perfectly but also ambient enough to make the scene very aesthetic.

Jessica realized that after a series of socializing and meeting new people, she was starving. Matt was engrossed into a conversation with one of his business partners, so she excused herself to get a plate of food. She spotted Annalyse in a nearby corner and smiled at her. Annalyse smiled back and signaled for her to sit by her side. Jessica got some items she wanted to eat, took a glass of water, and went to sit by her.

Her mother-in-law was sitting in the middle of a flock of middle-aged women. Jessica guessed this was the group of friends that she always spent a lot of time with. Annalyse motioned for everyone to pay attention and said, "Girls, meet my daughter-in-law. Isn't she the sweetest thing? My son has good eyes," Annalyse beamed. The compliment felt so genuine that Jessica wasn't sure what to say to portray her real feelings. She said thank you several times to all the ladies who agreed to Annalyse's words, then she dug into the food and almost let out a loud moan, it was so good.

"My God, Annalyse, this food is heavenly," she said to her mother-in-law.

"You're right. I will have to send the cook a special thanks tomorrow," she said, and they ate.



BY THE TIME MATT HAD FINISHED TALKING TO ONE OF HIS business partners, Jessica had already found a seat beside his mother and was happily chatting with her as they both ate. Having her out of his sight for even just a second, made Matt uncomfortable. Spending the last few days with working long hours late into the night had been very tough on him. He hated being away from Jessica for too long and not being able to know what she was doing or if she was completely safe. Ever since her kidnapping by the Coretti brothers, he had always been on edge. He tried to keep it as discrete as possible. Plus, keeping a careful eye on her was not an unpleasant thing because Jessica was breathtakingly beautiful. He would never understand why she didn't also feel that way. For Matt, no one even came close to what Jessica held over him.

He made his way over to the table, where Jessica was sitting beside Annalyse and her bunch of friends. When Jessica noticed him coming, the light in her eyes shone brighter. It warmed Matt's heart. Never had he imagined to be able to have such a sweet love with anyone else. After Bella, he had completely ruled out the possibility of ever falling in love ever again, but now, he felt extremely fortunate to have found that kind of a love with Jessica. He was even more pleased and grateful to see that Jessica was also fully committed in it. He went to sit down beside her and signaled for one of the waiters to bring him a plate of food.

"I was missing you already," Jessica said, eating a piece of sushi.

"Already, huh?" he said with a smirk. "Want to take a break from the party, dear wife?" he asked.

Jessica gave him a grin and said, "Very tempting indeed, but tonight is about everyone here. I should like to stay present and witness it all."

Matt smiled at her. This is what he loved about Jessica, the fact that she was never narrow-sighted or selfish. She always

knew how to see the entirety of things. This gave her the ability to be considerate of the situation and the people around her. She was amazing, and Matt couldn't comprehend how lucky he had gotten in life.

The rest of the Christmas dinner went by smoothly. People stayed long after dinner was over, and they drank and socialized. After seeing off the last guest, Matt and Jessica turned in for the night, tired to the bone. They slept soundly for the whole night, wrapped tightly in each other's arms.

OceanofPDF.com

Jessica felt Matt get up from his side of the bed and head into the bathroom. She could hear the shower running faintly and wanted to get up, but she was so tired she just couldn't get herself to get out of bed, so she slept in. The days after the Christmas dinner went by in a haze, and soon, it was New Year's Eve. The shower turned off, and within several minutes, Matt was out, wearing a towel.

"Why do you have to work even on New Year's Eve?" Jessica muttered groggily. She still had her eyes closed and her back was turned toward Matt.

"I have to wrap up a few things before the New Year, baby. I think I will be back just after lunch, and then we have the rest of the day together," Matt said. Jessica could tell that he wasn't the biggest fan of leaving her alone on New Year's Eve either, but he had no choice.

Getting ready for office, Matt left Jessica with a kiss to her forehead, and she slept in late for a couple more hours. She was feeling unusually fatigued this morning. The maid had come to wake her up, but she had asked them not to interrupt her this morning as she came down with a headache. A little after 9 am, Jessica couldn't stay in bed any longer. She felt a sudden nausea building in her stomach and bile rising up her throat, so she held her hand to her mouth and ran straight to the toilet. She barely made it there before she emptied the entirety of her dinner from the previous night into the bowl. Even after emptying her stomach, she kept hurling. After washing up and brushing her teeth, she came back to the room

and slumped into the bed, completely exhausted. She checked her forehead for any signs of fever and found out her temperature was just fine, but her forehead was all clammy, and she had the distant feeling that her pressure had fallen pretty low. Concerned for her health, she called for the maid to bring her some breakfast into bed.

After a small breakfast of eggs and toast and orange juice, she felt a little better. She didn't feel like eating the bacon for some reason. She was concerned because it was very unusual for her pressure to fall lower than normal. She only had low pressure very rarely during her menstruation sometimes, but other than that, she never faced problems in that department. Jessica called her doctor and got an appointment the very noon.

At the hospital, the doctor took her blood for conducting a few tests. By the time Matt said he'd be back, Jessica had come back home from the hospital and feeling a lot better. As promised, he made it home just after lunch time, and they spent the rest of the day together. They went out in the evening and spent their first New Year's Eve together in New York City. Matt had taken her out to an expensive restaurant, and she had been reminded of the first time they went out to eat and how the place had been so extravagant and expensive. She had remembered how she had told him that she would be fine in a burger joint as well, as long as the food and company was good.

"What are you smiling about?" Matt asked while they were having dessert.

"Oh, nothing. Just thinking about the first time we ate out together. Seems like a lifetime ago," said Jessica.

Matt chuckled. "Yeah, you were disapproving that day."

"I wasn't disapproving." Jessica laughed, sticking out her tongue, but she was feeling a little emotional too. A lifetime of things had indeed changed since then.

After dinner, they decided to randomly walk the streets of New York until the countdown. There were people everywhere. The city was more crowded than ever in New

Year's Eve, and Jessica found that beautiful. When the countdown happened, they were at a random street. Matt was initially worried that they weren't in any touristy spot or anywhere special when the countdown happened and asked if Jessica wanted to drive somewhere quick, but Jessica had held on to his hand and said, "It doesn't matter. I love this moment with you here. I don't care where we are," then kissed him. The countdown had ended, and the whole sky had lit up with fireworks as they had kissed each other.

They had come home pretty soon after because Jessica had wanted nothing more than to just be close to Matt. Matt had made sweet love to her that night and they had had a wonderful beginning to a new year in their lives. Their first year together as a married couple, madly in love with each other.

A few days after that, Jessica was browsing through some of the hospital applications she had prepared so she could start applying for work. Matt had gone to work, and she was sipping some coffee after having breakfast on the balcony. Her phone rang, and it was her doctor.

"Hello?" Jessica said.

"Hello, Mrs. Miller. I have your test results from when you came in the other day," came the voice of her doctor from the other end of the line.

Jessica sat up straight. She had been anticipating this call. The sudden incident of her getting low pressure had bothered her.

"Should I be worried doctor?" she asked.

"Absolutely not. If anything, you can be excited. I just received your test results, and the reports say you are perfectly healthy, and so is your baby, Mrs. Miller. You are five weeks pregnant," said the doctor.

Jessica didn't know if she had heard her right. "I'm... pregnant? What?"

"Yes, Mrs. Miller. Congratulations!" The doctor assured her that her symptoms are normal for a pregnant woman and

that she need not worry about her blood pressure because it was normal to fluctuate during pregnancy. After she hung up the phone, Jessica sat on the couch, absorbing what she had just heard.

I am pregnant... We are pregnant... Oh my God.

She felt a sudden rush of excitement and fright at the same time. So many thoughts raced into her head all at once.

How do I tell Matt? Will he be happy about the idea of being a father?

They hadn't exactly talked about kids. It was still pretty soon after their wedding, and Jessica didn't want to rush him into anything. She had always wanted kids though. It had always been on the plan to someday get married and have a family of her own. She just didn't know that life would present her the opportunity so soon and in such an unexpected way. Then again, these things seldom happened as planned. An hour later, she got her test results compiled in a file that the doctor express mailed her.

Holding the pregnancy positive results in her hand, Jessica finally let the tears take over her eyes. She couldn't believe she was going to have a baby! She was already getting so emotional, and she hadn't even known this for even half a day. She decided to tell Matt right away after he got home that day.

Jessica wasn't dramatic in any way when she broke the news to Matt. She had all the feelings of a person who couldn't tell him the news soon enough. She was raw in her reaction of awe and nervousness about the baby. Matt had been struck dumb, and for a few tantalizingly slow seconds, Jessica's heart feared that maybe Matt didn't want for this to happen. Maybe he was disappointed that they're pregnant so soon and that tell her that he doesn't want the baby, but soon, his face broke into a huge smile, and Jessica noticed there were pools of tears at the corner of his eyes. She had felt foolish for fearing anything else from him. This was her Matt, the guy who loved and valued his family over anything. Watching his reaction, she had finally broken down into a messy ball of tears and sobs. Matt hugged her and told her he

loved her and that she was going to make him the luckiest man alive.

OceanofPDF.com

Two weeks later, Matt and Jessica were visiting her parents' house again. Jessica had wanted to meet them face to face when she broke the news of pregnancy. She was a bit worried about how they will take it. They were just beginning to come to terms with Jessica's sudden and unexpected wedding to Matt. Things between them were still kind of rough, and Jessica was worried that this sudden pregnancy news would disrupt the progress they had made. Understandably, her parents, specifically her dad, might think she was going too fast or that she was being coerced into these decisions without her full intention.

Jessica and Matt arrived at her mother's place. Before entering, Matt had squeezed her hand, silently giving her strength.

"If the need arises, I will make sure they know that you are a daughter to be proud of. If they can't see that, then that's their loss. I love you."

After dinner, when they were sipping a hot cup of tea and lounging in their living room, was when Jessica thought was the time.

"Okay, Mom, Dad, we want to share news with you guys," Jessica began.

She saw their faces go from confusion to anticipation.

"I know this is very sudden, but... I am pregnant."

Margaret instantly stood up from her couch. "Oh my God, my baby!" she said before she ran toward Jessica and gave her

a motherly hug. David, though, was sitting on the couch with his brows high. Wonder and concern battled to take over his expressions, but when Margaret had let go of Jessica, David was already behind her, tugging them in for another hug.

“Matt. Could you mind giving us a minute? I need to talk to my daughter privately.”

“Of course.”

After Matt left the room, they sat her down on the couch.

“Honey, are you alright?” Margaret asked.

“Yes, Mom. I’m doing okay.”

They were silent for a bit.

“I hope you don’t take this as anything less than joy because trust me we are so overjoyed at the news! But I am your father, and I can’t help feeling concerned for my little baby girl. Are you happy? Do you feel rushed into anything? Is everything going too fast?” David asked.

“I understand, Dad, but no. Things are just perfect. All my life I’ve never felt so genuinely loved, Dad—so accepted for who I am and so treasured. I know the situation of our marriage was unusual, but can’t we get past that? Because now I know that it was the best thing in my life, and so is this pregnancy. You know I’ve always eventually wanted a family, and I think you would love it if you got to know Matt better. He’s such a good guy, and it only takes a little bit of knowing him to learn that. I know he will be the best father to our kids. I can already see him in the way he is with his nephews and nieces. The only thing that scares me, Dad, is how terribly happy I am. I am so happy that I want to cry. I love him so much,” Jessica said, tears running down her cheeks.

She looked up to find both her parents crying as well.

“We are with you, you know that? If you say you’re happy than there is nothing else we want.”

They hugged each other for a long time. Finally, Margaret wiped her tears, and they went back outside. Matt was waiting in the hallway, pacing back and forth. It was clear that he was

nervous about what was happening inside. David walked over to Matt, hugged him, and congratulated him. It was such a one father to another father-to-be moment that Matt was pleasantly surprised. In the end, they all were happy, and Jessica felt like she was the luckiest girl in the world.

OceanofPDF.com

EPILOGUE

Jessica had never liked Valentine's Day. It was not really that different now that she was with Matt. However, when she woke up on the morning of February the 14th, she found flowers at the bedside table and an apron-and-toque-wearing Matt carrying in a tray of breakfast.

"Rise and shine!" he said cheerfully and placed the tray on the bed. Jessica sat up against the headboard and said, "Good mor-" but couldn't finish saying it because she grabbed her mouth and ran to the toilet. She had been having a bad case of morning sickness. She heaved inside the toilet with Matt holding her hair back and brushed her teeth before finally coming to bed to have the breakfast Matt prepared for her. He had made an English breakfast, complete with eggs—sunny side up, just how she liked it—a hash brown, and toast with marmalade.

"This looks divine," she said and kissed Matt on the cheek. Matt helped her eat some of the breakfast, but eventually she started to feel uncomfortable again, so she left the rest uneaten. She looked guilty that she couldn't finish the meal Matt had taken the effort to prepare.

"It's okay, love. You don't have to force to eat when you feel nauseous," Matt said.

"I'm hungry, though," Jessica muttered.

"Tell me what you're craving, and I'll prepare it for you. Or have the cook do it."

"You," she said, licking her lips.

Matt raised an eyebrow, and his lips perked up in a smirk. He looked extremely sexy in the mild morning light, with his apron and his toque, like he had just stepped out of Ratatouille. Jessica had been craving sex a lot too, and Matt couldn't say he wasn't thrilled about that. He had made sure he was always accommodating to every one of her sexual desires, and Jessica was more than happy for it.

"I want you. I want to devour you," she said, not even bothering to foreplay. She took off her oversized sweatshirt and threw it across the floor. She wasn't wearing a bra underneath because her breasts were sore these days and had started to swell. Matt eyes glazed over when he took her in.

"You are so glorious when you are with my baby," he said softly, his breath escaping in a rush. He came closer to her, dropping his apron in the way. He threw off his shirt as well and crashed his mouth against hers in an all-devouring kiss. They fell into the bed together, and Matt gently caressed her breasts. Her sore breasts loved that sensation, soothing yet firing her up at the same time. Pretty soon, both of their pants came off, and their naked bodies were entangled with each other as they kissed passionately. Matt was about to come on top of her when she broke off the kiss.

"Wait," she said into his mouth.

"Why? I want you right now," Matt said trying to continue the kiss.

"No, wait. I want to do something," Jessica said and got up from the bed. Matt was lying on his back, erection on full display as Jessica walked over to the wardrobe in the closet and rummaged through one of the drawers. She came back with one of Matt's belts. Seeing the belt, Matt gave her an amused smile.

"I love that you're so kinky right now," he said and made as if to get up and tie her to the bed when she surprised him again.

"Not me. You," she said and pushed his chest back. Matt's eyes widened further as she came up to the bed, took his, and hesitated, as if asking permission if she could do it.

Matt nodded, and Jessica's eyes gleamed wickedly. She tied his hands together at the top of the headboard using his belt. Matt was watching her intently, her every single move sending a thrill down to his cock. Jessica stepped back to appreciate the view. Under the soft morning light, Matt completely naked, hands tied back to the bed with his own belt. His chest heaving from his quickened breath, lips slightly parted, messy hair falling over his forehead, skin flushed from desire, and his erection making it perfectly clear how much he wanted her. He was glorious. He was magnificent like a Greek god. Jessica felt not only her vagina but other parts of her clenching at the sight of him. Most importantly, her heart. She wanted to rip into him but also tenderly hold him close to her heart at the same time. She decided to go for the former and save the latter for later.

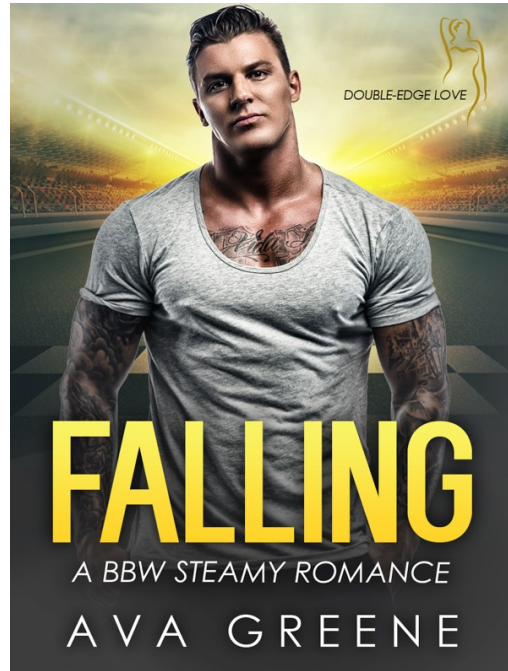
“Fuck, baby,” she said and descended upon him, starting with his mouth. They both melted into the kiss. Having Matt tied back made her feel even more desire. She had this power over this man, and all she wanted was to make him feel loved. She pressed her sore breasts to his mouth, and Matt licked and suckled at each one with passion. Jessica put her head back and moaned.

“Ohh... this feels so good, baby,” Jessica moaned. “Now, let me do whatever I want with you.”

She kissed and licked him down his neck, his chest, his abdomen, and to his bulging need for her. Matt grunted and moaned as she took him in her mouth and feasted.

“Oh my God, Jessica! I'm going to lose it,” Matt said, and lose it he did, but he was hard in just few seconds again when she impaled herself on him and rode him like her life depended on it. Rode him almost to the point of mind-boggling roughness. Yes, she was hungry indeed, and this Valentine's Day, she was having a whole buffet all to herself.

To be the first to know about upcoming releases, consider signing up to my newsletter. As a bonus, you get a free copy of my EXCLUSIVE standalone romance, Falling, plus lots of exciting content shared only to subscribers.



OceanofPDF.com

BOOKS BY AVA GREENE

[My Favorite Boss](#) (standalone office romance)

[Billionaire Boss Series](#) (office romance)

[Harbor Series](#) (medical romance)

[The Privileged Series](#) (billionaire romance)

[Double-edge Love Series](#) (bad boy romance)

[Doctor is IN Series](#) (medical romance)

[Evergreen Hotel Romance](#) (romance short stories)

OceanofPDF.com

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ava Greene is an emerging author of contemporary romance. She loves writing stories about billionaires, sexy doctors, bad boys and anything in between!

When she's not writing she spends her time in Maryland with her husband, their four children and their furry cat.

For more books and updates:

www.authoravagreene.com/subscribe



OceanofPDF.com