



BOSSSED

Around

LAURA OLSEN

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Laura Olsen

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The following story contains mature themes, strong language and explicit scenes, and is intended for mature audiences.

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Chapter One

Olivia

I lifted my head to take in the full reach of the Bennett Industries tower, a gleaming seventy-story ziggurat of steel and glass.

The air cut through my cheeks as I pushed through the revolving glass doors, ready to start my first day working for one of the largest circuit manufacturers in the world.

Expensive cologne and polished marble floors greeted me as I walked through the minimalist lobby, making my way through with a confidence I was trying desperately to actually feel. The receptionist eyed me with an intensity that made me question whether I belonged.

“Hi. Today’s my first day.” I smoothed my pencil skirt and shifted on my heels, feeling more like a girl playing dress-up in her mother’s pumps than an executive assistant for the CEO, Alexander Bennett.

Amid the floor-to-ceiling windows, sleek modernist furniture, and a water feature that could rival the Trevi Fountain, stone-faced figures in designer suits streamed by. An assembly line of key cards tapped open the electronic gates.

“And you are...?” The blonde woman at the reception desk, in a crisp white collared shirt, looked up at me, then back at her ledger.

“She’s my new one, Sylvia.” I heard the deep, gravelly voice before I saw who had spoken. His eyes locked onto mine as he walked effortlessly, his broad arms filling his charcoal gray suit perfectly.

The receptionist’s demeanor immediately changed. She stiffened her posture and touched her hand to her hair.

“Thank you, Mr. Bennett.” She turned back to me, lips pursed. “Welcome to Bennett Industries, Miss...”

I could barely remember my name while looking at him, much less speak it.

“Olivia Finnigan. She’s my new executive assistant. Olivia, come with me. We’ll get you your pass later.”

I nodded and walked behind him, as if pulled on a string, my legs practically shaking in his commanding presence. I had done my research, but even the gushing tabloid captions didn’t do justice to how handsome the ‘hot 38-year-old tech CEO bachelor,’ as they called him, was in person.

“How was getting to the office this morning?” He slowed his pace and waved me forward with his arm so I could walk closer to him, and the enveloping smokiness of his cologne engulfed me.

Even just barely touching me, his hand sent out an instantaneous spark of attraction that electrified the air between us. I swallowed hard, trying to hide how defenseless I was to his magnetism.

“It was good. Thank you.” I looked down, afraid that I’d trip on the marble floor if I keep eye contact. It’s difficult to

voluntarily look away from those eyes, though. “I took the subway.”

I wasn’t usually attracted to older men, but the power and authority he projected sent a heat through my stomach.

He led me into the elevator reserved just for him as the chief executive. The attraction that had smoldered before was roaring into a conflagration. It took every ounce of discipline to resist the pull to draw closer.

“This is us. Sixty-fifth floor.” With the ding of the elevator, rows of employees turned their heads to see who the boss had with him.

A chorus of ‘good morning’ echoed as he glided through the halls.

“Olivia, this will be your desk, in the office right outside of mine. I keep the door open throughout the day. But you can sit later. Follow me into my office and we’ll talk there.”

I nodded, following him into the expansive room filled with natural light, dark wood furnishings, and a breathtaking view of the city. He took his place behind the massive desk, his presence still commanding the entire room.

“Thank you, Mr. Bennett.” My voice quavered slightly. I wondered how I would maintain my composure all day just feet away. “Where should I start?”

“First thing—and it’s very important—call me Alexander.” His serious expression broke into a smile. “Here are some basic forms I need you to look over at some point. But right now, this is what I need you to take a look at. As you can

imagine, there's a huge backlog." He gently tossed a granite-black folder over to me.

"Of course." I opened the folder slightly, feeling the texture of the expensive paper.

"We'll be meeting with the marketing team to discuss our new product launch strategy. You can go over the materials in the executive conference room over there." He pointed to an all-glass room with a long oak table. "I'll join you shortly."

I clutched the folder tightly and walked over to the adjoining conference room, highly aware of my body in my pencil skirt. I could see from the reflection in the glass windows that his eyes followed me in sync as I walked. The view outside of the windows, as majestic as it was, paled in comparison to the image of this man poring over my body like one more asset in his empire.

As I opened the folder and skimmed through the pages, I tried to forget the jolt of Alexander's hypnotic stare, but it dominated every other thought.

"Olivia, I'd like you to meet a few of your colleagues." I snapped the folder shut as Alexander entered the conference room, as if the thoughts of him dashing through my mind were actually printed on the pages. A trail of other employees, dressed in intimidating black ensembles, poured in and took their seats. And Alexander took his next to mine.

I stood, and he gestured for me to sit.

"Everyone, I'd like to welcome Olivia to her first marketing meeting." A round of light applause and big smiles

surrounded me, clearly a reflection of their confidence in their boss.

“It’s nice to meet you. I’m Olivia. But I guess you knew that already.”

“We’ll go around the table.” Alexander gestured toward a tall woman with striking features and dark brown eyes.

“I’m Sophia, Chief Product Officer. If you ever need any guidance or help, don’t hesitate to ask.”

“Thank you, Sophia. I appreciate it.” I smiled and tilted my head in her direction.

“I’m Ethan, Senior Accounting Manager.” Warmth radiated from him, and I got the impression that he was the kind of person who would do anything for a friend. I hoped to become one of them right then and there. “Welcome to Bennett Industries. We’re glad to have you on board.”

“Thanks, Ethan.” His welcoming demeanor instantly put me at ease and even helped distract me for a few minutes from my attraction to my boss, still intensifying by the minute.

The rest of the faces were a blur, and I knew it would take me at least a week to learn them all. I was amazed, though, by Alexander’s effortless recall of the thirty employees gathered around the table.

Throughout the meeting, I watched as Alexander expertly steered the conversation, eliciting input from various team members while unabashedly critiquing and refining their ideas. Even when pulling an idea apart, he made it seem like a compliment. The room crackled with energy, each person striving to impress the formidable CEO.

I couldn't help but steal glances at him as he spoke. It took all my willpower not to reach out and trace the curve of his jaw or the strong line of his neck.

"Olivia, did you get that in your notes?" Alexander's piercing gaze drilled through me.

"Oh. Which part?" I tried to recover myself after losing my train of thought in his jawline and cheekbones.

"The part about a targeted approach for specific demographics. To ensure a greater return on investment."

"Oh. Yes. I got that part already." A different kind of flame shot through his eyes, and I got my first taste of how exacting a boss he'd be. I didn't know how I'd avoid making mistakes when he was the one pulling the reins.

Despite every effort to focus, my mind persistently wandered back to Alexander. The captivating blend of power, intelligence, and charm made him irresistible.

The day passed quickly whenever I was in his presence, and it crawled when I wasn't. I was pinned between the compulsive thoughts of what I might want him to do to me on that desk and my drive to impress him with the quality of my work. That's why I was there, after all.

Toward the end of the day, my heart raced as I stood beside Alexander, feeling myself subjected to his probing eye, not just my financial reports. His brow furrowed.

"Olivia, these projections don't take into account the recent market fluctuations." His voice was distant. Detached.

"I'm sorry, Alexander. I'll revise them immediately." I sensed the weight of his expectations. I was determined not to

disappoint him again.

“See that you do.” He shot the documents into my hand without a look. “The board needs accurate figures, not mistakes.”

The brief contact with his hand sent electricity through me, despite his scorn. As I returned to my desk, I couldn't help but watch Alexander from the corner of my eye. I watched as he leaned back in his chair, absentmindedly stroking his jawline.

“Earth to Olivia.” Ethan's gentle teasing snapped me out of my reverie. “You've been staring for the past five minutes.”

“Sorry, I was just... thinking about work.” I immediately averted my eyes back to my papers.

“Uh-huh. Sure.” He gave a knowing smile before heading off to a meeting.

Chapter Two

Olivia

I quickly learned that the tough assessment of my financial reports on the first day was a first-day grace period, a gentle reprieve from his unforgiving standards.

That was him being kind. In the four days that followed, the only thing that intensified as rapidly as my attraction to him was my intimidation. And fear.

“He’s going to fucking have my head for this,” I told Mia, my best friend, as I darted through the lobby and into a closing elevator.

“He can’t be that uptight,” she scoffed, and I could see her rolling her eyes. I met Mia in college, and we quickly became inseparable, rooming together three of the four years and never losing touch after we graduated. She was my support system, but right now, she didn’t get how grueling Alexander could be.

“You have no idea.” The elevator dinged on my floor, and I let out a soft groan. “I’ve got to go.”

“Good luck.” She blew an air kiss through the phone and hung up as I dashed down the hall. Just before I came up to the conference room, I slowed and quickly smoothed out my outfit and hair.

Alexander stood at the head of the table, his piercing eyes fixated on me. His tailored suit clung to his muscular form,

emphasizing the power that radiated from every inch of him. The scent of his cologne filled the room, both captivating and invigorating.

“Olivia, you’re late.” He looked at me coldly, his expression withering. I was learning he didn’t believe in bothering with pleasantries.

“It’s 9:05, I’m sorry. The trains were stuck right outside the station.”

I was still trying to catch my breath from running from the station. At least my cheeks were already red, so it would be less evident if he started whipping up my anger.

“Excuses won’t get you far here.” He narrowed his eyes with an expression that reminded me of a cobra about to strike. “Now, let’s go over your latest productivity reports.”

I took a deep breath, steadying myself as I watched him flip through the pages of the document I had stayed late trying to perfect. That was another reason I was ‘late’—although I’ve never worked for anyone who considered five minutes to be truly late. I could practically feel his gaze burning through me.

“Your numbers are off.” He tapped his fingers against the paper in front of him, then at his temples. “You need to reevaluate your calculations.”

“Are you sure?” My voice quivered, and my throat tightened. “I double-checked everything before submitting it.”

“Triple-check next time,” he snapped, his voice dripping with condescension. “This isn’t amateur hour, Olivia.”

My cheeks flushed, but I refused to let him break me. I clenched my fists beneath the table to steady myself, channeling anger into determination.

“Fine. I’ll revise it.”

He waved his hand for me to leave like a cocker spaniel he had no further use for. Just minutes ago, when I got in, I daydreamed about stroking his cheek and kissing those lips. Now, I just wanted to smack them.

“Is there anything else?” I kept my voice steady despite the turmoil raging within me.

“Actually, yes.” He leaned back in his chair, crossing his arms over his chest. “You’re going to be working directly with me on this project. I expect you to keep up. Don’t drag us down this time. I can only accept so many more errors.”

“Of course.”

The images that flooded my mind at the thought of working closely with him, me leaning over his desk to offer him my cleavage, him hovering the seam of his pants in my face and tempting me to draw his bulge in my mouth, his finger sneaking under my skirt and tracing a line to my clit, were instantly met with a sense of dread at knowing he’d be more likely to fire me than fuck me.

“Good.” His gaze lingered on me, and I couldn’t tell if the fire in his eyes was anger or something more primal. Then, he dismissed me again with a scornful nod.

I felt the weight of his stare on my back, as if he were testing me, daring me to defy him. But I was ready for the challenge. Alexander may have been demanding and ruthless, but I

would not let him push me around. Instead, I would rise to meet him head-on, fueled by the explosive tension between us.

Let the games begin.

The next morning, I strode into the conference room. Alexander's tall frame towered over the sleek glass table, covered with stacks of reports and documents. I saw him looking at the clock on the wall.

That's right. 8:55. Take that, fucker.

My pulse raced as I prepared for the high-stakes meeting ahead. He felt less like a boss and more like a rival, one I intended to outshine.

"Morning." I kept my voice steady despite the heat that flooded my veins whenever he was near.

"Olivia." There was a challenge in his gaze, daring me to defy him. As the meeting participants sat down, a chill took hold of the room.

"Welcome. We have a lot of work ahead, so I'm going to make this quick." Loathing and attraction intertwined inside me as he continued with the meeting, and I could barely pay attention to anything he said. After a while, he turned to me.

"Olivia is going to share her reports."

He looked me over like an object as I stood to present.

"We've been doing an excellent job with our most popular products and historic best-sellers." I stood tall and spoke confidently. "Where we can stand to improve is converting

existing customers to our newer products. We could stand to place more attention there.”

The room reacted with nods, making eye contact with each other, impressed. I looked at him with a *take-that* sense of satisfaction. His look of contempt deflated it.

“Interesting.” Alexander’s voice dripped with skepticism. “Have you considered the potential fallout to our most popular products if we suddenly shift gears? We could lose millions.”

“That’s the conclusion the sales and product teams reached. I’m here to assist the executives, not replace them by taking on their work. You all wouldn’t want that, would you?”

The room laughed politely.

“Well, let’s see. Let’s make sure you’re interpreting their recommendations properly. Otherwise, it could cost us millions. Hundreds of millions maybe.”

As Alexander moved on to other topics, I stewed, barely listening. *Who was he to ask me to do work above my pay grade and then criticize me for it?*

“Thank you, everyone. Olivia, you’ll clean up, won’t you? Thanks.” He left and walked straight to his office.

Marco, one of my allies, whispered as he walked out. “Great presentation. You just showed him up and he didn’t appreciate it.”

I smiled and nodded in response, grateful for the encouragement, and went back to cleaning.

I thought about Alexander's constant stare, an ever-present reminder of our battle, not just in terms of our minds, but against the compulsions of our bodies. At least for me. But I refused to back down. He might have been the CEO, but that didn't mean he had to have the upper hand.

I had barely made it back to my desk when Alexander called out to me, unseen from deep within his enormous office.

"Olivia. Come here."

I fought the image of him paddling me over his knee or on his desk and assumed a serious, professional face. The morning light cast a halo around his dark hair as he glowered looking down at the city streets. I imagined him chastising the peasants below for deigning to live out their lives in such close proximity to the likes of him.

"I've requested an updated report on the project. Have it on my desk by the end of the day."

"Of course." A tremor that ran through me, but my surface remained unrattled. "You'll have it."

I needed to stay focused, to prove that I could stand up to Alexander and hold my ground, but that required me to suppress my building rage.

As I settled into my chair, Marco's encouraging words from earlier kept me from self-doubt. I would refuse to let Alexander cow me into submission.

"Hey, brought you a coffee. I figured you could use it." I looked up and Marco was standing there, placing a steaming cardboard cup on my desk. His eyes flickered to Alexander for a brief moment. "We've all been there."

“Thank you.” I nodded gratefully as I took a sip. The bitter liquid burned my tongue, but it lit a spark. I wouldn’t back down, even if I got fired for it.

As the day wore on, I noticed Alexander’s gaze lingering on me more frequently, his eyes taking on a predatory, unnerving intensity. At four, he stalked over to my desk.

“Olivia,” he growled. I resented the invasion of my personal space but also reveled in it, wanting to breathe him in. “Is the report ready?”

“Almost.” I didn’t point out that it wasn’t the end of the day yet. “I can print it out now, or you can wait until it’s done. What would you prefer?”

“Both. Give it to me now, and then, once I tell you what you need to redo, give me the final.”

I had already pushed the print button and could see the pieces of paper flowing out. He marched over and snatched them off the tray.

As he scanned the documents, his jaw clenched in frustration at not finding immediate fault. He ambled back to his office, reminding me of a bear retreating to his cave after failing to outrun his prey.

Once he was back in his office, a few people clustered around Sophia’s cubicle, looking in the direction of our side of the office.

“Keep it up,” Ethan whispered as he passed by, winking at me like an encouraging older brother.

“Thanks.” I knew that this battle was far from over, but I was prepared to face whatever challenges lay ahead. Alexander

the not-so-great would not succeed in conquering me.

Chapter Three

Olivia

My body yearned for sleep, but work had other plans. The scent of freshly brewed coffee tantalized my senses.

“Alexander? I didn’t expect anyone else to be here this late.”

Alexander leaned against the counter, tie loosened and sleeves rolled up, revealing taut forearms that made my eyes linger.

“Neither did I.” A small smile played on his lips as he glanced up. He gestured toward the coffee pot with a nod.

“Help yourself.”

“Thanks.” I poured myself a cup, the aroma wafting to my nostrils. I leaned against the counter opposite him, cradling the ceramic mug with my hands.

“You know, Olivia, you don’t have to stay so late. No one expects you to shoulder everything.”

The intimacy of his tone caught me off guard. I studied his face, looking for the sanctimonious tyrant I had begun to think of as my enemy.

“Sometimes it feels like I do.” The words tumbled out of me before I could prevent myself from saying them. “I just... I want to prove myself, you know? Show everyone I’m capable. That I’m good at what I do.”

“Olivia.” His eyes met mine with an intensity that made my pulse quicken. “You prove yourself every day. You work hard and do a good job. You haven’t even been here a month yet. I’m tough because I need my people to perform. But if you weren’t good at what you do, you wouldn’t be here.”

“Thank you, Alexander.” It was strange to see this side of him.

“My bosses were hard on me, too. Before I ran my own company.” He looked down, thinking. I didn’t want to press him to speak. It looked like he was debating whether to say what he was mulling over. “In my family, my dad wasn’t home a lot. It was seen as a weakness to devote yourself to anything other than work. Anything other than the business.”

I nodded, surprised to see the emotion on his face from recalling it.

“That can’t be easy.”

“It’s a trait that I struggle with myself. So, when I see it in other people...” He looked at me, no longer with the penetrating gaze, but with a softer understanding. “When I see it in someone like you. I realize it’s something I don’t want to cause in other people.”

He was quiet again. I paused, just looking at him. His face lacked the brutal coldness of earlier. There was an angelic side to it that I’d never seen before. Even though he was fifteen years older than me, he still had a sweet quality that made him look younger.

“Someone as talented as you shouldn’t beat yourself up so much, Olivia. Don’t let it keep you from living, either. It’s

different when you have the success or failure of a company on your shoulders. But you, you don't need to deal with that."

His words struck a chord. For a fleeting moment, I imagined what it would be like to truly live. To genuinely embrace every thrilling, terrifying, beautiful moment life had to offer. As I stood there in that dimly lit kitchen, sharing a late-night confession with Alexander, maybe I was taking a step toward that dream.

"Let's make a deal." I found my hand alighting on his for just a moment, then pulling it back. Both of us closed our eyes for a second at the physical connection, unable to help it. "I'll keep you from yourself, and you keep me from myself."

"It's a deal."

The warmth of Alexander's gaze lingered on my skin, bringing my vulnerability to the surface. I inhaled deeply, deciding to take a risk. "I was always afraid that I wouldn't meet everyone's expectations. Especially yours."

Alexander leaned against the counter, facing me, his eyes widening. "Olivia, you have no reason to feel that way. Ever."

My fingers traced the rim of my mug. The heat seared my skin, anchoring me to that moment. "But what if it's not enough? What if I can't keep up?"

His hand reached out, lightly touching my arm, and this time he held it there. It sent a chill through my body. "You're more than enough. Trust yourself. You've got this."

I looked into his eyes, searching for any hint of insincerity, but all I found was warmth. My soul burned with a longing to explore his depths. I wanted to find out who the man was

who I caught a glimpse of, the one who seemed so different from the aloof CEO I saw at work.

“Thank you, Alexander.”

“Anytime.” His fingers lingered on my arm, moving up and down on my skin for a moment before he withdrew them.

As the silence stretched between us, the air crackled. The distance separating our bodies shrank, as if we were being drawn together by a magnetic force. The contours of his face became more defined in the dim light. The curve of his lips tempted me even more than they had before.

“Olivia,” he murmured, his voice laden with desire.

“Alexander,” I replied, echoing his intensity.

We stood there, suspended in that shared moment. The undeniable desire between us grew more palpable with every passing second. My heart raced as I contemplated how fully the lines of our professional relationship might blur.

He moved closer, lifting a hand to brush a stray hair from my face. His fingers stroked my cheek, and I began to lean into his touch. His hands were unexpectedly rough, and I liked the weight of his touch. But all too soon, he pulled his hand back. As our eyes remained locked, I found myself unable to look away, unwilling to break that electrifying connection.

“Tell me something.” He licked his lips, and my eyes followed the motion. His voice was deep as he shifted closer, lifting his hand to cradle my jaw. “Do you want this?”

The candor of the proposition was both terrifying and electrifying. A simple ‘yes’ was all that separated me from the person I craved. I bit my lip.

“I don’t know,” I admitted, my inner turmoil reflected in the furrow of my brow. “But I can’t deny how much I want you.”

“Neither can I,” Alexander confessed, his fingers tracing the curve of my jawline. “I want you so much more than you can imagine.”

Our lips hovered just inches apart, a palpable tension filling the narrow gap between us. With each heartbeat, my willpower waned, drawing me into the irresistible magnetism of Alexander. “Alexander, I…” My words were swallowed by the sudden crush of his mouth against mine.

He kissed me fiercely, a carnal hunger driving him forward as he claimed my lips with his own. My body responded without hesitation, and a fire ignited within me as I surrendered.

As Alexander’s hands roamed my body, exploring my curves with a possessiveness that rocked me to my core, all my earlier preconceptions vanished. He was no longer just my boss. He was the man who had the power to make me feel alive in a way I had never thought possible. And he wanted me as much as I wanted him.

“Olivia.” Alexander panted between kisses, his eyes searching mine for an answer to the unspoken question that hung between us.

I took a deep breath, my lungs filling with the scent of him as I weighed the choices. “I don’t know what will happen next. But, my God, am I willing to find out.”

“Mm-hmm,” he growled, nodding and pressing his lips against mine once again.

Chapter Four

Alexander

The memory of Olivia's flushed cheeks and shaky breaths consumed my thoughts as I stood at the window of my office, staring out at the city below. The late-night encounter we shared still lingered in my mind like a fever dream, blurring the lines between reality and fantasy.

The vulnerability I had witnessed in her eyes was something I had never expected, and it had caught me off guard. I had found her attractive since her first day, but I didn't intend to give in like that. I might have taken her right there in the kitchen if she hadn't pulled away.

When she whispered that she better go, it took everything in me not to argue. I had to pry my hands off of her, and it was one of the fucking hardest things I ever had to do. Now, she had taken over my mind and I had been replaying the kiss over and over like a goddamn teenager.

"Alexander?" A voice called from behind me, forcing me to abandon my musings. I turned to see one of my colleagues and brother, Christopher, standing in the doorway. He handled acquisitions and onboarding while I specialized in strengthening current client relationships, direction of the company, and negotiating contracts with suppliers.

"Christopher, what can I do for you?" I replied, feigning focus. But my attention remained on the unexplored depths of Olivia's soul that I had glimpsed the previous night.

“Are you okay?” Christopher raised an eyebrow in concern, noting my unusual demeanor.

“Fine,” I said curtly, “just lost in thought.” I forced a grin, hoping to dispel any lingering suspicion. Christopher nodded and left me to my introspection.

Intrigued by Olivia’s hidden insecurities, my mind began to whirl with questions about my own actions and their impact on those around me. Was my drive for success and power truly worth the price others paid?

Damn it.

How had Olivia managed to affect me so profoundly, both personally and professionally? I had always prided myself on maintaining a clear divide between my emotions and my decision-making. Yet, there I was, questioning everything I thought I knew.

Standing in my office, I stared out the floor-to-ceiling windows, watching as a light drizzle began to dampen the city below. The cool glass pressed against my forehead, grounding me. My thoughts drifted back to Olivia, her vulnerability and resilience, which I found both compelling and disconcerting.

My phone rang. Olivia. My pulse quickened as I picked up the call, eager for this opportunity to hear her voice.

I hadn’t thought I would see her today since she was out of the office meeting with a potential client list I had given her. But I was glad she had called.

“Olivia,” I greeted her, my voice steady despite the rush of anticipation.

“Alexander,” she responded, all business. “I need to discuss the meeting I just finished with you.”

“Of course.” As we delved into work-related matters, I couldn’t help but notice the subtle shift in her tone, an undercurrent that suggested something more profound between us.

“Is there anything else you’d like to discuss?” I asked when she finished her recap, allowing a hint of warmth to color my words.

“Actually, yes,” she said hesitantly, her voice softening. “I’ve been thinking about our conversation the other night.”

“Go on,” I urged.

“Your candor was... unexpected. And it made me realize that maybe we misjudged each other.”

“Maybe,” I agreed, my grip tightening around the phone. “I think it’s important for leaders to show empathy and understanding. It’s something I was working on.”

“Me too,” she admitted, her breath hitching slightly. “I appreciate your willingness to be... open.”

“Likewise,” I responded, feeling a surge of respect for her tenacity. “Perhaps we can learn from one another.”

“Perhaps,” she echoed.

As our conversation continued, I found myself captivated by her boldness, her unwavering dedication to her ideals. She was a worthy adversary, one who challenged me to reevaluate my approach to leadership.

“Olivia,” I said, my voice barely above a whisper. “I have to admit, I’ve been thinking about you... our conversations...”
Fuck what was I saying?

“Alexander,” she breathed out, her tone laced with desire. “I can’t deny that there’s something between us. But I don’t think it’s smart.”

“Agreed,” I replied, my body aching for her touch. “But it doesn’t mean we can’t explore this connection. Maybe we’ll find common ground outside of work.”

“Maybe,” she said, her voice sultry and inviting. “Look, I have another meeting.”

I cursed myself for the work I’d given her. “Goodbye for now, Olivia,” I murmured, reluctantly ending the call.

“Goodbye, Alexander.”

The scent of freshly brewed coffee wafted through the air as I walked into the conference room, my mind preoccupied with thoughts of Olivia.

“Morning, Alexander,” said Christopher, handing me a steaming cup of coffee. “You seem lost in thought. Busy on the new campaign?”

“Always,” I replied, taking a sip and savoring the bitter taste. I wasn’t ready to divulge details of my late-night encounter with Olivia just yet. It was a vulnerability that still felt raw.

“Alright, let’s get started,” announced Sarah, a project manager I had recently hired, signaling the beginning of the meeting. As we dove into the agenda, I should have been

evaluating her performance, but I found it difficult to focus. My mind kept wandering back to Olivia—her fiery spirit, her determination, and the undeniable chemistry that crackled between us.

“Alexander, any input on this?” Christopher’s voice snapped me back to the present moment.

“Uh, yes,” I stammered, quickly scanning the document in front of me. “I think we should consider alternative strategies for reaching our target audience. We can’t keep doing the same thing over and over again as CPC grows.” I normally would have phrased that as a critique of Sarah’s presentation, but for some reason, I softened the blow. As I spoke, I realized that my newfound empathy had extended beyond Olivia. I was questioning my own actions and their impact on those around me.

“Great point,” Sarah responded, making a note on her tablet. “We’ll explore that further.”

As the meeting wrapped up, I gathered my belongings and walked towards my office. The image of Olivia’s smoldering gaze remained etched in my memory, forcing me to count moments until our next meeting.

Chapter Five

Olivia

As I entered the boardroom, a few familiar faces greeted me with warm smiles. Ethan, who I had been spending most days with, walked in beside me, his lanky frame towering above most of the others. At first, I had been hesitant about getting to know some of the people around the office, but Ethan had bounded up to my desk on the first day, telling me how amazing my shoes were. When he noticed my reluctance to accept his compliment, he told me not to worry about him. Apparently, he was one of the few openly gay guys in the office, not some perv hitting on me—his words, not mine.

When I had called Mia that night and told her, she had laughed and then told me not to replace her. I had reminded her that no one could ever replace her as my best friend, but having Ethan around had been nice.

We all exchanged pleasantries as we took our seats, and the tension in the room was palpable.

“Did you hear about the new coffee machine on the sixth floor?” Ethan joked, grinning broadly. “I heard it was so advanced, it could tell your mood just by looking at you!”

The laughter that followed eased some of the anxiety in the room, and I couldn’t help but smirk at the thought of a sentient coffee machine. As everyone settled down, the door swung open, and Alexander strode in.

He exuded an air of confidence, and his presence transformed the room instantly. My palms grew clammy as I watched him take his seat at the end of the boardroom table. His gaze was penetrating, as though he could see straight through anyone who dared make eye contact with him.

“Alright, let’s get started,” he announced, his voice commanding the attention of every person present. The authority in his tone sent shivers down my spine, reminding me of the power he held over all of us.

Ethan leaned toward me, whispering, “I think he practiced that entrance in front of a mirror this morning.”

Suppressing a giggle, I nodded in agreement. Though there was something undeniably attractive about Alexander, I couldn’t deny that his self-assured demeanor bordered on arrogance at times.

“First up, we have the marketing team presenting their latest campaign strategy,” Alexander said, gesturing for them to begin. As they launched into their presentation, I couldn’t help but steal glances at him, noticing the way his eyes narrowed and his jaw clenched when he was deep in thought.

My fingers drummed nervously on the polished wood of the conference table, the smooth surface contrasting starkly with my inner turbulence. I glanced at Alexander from the corner of my eye, and memories of our kiss flooded my mind—how his lips felt against mine, the way his body pressed against me with an electric intensity that threatened to consume us both. I shook my head, pushing these thoughts away. I couldn’t let him see how much he affected me. My career was on the line, and I refused to be toyed with.

“Next up, we have the financial department presenting their quarterly report,” Alexander announced, his voice commanding the attention of everyone in the room.

I sat up straighter, gathering every ounce of resolve as I waited for my turn to present. As each project head came forward with their updates, I rehearsed my notes in my mind, preparing myself for the crucial moment.

“Finally, we have Olivia presenting her report on our potential new clientele,” Alexander said, his tone flat and unreadable.

I tried to project an image of cool detachment as I stood, smoothing my skirt before walking to the front of the room. With every step, I felt the weight of Alexander’s gaze, dissecting and analyzing my every move. I cleared my throat, pulling up the charts and graphs I had meticulously prepared.

“During the past few weeks, I met with several potential clients who expressed interest in our services,” I began, my voice strong and steady despite my nervousness. “I believe that we can successfully acquire these new accounts and increase our revenue by twenty percent over the next quarter.”

“Interesting,” Alexander interjected, leaning forward and resting his chin on his clasped hands. “So, you’re saying that these clients are just waiting for us to swoop in and save the day? What makes you so confident?”

His question caught me off-guard, but I refused to let it show. “I did extensive research on their current providers, and I believe we can offer them more efficient and cost-effective solutions,” I replied, my tone firm.

“Really?” Alexander challenged, his eyes never leaving mine. “And what makes our product so superior to their current providers?”

My palms started to sweat, but I maintained my composure. “Our team consistently demonstrated innovation and adaptability in meeting the unique needs of each client. Furthermore, our track record speaks for itself in terms of customer satisfaction and retention.”

“Very well,” he conceded with a smirk, though his eyes remained cold and calculating. “But let’s not forget that acquiring new clients also means increased workload and resources. How do you propose we manage this influx without compromising our existing commitments?”

My anger flared at his interrogation, but I forced a smile. “We will allocate additional resources as needed and reevaluate our priorities to ensure that all projects receive the attention they deserve.”

“See to it that you do,” Alexander’s words were like ice, sending cold shivers down my spine. But beneath my anger, I felt a familiar heat begin to stir—a fire ignited by the friction between us, reminding me of the undeniable connection that bound us together in spite of everything.

I nodded and turned back to my presentation, going over the next person and what they could offer us before Alexander cut in again.

“Olivia, you mentioned that we would be offering these new clients a discounted rate for the first six months. How do you plan on making up for that loss in revenue?” Alexander’s voice was calm, but his gaze pierced me like a knife.

I gritted my teeth and forced a smile. “We will more than make up for the initial discount through increased volume of services and long-term contracts. I ran the numbers, and it’s a sound investment.”

“Really?” He raised an eyebrow. “And how exactly did you come to this conclusion? Show me your calculations.”

I tried to stay cool, but the heat rose in me, anger threatening to boil over. “I ran multiple projections based on various scenarios, and they all showed positive results,” I snapped back. “Are you questioning my competence?”

“No, Olivia,” he replied coolly, though his eyes betrayed a flicker of annoyance. “I’m questioning your assumptions. What if some of these clients don’t commit to long-term contracts? What then?”

“Alexander, every business venture has risks.” My voice trembled with barely-contained rage. “As professionals, we weigh those risks against potential rewards and make informed decisions.”

When Alexander looked at me, there was something dangerous in his gaze. Something that made my pulse race just as much as the fury burned in my chest.

“That may be the case,” Alexander ground out. “But I don’t see why this decision is necessary. They should start at our standard rates. A quality price is worth a quality product.”

“If your methods worked, then you wouldn’t have sent me,” I snapped, and then my eyes widened. Oh, fuck. That was a little far, especially in front of everyone else.

Chapter Six

Olivia

“Everyone out, now!” he commanded, his voice low and dangerous.

I watched our coworkers scurry like frightened mice, collecting their belongings and filing out of the room without hesitation. Despite the fear that coursed through me, there was an undeniable spark of excitement.

The door closed with a soft click, leaving us alone in the dimly lit boardroom. Alexander didn't waste any time, swiftly striding around the table toward me. His movements were predatory, and I was caught between wanting to flee and craving his touch.

“Olivia,” he growled, his voice deep and sensual despite the anger that fueled it. “You think you can just waltz in here and undermine me in front of everyone?”

“Why are you grilling me harder than anyone else?” I demanded, my nails digging into my palms. “You're not questioning their competence or motivations! Sarah blew her entire presentation and you basically just patted her on the head!”

“Maybe I was just testing your resolve,” he retorted. “Perhaps I wanted to see if you could handle the pressure that came with being in charge of such an important project.”

“Or maybe you were using this as an excuse to exert power over me!” My words were a venomous hiss, and the room was so quiet, I could hear the blood pounding in my ears. “Is this how you get your kicks, Alexander? By making people feel small and helpless?”

The room remained uncomfortably still, the air thick with tension and unsaid words. But I held my ground, refusing to let him break me.

My pulse thundered, heat pooling in my core at the intensity of his gaze. Part of me wanted to apologize, to diffuse the situation, but another, bolder part refused to back down.

“Maybe if you didn’t try to control everything and everyone all the time, you wouldn’t feel so threatened,” I retorted, my own voice wavering slightly.

His eyes darkened, and for a moment, I worried I’d gone too far. But then, his hand reached out, gripping the back of my neck with surprising tenderness. There was a warning behind his touch, a reminder that he was stronger than me, but also a promise of something more.

“Is that what this is about, Olivia?” he asked, his breath hot against my face. “Are you trying to provoke me? To get me to put you in your place?”

My breath hitched, and I felt the warmth radiating off his body as he leaned closer. “And what would that place be?” I whispered, my eyes locked on his.

“Underneath me,” he replied, his voice low and rough.

The room seemed to shrink around us, the air filled desire. And as Alexander’s grip tightened on my neck, I knew there

was no turning back.

“Your behavior is unacceptable, Olivia,” Alexander growled.

I felt the tension between us pulsating like electricity. I clenched my fists at my sides, unwilling to back down. “You feel threatened by me,” I shot back defiantly.

His grip on me tightened, his fingers firm but gentle. The sensation sent shivers down my spine, making my knees weak. “There’s only one way to deal with a brat like you,” he said, his gaze locked onto mine, piercing through any armor I had left.

My breathing caught, and I swallowed hard, feeling vulnerable yet exhilarated under his touch. “Tell me,” I demanded, my voice barely above a whisper.

Alexander pulled me closer to him. “I have to show you who’s in charge,” he growled, his free hand forcefully gripping my chin.

His lips crashed into mine, a fervent kiss that left no room for resistance. Every inch of my body came alive under his touch.

“Please,” I whimpered against his mouth, my desire for him growing stronger by the second. His hands roamed over my body, exploring the curves and valleys, igniting a fire within me that I couldn’t ignore.

“Olivia,” he breathed against my lips, “do you understand now who’s in control?”

My response came without a moment’s hesitation as I wrapped my arms around Alexander’s neck, pressing my body against his.

“No,” I whispered, a surge of excitement rushing through me.
“Show me.”

His fingers slowly made their way to the buttons of my shirt, expertly undoing them one by one. The anticipation built with each button that came undone until finally, my shirt was pushed aside, leaving me exposed in my bra.

“Beautiful,” Alexander murmured, his eyes drinking in the sight of me. His fingertips traced the edges of my bra, sending goosebumps along my skin. He leaned in to capture my lips once more, and I eagerly responded, pulling him closer.

Alexander leaned back, his intense gaze scanning my body as I stood there vulnerable to his desires. “You’re so beautiful,” he murmured, his voice husky and filled with lust.

He lowered his head to my chest, lips grazing the swell of my breasts above the edge of my bra. I couldn’t help but arch my back, aching for more contact as pleasure coursed through me. Moaning softly, I threaded my fingers into the dark strands of his hair, urging him closer.

“Alexander,” I gasped breathlessly, my legs quivering with anticipation.

“Patience, Olivia,” he teased, pressing scorching kisses down the valley between my breasts. His hands skimmed my waist before gripping it possessively. He spun me around in one fluid motion, pushing me towards the boardroom table.

My hands slammed onto the polished wood, steadying myself as I was bent forward. I felt my skirt flip up, exposing my barely-covered ass to Alexander’s hungry eyes.

“Is this what you want?” Alexander growled in my ear as he stepped closer, his body pressed against mine. I was completely at his mercy. This man, this powerful CEO, had me bent over a conference table, ready to claim me in every way possible.

“Y-yes,” I stammered, my body trembling with desire. “Please.”

“Good girl,” he whispered approvingly, his hand sliding along the curve of my hip. “Now, let’s see just how much control you’re willing to give up.”

I glanced back over my shoulder, catching sight of Alexander undoing his pants and pulling himself out. The sight of his erection sent a bolt of heat through me, and I couldn’t tear my eyes away as he began to stroke himself.

“Olivia,” he growled, his voice rough with feral lust, “you’ve been tempting me since day one. Is this what you want?”

I nodded emphatically, biting my lip and feeling a mixture of fear, excitement, and pure unadulterated urge coursing through me. “Yes,” I panted, my voice barely a whisper. “Please, I need you.”

“Good girl,” he purred, stepping closer and positioning himself between my legs. I braced myself against the table as he slowly pushed inside me, the sensation of him filling me drawing a deep groan from both of us. He gripped my hips tightly, anchoring me in place as he started to move.

“Fuck,” I gasped, my nails digging into the polished wood of the table. My mind raced with thoughts of submission,

longing, and an overwhelming need to surrender completely to this powerful man.

“Tell me, Olivia,” Alexander commanded, his voice low and dangerous, “tell me how much you want this.” His thrusts became more insistent, driving into me with a rhythm that left me breathless and desperate for more.

“Alexander, please,” I whimpered, my body trembling with need. “I want... I need you so badly. Take me, make me yours.”

As if spurred on by my words, Alexander’s grip on my hips tightened, and he quickened his pace, each thrust pushing me closer to the edge of ecstasy.

“Then let go for me, Olivia,” he murmured, his breath hot against my neck. “Show me just how much pleasure can you take.”

My body quivered with anticipation, and I knew that I was completely at his mercy. With Alexander claiming me in the most primal way possible, my entire world narrowed down to the sensations coursing through me and the man who had awakened desires I never knew I had.

“Please,” I gasped, unable to hold back any longer. “Alexander, I’m yours.”

“Good girl,” he whispered, his voice filled with satisfaction and possessive hunger. As our bodies moved together, I knew one thing with absolute certainty: I would never be the same again.

“Oh, God,” I gasped, my voice shaky as he continued to thrust into me. “You feel so incredible.” It was as if our

bodies were made for each other, his every movement sending a shockwave of pleasure through me.

“Is that so?” He smirked. His fingers wove into my hair, fisting it before yanking me up so that my ear was just inches from his lips. “I know you could take more, Olivia,” he growled.

As Alexander’s pace quickened, I couldn’t help but moan, my body pushed harder against the boardroom table. The mixture of pain and pleasure blurred together, creating an experience unlike anything I had ever known. My thoughts became hazy, consumed by the feeling of him inside me and the dominant hold he had over my body.

“Ask for my permission,” he commanded, breathing heavily into my ear. “You need to learn your place, Olivia.”

His words sent a shiver down my spine. I never thought I’d be in such a vulnerable position, but there was something about Alexander’s dominance that I craved. I wanted him to push me further, to make me surrender to him completely.

“Please, Alexander,” I begged. “Let me finish. I need you to bring me pleasure. I want to give myself to you completely.”

He didn’t respond right away, instead he let me hang in delicious anguish. Then, without warning, he pushed all the way into me. “Come for me,” he commanded.

The intensity of our connection sent me over the edge, and I cried out as wave after wave of ecstasy washed over me. Alexander followed suit, releasing his own climax as we rode out the storm of pleasure together.

Chapter Seven

Olivia

The scent of Alexander's cologne lingered in the air as I walked into the office. My heart thumped hard, my cheeks flushing at the memory of yesterday's carnal encounter. He stood by the window, engrossed in conversation with another coworker. I was unsure of how to behave around him now. Should I act as if nothing had happened?

"Olivia, good morning," Sarah snapped me out of my thoughts.

"Morning," I replied, forcing a smile.

I took my seat, attempting to focus on work. But my gaze kept drifting over to Alexander. He didn't seem to notice me, but it was hard not to think about his hands all over my body from the day before. Was it just a one-time thing? Or could there be more between us?

"Olivia!" Alexander's voice called out, causing me to start. "Can you come to my office for a moment?"

"Uh, sure," I replied, trying to hide my nervousness.

As I stepped into his office, he closed the door behind me. The silence was deafening, and the tension between us was palpable. I swallowed hard, wondering what he wanted from me.

"Alexander, what do you need?" I asked, my voice barely above a whisper.

“Actually, I need my lunch,” he answered, his voice low and seductive.

“Would you like me to pick something up for you?” I offered, not letting my nervousness show.

He took a step toward me, shaking his head. “That won’t be necessary.”

Our eyes locked, and the space between us seemed to close in an instant. Every nerve in my body tingled with anticipation. As his hand brushed mine, I knew that I was playing with fire, but I couldn’t bring myself to pull away.

Alexander reached out, pinching my chin between his fingers and tilting my head up to meet his gaze. His eyes were dark and hungry. Without another word, he leaned in and captured my lips with his, the delicious taste of him compelling and insistent.

“Alexander,” I breathed against his mouth, wrapping my arms around his neck as he pulled me closer. Our bodies melded together, heat radiating from every point of contact.

In one swift motion, he picked me up, and I instinctively wrapped my legs around his hips. My heart raced, fueled by a mixture of desire and nerves. His grip was strong, and I felt safe in his arms, even as the thrill of uncertainty coursed through me.

“God, Olivia,” Alexander murmured. “I can’t get enough of you.”

He carried me over to his desk, setting me on the edge. Papers scattered beneath me, but neither of us cared about the

mess. He pulled back to sit in his chair, and I watched as he took in the sight of me, perched and waiting for him.

“Is this what you wanted?” I asked, my voice trembling.

“Olivia,” he replied, his eyes never leaving mine. “You have no idea how much I’ve been craving that moment.”

He leaned in, his breath hot on my skin as he whispered, “This is the meal I want, Olivia. Nothing else will satisfy me today.”

My chest tightened at his words, a mix of excitement and fear bubbling within me. As Alexander’s hands slid up my thighs, I knew there was no turning back now.

“Then take what you want,” I said, giving in.

Alexander didn’t need any further encouragement. With a growl, he pushed my knees open and shoved my skirt up around my waist. His eyes widened when he discovered that I wasn’t wearing any underwear, and the predatory gleam in his made me wet in an instant.

“Olivia,” he said, his voice rough with lust. “Were you hoping this would happen?”

I nodded, unable to find the words to express just how much I had fantasized about that moment. As if sensing my thoughts, Alexander grinned wickedly, and I leaned back on my hands, opening my legs wider for him.

“Please, Alexander,” I whispered, exposing myself completely to him. “I need you.”

“Patience,” he murmured, his eyes locked onto mine as he lowered himself between my thighs. He pressed a series of

soft kisses along the insides of my legs, making me squirm and gasp with each touch of his lips against my sensitive skin.

“Stop teasing me,” I begged, my voice trembling with need. “Please... I can’t take it anymore.”

Alexander chuckled. “As you wish,” he said, finally bringing his mouth to where I had ached for him most.

The sensation was electrifying, and I had to bite my lip to keep from crying out. My fingers dug into the edge of the desk as I fought to keep control, but with every flick of Alexander’s tongue, I felt my resolve slipping away.

“Alexander,” I whimpered, my hips bucking involuntarily towards his face. “Please... don’t stop...”

He didn’t respond, but I felt he had no intention of stopping anytime soon. And as the pleasure mounted, threatening to consume me whole, I couldn’t help but wonder if I would ever be able to resist him again.

Alexander’s tongue expertly explored me, finding all the places that made my body sing. I struggled to contain my gasps and moans, covering my mouth with my hand so as not to alert the office just beyond the door. The fact that we could be caught at any moment only served to heighten the experience, making every nerve ending in my body buzz with anticipation.

“God, Alexander,” I breathed into my palm, feeling my control slipping away as he continued his sweet torment. “You drive me insane.”

He didn’t respond verbally, but sensed his smirk against my skin as he pressed two fingers to my entrance. My eyes

widened at the sudden sensation, and I bit down on my hand to keep from crying out. The combination of his fingers inside me and his tongue working its magic was almost too much for me to bear.

I glanced down at him, our eyes locking in a heated exchange. He watched me intently as he slipped his fingers deeper, curling them just right to hit that perfect spot within me. I had to close my eyes, the pleasure threatening to overwhelm me completely.

“Olivia,” he whispered against my sensitive flesh, his voice thick with desire. “Let go. I’ve got you.”

His words were the tipping point, and I surrendered to the wave of ecstasy crashing through me. My hips bucked uncontrollably as the sensations rippled through me, leaving me breathless and shaken. Alexander worked me through it, his fingers and tongue relentless until the last tremor subsided.

Finally, he pulled his fingers out of me, leaning back in his chair to regard me. His dark eyes smoldered with satisfaction as he raised his fingers to his lips, licking them clean. The sight was undeniably erotic, stirring the embers of desire deep within me once more.

“Get back to work, Olivia,” Alexander commanded, his voice cold and distant. The sudden change in his demeanor caught me off guard, as I slid off the edge of his desk.

“Y-yes, Alexander,” I stuttered, feeling a mix of humiliation and confusion. My legs were shaky as I adjusted my skirt, trying to regain some semblance of composure.

“Close the door behind you,” he added, not even bothering to look up at me as he got back to his paperwork.

I nodded, although he couldn't see it, and hastily made my way out of his office. As soon as the door clicked shut behind me, I leaned against the wall, trying to catch my breath and process what had just happened. Was this all just a game to him? A power play to keep me on my toes?

My thoughts raced as I returned to my desk, unable to focus on the work piled in front of me. The memory of Alexander's touch lingered on my skin, making me shiver despite the warmth of the office.

“Everything okay, Olivia?” Sarah asked with a concerned expression. I could tell she noticed the flush on my cheeks and the unsteady way I held myself.

“Y-yeah, I'm fine,” I lied, forcing a smile. “Just had a bit of a disagreement with Alexander.”

“Ah, I see,” she said sympathetically, though I knew she had no idea what truly transpired between us. She was probably just thinking there was going to be some HR nightmare with our short-tempered boss. If only she knew... “Well, if you need anything, just let me know.”

“Thank you,” I replied gratefully, watching her walk away before sinking into my chair. I tried to concentrate on the task at hand, but my mind kept wandering back to the way Alexander looked at me, the hunger in his eyes as he devoured me with his gaze, his touch, his tongue.

Despite the confusing aftermath, I couldn't deny the magnetic pull I felt towards him. The attraction was undeniable, a force

so powerful that I knew I'd come running to him again in a heartbeat if he called for me.

But why was he ignoring me now? What had I gotten myself into?

Throughout the day, Alexander didn't spare me a single glance. It was as if our intimate encounter never happened, and yet every time I shifted in my seat or caught a glimpse of him across the room, my body betrayed me, reminding me of how he made me feel.

As the hours ticked by, I found myself torn between anger and longing, unsure of how to navigate this situation. I wasn't sure what kind of power play he was pulling, but the longer I stewed over it, the more I decided I was done with it.

I gritted my teeth as I watched him walk around the office, talking to the other employees and pointedly acting as if I didn't exist. Did he just think I was some toy to play with? Would he just throw me away and buy a new one when he decided he was done?

I stayed after everyone else was gone. I couldn't help myself. I just kept staring at Alexander's door, and I knew he hadn't left yet.

My rage had doubled at this point. I refused to be just a little plaything for someone, and before I could think better of it, I was on my feet.

The dimly lit hallway felt oppressive as I approached Alexander's office. It was late; the only sounds were the distant hum of air conditioning and my own shallow breaths. My hand trembled slightly as I raised it to knock on his door.

“Come in,” Alexander called out, his voice bored and distracted. A surge of anger washed over me at his indifference.

I pushed the door open, stepping into his office where he sat behind his mahogany desk, engrossed in paperwork. He didn’t even bother to look up at me, and that infuriated me more.

“Alexander, we need to talk,” I demanded, my voice wavering despite my efforts to sound strong.

He finally looked up from his work, his piercing eyes locking onto mine with an intensity that reminded me of today’s lunch. “What about?” he asked, his tone low.

“Us. This... relationship we’ve been having,” I said, forcing myself to hold his gaze. “It needs to stop. I don’t want to be just some toy for you to play with.” My hands clenched into fists at my sides. “It’s unprofessional, and I don’t want it to affect my job.”

Alexander’s eyes narrowed, and I could see the gears turning in his head. But for now, I stood my ground, determined to end things before they spiraled out of control.

“Don’t you think you’re overreacting?” Alexander scoffed, his eyes flashing with irritation. “I’m the boss. How could this hurt your job in any way?”

“The boss and his assistant...” I snapped, cocking a hip. “It never goes right.”

He stood up abruptly, sending his chair skidding backward. Moving around the desk toward me, my heart hammered in my chest like a trapped animal. Every instinct screamed to

flee, but I forced myself to stay put, jaw clenched and head held high.

“Olivia,” he said softly, reaching out to stroke my hair. His touch was electric, making my skin tingle with an almost painful intensity. But I refused to let him manipulate me again. With a sharp slap, I knocked his hand away from me.

“Alexander, don’t touch me,” I snapped, my voice firm and steady despite the emotions roiling inside me. “I’m ending this.”

“Is that so?” he murmured, a dangerous glint in his eyes. It was clear that he wasn’t used to being defied, and the thought of standing up to him both terrified and exhilarated me. But I had had enough of feeling like a pawn in his twisted game.

“Damn right, it is,” I retorted, meeting his gaze. “I won’t let you control me any longer.”

He looked at me for a moment, no doubt weighing his options. The air between us crackled with tension, thick and heavy like fog before a storm.

Alexander’s dark, smoldering eyes narrowed as his expression turned furious. I guessed he wasn’t used to hearing no.

I took a step back, but his hand shot out in an instant, gripping my wrist with a vice-like force, pinning me in place. “You don’t get to make that decision,” he growled.

The heat of his breath on my face mingled with the sweat beading at my temples. The scent of his cologne, a heady mix of musk and cedarwood, invaded my nostrils, making it difficult to breathe. As much as I knew this was wrong, that I

shouldn't want this, my body betrayed me, responding to his proximity with an ache that throbbed deep inside.

"Let go of me," I demanded through clenched teeth, even though I didn't fight against his hold. My heart pounded furiously in my chest, each beat echoing in my ears like the sound of a war drum. I refused to let him control me any longer; I would fight for my independence, even if it meant going against every instinct screaming for me to submit to him.

"You told me you wanted this." I didn't understand why he was so angry. Couldn't he have anyone he wanted? Was this really about getting the one prize that he couldn't have? "Now you're just going to cut it off over a pathetic excuse?" He shook his head, barking out a harsh laugh. "I don't think so. You aren't ending this."

With a sudden burst of strength fueled by anger, I wrenched my wrist free from his grasp, feeling both satisfaction and pain as the red marks left behind began to throb. "Just watch me end it, Alexander," I spat out, my voice trembling with barely contained rage.

My legs shook beneath me, but I gathered all the courage I could muster and took a step back. Then another. With each step, I felt more liberated, more in control of my own life.

As I turned to storm out of his office, I could practically feel the weight of his gaze on my back—heavy, oppressive, full of need and desire. But I didn't look back. I wouldn't give him the satisfaction of seeing me falter. Instead, I held my head high and strode out of the room, leaving Alexander—and what I truly wanted—behind.

Chapter Eight

Olivia

The sharp scent of coffee filled the air as I sat at my desk, scanning through emails and organizing the day's agenda. Alexander's office door clicked open, distracting me from the screen. I glanced up as he strode towards me, his broad shoulders framed by the sunlight streaming in through the floor-to-ceiling windows.

It had been a few days since I called off whatever was going on between us, and he hadn't addressed it since nor had he tried to make a move on me. Everything had been strictly professional between us, to the point that we seemed like strangers.

I hated it.

"Olivia, I have a business trip coming up next week," he said, a note of anticipation in his voice. "I need you to accompany me." My heart skipped a beat as I imagined spending days—and nights—with him away from the confines of the office.

But still, I was hesitant. I knew he was my boss, but I had told him that I couldn't keep doing this. Why was he forcing me to go away with him?

Alexander must have seen the hesitance on my face because he sighed. "I was going to take Ryan from marketing, but his mother is in the hospital. I'm not going to force him to go, but I need a second person, someone I can trust to attend

meetings when I can't be in two places at once. Unfortunately, no one else here would be able to drop their work to attend, but since I am your work, you should be available." He cocked an eyebrow. "Will that be a problem?"

Yes, I didn't say to him. This sounded too personal.

I wanted to protest, but I couldn't. His reasons were perfectly logical and if I took my emotions out of it, I couldn't deny it made the most sense. Especially since I worked so closely with Alexander.

"And you'll get your own room," he added, raising the other eyebrow.

I could see now that he was trying to show me this was purely business. He didn't want to force me into anything or take advantage of the situation. So, I shoved my feelings down and put my professional face on.

I nodded, pulling out my planner and flipping to the appropriate date. "Where are we headed?"

"New York," he replied, the corner of his mouth lifting in a knowing smile. He ran a hand through his thick dark hair, tousling it just enough to make me wonder how it would feel between my fingers. "I have lined up several important meetings, so I need you to get everything organized for us."

"Of course," I said, swallowing hard. Excitement and nerves churned within me, threatening to overwhelm my professionalism. "I'll book accommodation and compile all the necessary documents."

"Perfect," he murmured, his gaze lingering on me for a moment longer than necessary. The heat in his eyes sent a

shiver down my spine, making me acutely aware of the growing tension between us. “And we’ll be gone for two weeks.” With a curt nod, he retreated back into his office, leaving me to wrestle with the implications of this trip.

I threw myself into the preparations. I carefully researched the best hotels, ensuring that our accommodation was both luxurious and discreet. The thought of us sharing close quarters sent a thrill through me, my fingers trembling as I typed in the reservation details.

“Olivia,” Alexander called from his office, drawing me back to reality. “Could you come in here for a moment?”

“Coming,” I replied, taking a deep breath before entering his domain. As I crossed the threshold, I noticed the way his gaze flickered over my body, lingering on the curve of my hips beneath the fabric.

“Is everything set for the trip?” he asked, leaning back in his chair and steepling his fingers.

“Almost,” I answered, fighting the blush that threatened to creep across my cheeks. “I just need to finalize our flights and print out the itinerary.”

“Good,” he said, his voice low and commanding. “And you called the crew for the plane?”

I nodded. “I did.” The crew for his *private* plane. I was a little excited.

He nodded. “I won’t keep you then.”

“Right. Let me know if you need anything else,” I said, my voice steady despite the turmoil roiling within me. With a quick nod, I left his office and returned to my desk, my mind

racing with equal parts anticipation and trepidation as I prepared for the journey ahead.

The rhythmic clicking of the computer mouse resonated in my ears as I finalized our travel arrangements, the anticipation pooling in the pit of my stomach. Alexander's presence lingered like a phantom touch on my skin, igniting an insatiable craving that threatened to consume me. It was maddening—this inexplicable pull he had over me.

“Olivia, did you have a moment?” His voice startled me from my reverie, the familiar deep timbre sending delicious shivers down my spine.

“Of course,” I replied, rising from my chair and smoothing down my blouse, acutely aware of the way the fabric brushed against my sensitive nipples, betraying my arousal.

As I stepped into his office again his predatory gaze roamed over me, leaving a trail of scorching heat in its wake. The intensity of his stare caused my breath to hitch, and I struggled to maintain my composure.

“Let's go over our objectives for the trip one last time,” Alexander said, his tone authoritative as he gestured toward the glossy black conference table.

“Alright,” I answered with feigned nonchalance, settling into the plush leather chair across from him, my fingers unconsciously tracing the cool, smooth surface of the table.

“First and foremost, we need to secure their commitment to our partnership,” he began, his eyes locked on mine. “It is crucial that we present a united front and demonstrate the strength of our collaboration.”

I nodded, swallowing thickly as the implication of his words tugged at the edges of my consciousness. How would I be able to maintain the facade of professionalism when all I wanted was to taste his lips and feel his hands on my body?

“Secondly,” Alexander continued, the intensity of his gaze never wavering, “we need to gather insight into their operations and identify potential areas for improvement. This will help us better understand how to support them moving forward.”

“Understood,” I murmured, my voice barely audible as my heart raced in my chest, the proximity between us both exhilarating and torturous.

“Lastly,” he said, leaning in slightly, his cologne enveloping me in a heady cloud of desire, “we need to establish clear expectations for our roles during this trip. We can’t afford any distractions or misunderstandings.”

“Agreed,” I breathed, desperately fighting the urge to close the distance between us and press my lips to his, consequences be damned.

“Good,” Alexander replied, his voice low and controlled, betraying none of the raw passion I knew simmered just beneath the surface. “We leave tomorrow. Get some rest tonight, Olivia. We have a long day ahead of us.”

“Of course,” I whispered, standing on shaky legs and making my way to the door, feeling the weight of his gaze on me every step of the way. As I exited his office, I couldn’t help but wonder how I would survive the trip with my sanity—and professionalism—intact.

As I got ready to leave for the day, the memories of our conversation earlier replayed in my mind. Alexander's strong jawline, his piercing gaze, and the way his lips formed words that were both business-like and tantalizingly suggestive.

"Olivia, I emailed you the updated itinerary," Alexander called from his office.

"Got it," I replied, glancing at my phone to see the new schedule.

"By the way," he said, entering the room with a casual swagger that made my heart race, "I noticed you are quite good at organizing everything. I appreciate it."

"Thank you, Alexander," I responded. "I enjoyed doing it."

"Good."

"Will we have time to explore the city?" I asked.

"Maybe," he replied, all seriousness returning to his expression. "But remember, we are there for business, not sightseeing."

"Of course," I said, swallowing hard as I watched him leave the room.

Chapter Nine

Olivia

“Oh. My. God.” I gasped.

“What?” Mia squealed in my ear, my phone tightly clutched in my hand. “You can’t just say that and not tell me what immediately!”

“He just showed up in a fancy sports car.” My jaw had dropped.

“Ooooh,” Mia sang through the phone. “Well, go! Call me when you get to the hotel, okay?”

“I’ll send you lots of pics,” I promised.

“You better.” Her voice actually sounded threatening as she clicked off the call.

The sleek black car pulled up to the curb, and my heart leapt. I had never been in a vehicle this luxurious before—the leather seats, tinted windows, and smooth ride were nothing like the crowded buses and cramped cabs I was used to. Alexander really knew how to travel in style.

“Enjoying the ride?” he asked, his voice rich and warm like melted chocolate.

“Very much so,” I replied, trying to contain my excitement. “I didn’t know cars could be this comfortable.”

He chuckled, letting his fingertips brush against my thigh as we sped towards our destination. The touch sent shivers up

my spine, and I found myself shifting in my seat, craving more of his touch.

My phone buzzed, and I fished it out of my purse. It was from Ethan. *You went on a trip with the boss???* he asked, followed by a string of emojis.

I giggled. Ethan had definitely become my closest friend at the company, and he had even managed to drag me out to drinks with other coworkers a time or two.

A business trip, I texted back.

He sent me back an emoji of an eggplant, and I shook my head, locking my phone.

Before I knew it, we arrived at a small, private airfield where a gleaming jet awaited us. My jaw dropped as Alexander helped me out of the car, and I couldn't help but gawk at the plane. He grinned at my reaction, wrapping an arm around my waist to guide me up the steps.

"Come on, Olivia," he said, his lips brushing against my ear. "Let's get you settled in."

Inside the plane, the opulence was even more overwhelming. Plush leather seats lined the cabin, and there was enough space for a dozen people to lounge comfortably. I took the seat across from Alexander, my eyes wide as I tried to take everything in.

"Never been on a private plane before?" he teased, raising an eyebrow.

"Is it that obvious?" I asked, rolling my eyes playfully. But deep down, I was utterly captivated by all that luxury.

As the engines roared to life and the plane began to taxi, my breath quickened uncontrollably. I gripped the armrests with white knuckles, feeling suddenly claustrophobic despite the spacious cabin. Alexander noticed my discomfort immediately.

“Are you all right?” he asked gently, his eyes filled with concern.

I nodded, trying to steady my breathing. “I’ll be fine. I just—I’m not a big fan of takeoffs.”

His gaze softened, and he reached across the aisle to take my hand, giving it a reassuring squeeze. His touch anchored me, and my nerves began to settle as the plane lifted off the ground and ascended into the sky.

“See?” he murmured, his thumb stroking my skin. “Not so bad, is it?”

I exhaled shakily, finally able to crack a smile. “No, not so bad at all.”

“Would you like some champagne?” Alexander asked, pouring himself a glass from the bottle of Cristal on the small table between us. He held it up to me with that charming smile he knew I couldn’t resist.

“Sure,” I said, my cheeks warming as I accepted the glass. The bubbles tickled my nose as I took a sip, and I realized that he was trying to distract me from my lingering nerves. It was a sweet gesture, one that warmed my heart more than I’d like to admit.

“Come,” he beckoned, patting the empty space next to him. “I promise I won’t bite.”

I grinned and moved to sit beside him, feeling a thrill run down my spine as his arm touched mine. He pulled out a deck of cards from a compartment near his seat and started shuffling them with practiced ease.

“Did you know I am a master at gin rummy?” he teased, dealing the cards between us. His fingers brushed against mine as we began the game, and every touch sent sparks shooting through me.

“Really? I never took you for the rummy type,” I replied, raising an eyebrow.

“Ah, there’s much you didn’t know about me, Olivia,” he said, his voice low and playful. As we played, I found myself laughing more than I had in weeks, thoroughly enjoying the unexpected side of Alexander that I was discovering.

Just as I was about to call out that I was out of cards, and therefore had won, the plane suddenly jolted, and I gasped, gripping Alexander’s arm tightly. Turbulence. My pulse raced, but before I could give in to my fear, Alexander pulled me onto his lap, cradling me close to his chest.

“Shh, it’s alright,” he murmured, pressing his lips to my temple. The feel of his warm breath on my made me want him so much, and I couldn’t help but turn my head to meet his gaze.

I shouldn’t have done this. I knew it, but I didn’t care. I was already putting up all my energy to handle being on this plane. I was out of the strength to resist him, too.

“Alexander,” I whispered, my lips brushing against his. He didn’t hesitate, capturing my mouth in a searing kiss that stole

my breath away.

As we made out, our hands roamed each other's bodies greedily, hungry for more contact. I threaded my fingers through his thick, silky hair, while his hands gripped my hips, pulling me tighter against him. The plane continued to jolt and shake, but all I could focus on was the electric connection between us, the way my entire being felt alive and aflame when I was with him.

"Olivia," he groaned, his voice ragged with desire. "You have no idea what you do to me."

"Show me," I breathed, losing myself in his touch, in this wild, passionate dance between two souls who couldn't get enough of one another.

The captain's voice came over the intercom, pulling me out of the whirlwind of passion. "Ladies and gentlemen, please fasten your seat belts as we prepare for landing."

"Looks like our time is up," Alexander whispered, his eyes dark with desire. Reluctantly, I slid off his lap and into the seat beside him. His hand found mine, fingers intertwining, offering comfort and reassurance.

I glanced out the window, watching as the ground grew closer. My mind buzzed with the memory of Alexander's touch, making it impossible to focus on the impending landing.

"Hey," he said softly, breaking through my thoughts. "You okay?"

"Of course," I replied, squeezing his hand. "A little distracted."

“Understandable.” He smirked, knowing exactly what I meant.

Once the plane touched down, the world outside shifted from a blur to a still, solid landscape.

Back on flat ground, though, reality started to hit me. Guilt flooded my system and I slowly pulled away from him. “Alexander,” I started, but he shook his head.

“It was a distraction. Nothing more,” he murmured, standing without looking at me. It shouldn’t have hurt but it did. “I’ll forget it ever happened.”

“Thank you,” I whispered.

The cabin doors opened, and we stepped onto the tarmac, leaving behind the intimate cocoon of the private jet.

A modern limo awaited us, its engine purring like a well-fed cat. Alexander held the door open for me, his hand resting on the small of my back as I slid into the leather seat. The scent of his cologne lingered in the air, mingling with the smell of the leather upholstery.

As the car wound through the city streets, I watched the scenery change from industrial to upscale. The buildings grew taller, grander, their facades adorned with intricate detailing. We pulled up to an opulent hotel that seemed to rise out of the ground like a castle in the sky. Alexander helped me out of the car, his hand lingering on mine for a moment longer than necessary.

“Welcome,” he said, his voice low, seductive, as we entered the lavish lobby.

My eyes widened at the sight before me—marble floors, crystal chandeliers, and plush velvet furnishings created an atmosphere of pure luxury. It was like stepping into another world, one where I could easily lose myself.

Alexander had a list of hotels on file that he preferred to stay at so I hadn't really looked into the hotel much before booking our rooms. Now, I was a little glad I hadn't. It was a wonderful—albeit accidental—surprise.

“Wow, this is incredible,” I breathed, feeling a thrill of anticipation for what lay ahead.

“Only the best for us,” he murmured, giving me a wink that made my heart flip.

Chapter Ten

Olivia

I followed Alexander to the front desk as our bags were carted in. He strode forward with confidence, stopping before the receptionist and giving her a smile that made my stomach squeeze.

“Hello,” he said in a deep rumble, still smiling. The jealousy built in me. “We have a reservation for Bennett.”

She nodded, typing on the computer. Finally, she swiped a keycard and passed it across the desk. “Nice to have you Mr. Bennett. Here is your room key. As always, you are on the top floor.”

Alexander stared down at one card and then back up at the woman. “I’m sorry. There should have been two rooms.”

The woman looked to the screen and then back at him, her facial features growing tight. “No, sir. We have one room here.”

A wave of confusion washed over me. I know I booked two rooms. I glanced at Alexander, who seemed equally puzzled as he stared at the receptionist.

“That can’t be right,” Alexander said, leaning against the front desk and looking impressively imposing. “There seems to be an issue with our reservations.”

“Let me see if I can fix this for you, sir,” the receptionist replied, her fingers flying across the keyboard. A pregnant

pause followed, and tension simmered between Alexander and me.

“Unfortunately, there is only one suite available,” she informed us, apologetic eyes darting between the two of us. “We are fully booked.”

“Sharing a suite?” My voice squeaked, betraying my anxiety. I caught my lower lip between my teeth, forcing myself to remain composed despite the sudden intimacy of the situation.

“Is there no other option?” Alexander asked, his tone firm yet polite.

“I’m afraid not, sir. We are fully booked tonight.” She looked genuinely sorry, but it did little to ease my nerves.

“Very well,” he agreed, accepting the key card from her outstretched hand. “We’ll manage.”

As we made our way to the elevator, I couldn’t help but steal glances at Alexander. His jaw clenched, revealing the faintest hint of frustration. Yet, beneath that irritation, I sensed something more—a curiosity that bordered on excitement.

“Looks like we’ll have to make the best of this situation,” he said with a forced smile, attempting to ease the tension.

“Of course,” I replied, swallowing hard.

The elevator doors opened, and we stepped inside, the close quarters magnifying the already palpable tension between us. As the elevator ascended, I found myself acutely aware of Alexander’s presence.

“Here we are,” he announced as we stepped out onto our floor. We walked side by side to our shared suite, the silence between us heavy with anticipation.

He swiped the key card, and the door clicked open, revealing the lavish room beyond. It was a massive sitting room with a balcony, a small kitchenette, and there was a small hall that disappeared to the right. There must be a bedroom that way.

“Let’s establish some ground rules,” Alexander suggested, clearly eager to maintain some semblance of professionalism. “We’ll take turns using the bathroom. We can share the common space and split the drawers and closet.”

“Sounds reasonable,” I agreed, nodding my head in approval.

“Exactly.” Alexander flashed me a reassuring smile, his eyes sparkling with mischief. “Now, I propose we each take a few minutes to settle in and change out of these travel-worn clothes. I’ll go first, if you don’t mind.”

“Go ahead,” I told him, my voice barely above a whisper as I avoided direct eye contact. His presence alone was enough to make me feel dizzy with desire.

Alexander disappeared into the bathroom, leaving me alone to ponder the implications of our situation. My thoughts raced as I ran my fingers through my tangled hair, attempting to regain some semblance of order in both my appearance and my emotions.

As much as I wanted to deny it, the undeniable chemistry between us felt like a ticking time bomb, and I couldn’t help but wonder how long we would be able to resist the temptation. But for now, professionalism had to prevail.

When Alexander emerged from the bathroom, the scent of his freshly showered skin enveloped me, making it even more difficult to focus on anything other than the man standing before me. He was clad in a crisp white dress shirt and tailored slacks, the very image of professionalism—yet beneath that facade, I sensed the same simmering tension that threatened to consume us both.

“Your turn,” he said, gesturing towards the bathroom with a slight nod.

The air in the suite felt heavy. The sound of his fingers drumming against the polished wooden table filled the silence, while my gaze wandered to the curve of his arm, where a single droplet of water from his earlier shower lingered.

“Shall we go over the meeting agenda for tomorrow?” he asked, breaking the silence that had fallen between us.

“Of course,” I replied, trying to shake the distracting thoughts from my mind. I walked over to the table where he sat, feeling the warmth of his body radiating towards me as I took my seat beside him. Each heartbeat reverberated with our unresolved chemistry.

Alexander flipped open his laptop, and we dove into the details of our presentation. He spoke confidently, but I noticed the way his eyes occasionally flickered up to meet mine, as if seeking reassurance or searching for something more.

“Olivia,” Alexander said, drawing me back to the present. “What did you think about adding a few slides on our recent success stories?”

“Good idea,” I agreed, struggling to keep my voice steady. “It’ll drive home the value we provide.”

As we continued working, our hands brushed against each other whenever we reached for the same document or took turns typing on the keyboard. Each accidental touch sent a thrill down my spine, the heat of his skin searing into my flesh like a branding iron.

“Maybe we should call it a night,” Alexander suggested, the rasp in his voice betraying his own inner turmoil. “We have an early start tomorrow.”

“Right,” I said, exhaling slowly as I tried to collect myself. “Let me come grab my clothes.”

We both stood, heading to the bedroom together where our suitcases had been set down.

Chapter Eleven

Olivia

I really took in the bedroom for the first time after rushing through changing earlier, a space far more intimate than either of us had expected and had since avoided. The dim light cast a warm glow on the plush carpet and opulent furniture, making the room feel even more sensual than it already was. As I took in the king-sized bed, adorned with silky sheets and an array of pillows, a bold idea formed in my mind.

“Listen, Alexander,” I began, my voice trembling slightly. “Since we’re stuck here together, why not... share the bed? It’s big enough for both of us, and we can just keep things strictly professional.”

He hesitated, his eyes widening in surprise.

“Fine,” he finally agreed, his voice steady. “But only on the condition that we set some boundaries. We can’t let this... situation affect our working relationship.”

“Agreed,” I replied.

I was almost certain he was doing this for my benefit, and I appreciated it. As much as I wanted to give in, I knew that it was a road I couldn’t come back from. What happened after Alexander got tired of me and fired me? Or worse, if other people found out? Where was I going to get a job with the

reputation as the girl who was willing to screw her boss? The wrong places, that was where.

As I watched him unpack his things, my eyes involuntarily lingered on the curve of his strong shoulders and the way his shirt hugged his muscular frame. The urge to reach out and touch him was almost unbearable, yet I knew I must resist—for the sake of our jobs and my own sanity.

“Thank you,” I said, offering him a grateful smile. “For being understanding and... willing to make this work.”

He nodded, his expression unreadable as he returned my smile. “Of course, Olivia.”

He went to the bed, now settled into the room, and pulled back the blankets. I gulped, thinking that maybe I should have thought this through now. But there was no going back as I watched Alexander slide into bed.

I got in on my side, overly aware of how close I was to him, and rolled over, flicking off the lamp. He did the same, settling in, and there was a small sliver of space between us. I could still feel the heat radiating off his back, though.

I itched to reach out and touch him, but I held still until I heard his breaths deepen. My body was still too tense to relax, and I started to wonder if I was going to go these two weeks without sleep.

The steam from the shower filled the bathroom with a hot, misty haze as I washed away the sleepless night. As I stepped out, my towel wrapped securely around me, I caught a glimpse of Alexander in the mirror, seated at the small suite

table, working on his laptop. His focus and determination were evident, but there was something more—something that rendered him irresistible despite our imposed boundaries.

“Olivia,” he called out without looking up, “we should go over the presentation one more time before we present.”

“Sure,” I replied, willing my voice to remain steady as I quickly got dressed in my pajamas. The anticipation of being near him made my pulse quicken.

Seated across from him at the table, I struggled to concentrate on the words and images displayed on the screen. The close proximity allowed me to catch the subtle scent of his cologne, a mixture of woody undertones and fresh citrus. It was intoxicating, and I found myself leaning closer, attempting to detect each individual note.

“Olivia?” Alexander’s voice broke my focus, and I glanced up to see concern etched across his face. “You here?”

I nodded, not trusting myself to speak for fear that my voice might betray my inner turmoil. He studied me for a moment, then set aside his laptop, giving me his full attention.

“Look,” he said gently, “I know this isn’t an ideal situation, but we need to make the best of it. And if there’s anything that’s bothering you or making you uncomfortable, please tell me.”

His openness caught me off guard, and I found myself admitting, “It’s just... hard to separate work from... everything else when we’re living in such close quarters.”

He nodded, understanding dawning in his eyes. “I agree. Perhaps we should set aside some time each evening to just...

talk. About anything other than work, I mean.”

“Okay,” I replied hesitantly, unsure of where this might lead but curious nonetheless.

Two days had passed since our arrival, and the tension between Alexander and me had turned into something almost resembling a friendship. That night, as I sat on the plush couch with my bare feet tucked under me, I found myself sharing parts of my life that I had never spoken about before.

“Growing up, my family went through some tough times,” I began hesitantly, studying the intricate patterns on the carpet. “My dad lost his job when I was young, and it really affected all of us.”

Alexander shifted in his seat to face me, his eyes filled with compassion. “I’m sorry to hear that, Olivia. It must have been hard for you and your family.”

“Hard” was an understatement, but I nodded in agreement. “It made me grow up faster than I would have liked. I had to learn how to be strong, not just for myself but for my mom and younger sister too.”

“Your resilience is admirable,” he said, his voice low and warm. “I can see now why you’re so driven and successful in your career.”

“Thanks,” I said, blushing slightly at the compliment. “What about you? Your dad’s the founder of the company, right?”

Alexander leaned back against the couch, his hands resting on his thighs. “Yeah, he is. And he always had high expectations for me—not just academically, but also in terms of taking on

responsibilities within the company. He wanted me to follow in his footsteps and eventually take over as CEO.”

“Did you ever feel pressured by that?” I asked, curious.

“Of course,” he admitted with a sigh. “But I realized that I could either let those expectations define me or use them as motivation to prove myself. That’s partly why I work so hard—to make sure I’m worthy of the position.”

As we continued talking, I found myself growing more and more comfortable in his presence, sharing stories and experiences that I had never dared to reveal before. We seemed to be connecting on a deeper level, and it felt strangely intimate.

Despite this newfound camaraderie, living with Alexander wasn’t always easy. In the mornings, his obnoxiously loud alarm jolted me awake at an ungodly hour. His rigid shower schedule meant I could never get back to sleep, the sound of the water running and the bathroom door opening and closing only adding to my annoyance.

“Alexander,” I snapped one morning as I stumbled out of the bed, hair disheveled and eyes bleary from lack of sleep. “Can you please be more considerate with your alarm? It’s waking me up every day, and I’m exhausted.”

He looked surprised, caught off guard by my outburst. “I’m sorry, Olivia. I didn’t realize it was bothering you so much. I’ll try to be quieter in the mornings.”

“Thank you,” I grumbled before retreating back into bed, hoping for a few more precious minutes of rest.

As another day went by, we attempted to navigate our shared space with mutual respect. Even though it wasn't perfect, and there were still moments when we irritated each other, I couldn't deny that there was an undeniable chemistry developing between us—one that I couldn't help but be drawn to no matter how hard I tried to push it away.

But Alexander made it easy at times. Like when I came into the bedroom after breakfast, having just gotten dressed for the day before eating.

“Olivia,” he snapped, eyeing the pile of clothes on the chair I tried on and discarded, “can you please put your things away? It looks like a tornado swept through here.”

I wasn't sure why him bossing me around in my personal life irked me, but I felt my blood boil at his comment. “You're not my father, Alexander. I'll clean up when I feel like it.”

“Fine.” His tone was curt, the tension between us thickening like molasses.

We went back and forth like this, building both a friendship and animosity between us. Underneath it all, that chemistry was making it worse, and every moment I got closer to him was matched with another where we were at each other's throats. It was almost like a balance.

Tensions reached an all-time high one fateful morning when I walked in on Alexander, who I thought was in the hotel gym, freshly showered, clad in nothing but a towel. I froze in the doorway, my eyes involuntarily drinking in the sight of his toned body, water droplets glistening on his chest like tiny diamonds.

“Olivia,” he breathed, a hint of surprise coloring his voice. He didn’t move to cover himself further, and desire flickered between us like a live wire.

“Sorry, I... didn’t know you were in here,” I managed to stammer, my pulse racing wildly. It was impossible to ignore the heat that passed between us, the irrefrangible pull that threatened to draw me into his orbit.

“Clearly,” he smirked, inclining his head to the side. “Is there something you need?”

“Uh, no,” I replied, feeling my face flush with embarrassment. “I just wanted to grab my toothbrush.”

“Go ahead,” he said, stepping aside to clear the path to the sink. There was a teasing glint in his eyes, and I couldn’t help but be entranced by the way his muscles shifted and flexed beneath his damp skin.

I crossed the room, hyperaware of his closeness. The scent of his soap filled my nostrils, a heady mix of cedarwood and something uniquely Alexander. As I reached for my toothbrush, our hands brushed against each other, and a jolt of electricity surged through me.

“Sorry,” he murmured, his voice raspy and seductive. His gaze met mine, and it was as if time stood still.

“Alexander,” I whispered, unable to tear my eyes away from his. I knew I should walk away, put some distance between us before this went any further. But there was something about this electrifying connection that kept me rooted to the spot, unwilling to break the spell.

“Olivia,” he responded, his voice barely audible. Our gazes remained locked, the air around us crackling with desire. My heart hammered in my chest, and I was acutely aware of how little separated us, of how easily we could cross that invisible line.

But just as quickly as the moment materialized, it vanished. Alexander cleared his throat, stepping back and reaching for his clothes. “I’ll let you get ready,” he said, his voice carefully neutral.

“Right,” I replied, my voice trembling. As he exited the bathroom, I leaned against the counter, trying to calm my racing thoughts and quell the ache that had settled deep within me.

It was only our fifth day there, and we were scheduled to stay through the next week. I didn’t know how I was going to make it through if we kept hurtling forward at this trajectory.

Chapter Twelve

Olivia

The air was thick with an unspoken tension as Alexander and I stood in the massive conference room of Waverly Global Enterprises, waiting for the first meeting of the day to begin. The room felt too warm, or maybe it was just my nerves that had me feeling overheated.

“Olivia,” he said softly. My name rolled off his tongue like a caress. “Are you ready for this?”

I nodded, trying to focus on the upcoming meeting, but all I could think about was how close we were standing. The scent of his body filled my nostrils, making it difficult to concentrate. Heat radiated from his body, and I was tempted to step even closer, just to experience the warmth of him against me.

“Absolutely,” I replied, hoping the slight quiver in my voice wasn’t noticeable. “Let’s do this.”

Throughout the day, Alexander and I found ourselves in situations where our physical proximity was impossible to ignore. It was both thrilling and disconcerting, leaving me torn between wanting more and maintaining a professional distance.

During one of the breaks, I made my way to the restroom to splash some cold water on my face. I pulled my phone out and opened mine and Ethan’s text thread.

I already told him about the room mishap—which he found much more humorous than I did—and there’s another waiting from this morning. *Go kill the presentation, girl!*

I rolled my eyes, picturing him cheering me on. I once saw him do a full cheer routine for his teammate at a dive bar’s game of darts. He could be a lot, but that’s kind of what I loved about him. He knew how to lift my mood up—and he gave the best fashion advice.

As I pushed open the door that led to the hall with the bathrooms, I nearly collided with Alexander who was just exiting. Our eyes locked for a moment, and I felt a jolt of lust course through me. He stepped aside, allowing me to pass, and I caught another whiff of his intoxicating scent as our bodies brushed against each other.

“Sorry,” I mumbled.

“Nothing to apologize for,” he replied, his eyes never leaving mine.

I quickly ducked into the restroom. It was becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the attraction between us. My body craved his touch, and I was finding it harder to resist the urge to explore this connection further.

When I walked back out of the bathroom, I was surprised to find Natalia, one of the suppliers for Waverly Global who also happened to look like a supermodel, leaning into Alexander. I bit my tongue as the door swung closed behind me, and the sound of it clicking drew their attention to me.

Alexander’s eyes immediately darkened, and I didn’t know how to take it. He slipped out from under Natalia, though.

“Natalia, I think you have met Olivia, my executive assistant.” He stepped up behind me and I tried to hide my smirk. It felt like in that moment he was picking me. I shouldn’t want him to, but I wasn’t going to let the momentary thrill go.

“Yes,” she purred, stepping forward with her eyes still on Alexander. “As I was saying, I’d love to set up a meeting to talk about your supplier needs.”

“We’d love to.” He cleared his throat. “I believe we have some availability tomorrow morning.”

I nodded along and watched as Natalia’s mouth curved down. For a moment, her eyes flicked to mine. “I was thinking a private meeting,” she said.

I turned to look at Alexander, who was tense. His eyes stayed forward, even as his jaw worked. Then, a smile broke across his face. “I’m sorry, Natalia, but we are running late for a meeting now. I will be in touch, though, to set up a time.”

Alexander pressed a hand to my lower back to usher me along toward the elevator. When she was out of earshot, I murmured, “We don’t have another meeting.”

“I know,” he shot back. “Just keep walking.”

I tried to hide my smirk as we stepped into the elevator. When we turned around, Natalia was still standing there, watching us with a predatory gaze. The doors slowly slid closed, and once she could no longer see us, I burst out laughing.

Alexander smirked as he watched me. “You found that amusing.”

“I didn’t know there could be so much sex appeal in business negotiations.”

He scoffed. “There was no sex appeal.”

I rolled my eyes. “Oh, please. She was so flirting with you.”

He shrugged. “I hadn’t noticed.”

For a moment, I let that sink in. Did he really not? Was he preoccupied with something—someone—else? I couldn’t imagine a guy like Alexander not going for a girl like Natalia. Yet, he left her standing there.

When I looked back up at him, he was watching me with a serious expression, and I decided not to press it. Instead, when the doors opened to the lobby, I asked, “Where are we going?”

He pressed his hand to my lower back—which felt way better than it should—and murmured, “Let’s call it a day.”

In the suite, Alexander leaned over my shoulder to review the documents I had prepared, his breath warm on my neck. His firm chest pressed against my back, and it took all my self-control not to lean into him, seeking comfort in his embrace.

“Your research is impressive,” he murmured, his lips dangerously close to my ear. “I knew you were the right person for the job.”

“Thank you,” I replied, my voice barely a whisper. Despite the compliment, I couldn’t help but wonder if he was referring to more than just our professional relationship.

As the day wore on, the moments of physical closeness grew more frequent, each one leaving me more flustered than the

last. The mix of attraction and discomfort was too much, threatening to consume me entirely. And yet, amidst the chaos of these conflicting emotions, I couldn't help but believe that there was something undeniably special about the bond Alexander and I shared.

“Olivia, if you could hand me the financial reports,” Alexander requested, his voice deep and steady.

“Of course.” I reached for the documents, fumbling slightly before handing them over. Our fingers briefly touched, and I inhaled sharply, trying to mask the effect he had on me.

“Thank you,” he murmured, his eyes locking onto mine for a brief second. There was an intensity in his gaze that made me feel exposed, as though he could see the desire I was desperately trying to hide.

As we sat across from one another at the polished conference table, I was acutely aware of every move he made. The way his muscles flexed beneath his perfectly tailored suit, the confident arch of his brow, the curve of his full lips as he spoke—all these details made it increasingly difficult to focus on anything else.

“Olivia?”

“Sorry, what were you saying?” I stammered, cursing myself for losing focus.

“Would you mind sharing your thoughts on our strategy moving forward?” He asked, his tone patient yet expectant.

“Right, um...” I cleared my throat and gathered my thoughts, forcing myself to concentrate. “I believe we should emphasize our unique selling points—our commitment to

quality, our dedication to customer satisfaction, and our innovative products.”

“Excellent points,” he agreed, nodding thoughtfully. “Let’s dive deeper into those aspects and see how we can leverage them for maximum impact.”

“Of course,” I replied, momentarily victorious in my ability to stay on track. But the closeness of his body worked against me, making it all too easy to slip back into the dangerous territory of longing.

“Olivia, would you mind passing me that pen?” Alexander asked. My heart drummed as I reached for it, my fingers brushing against his outstretched hand. The electricity between us was undeniable, and the air around us seemed to crackle with anticipation.

“Thank you,” he murmured, his eyes never leaving mine.

“I’m hungry,” he said quietly, still not looking away. “Are you... hungry?”

I nodded numbly, and he helped me to my feet, but instead of stepping away, he moved closer. There was barely an inch of space between us, the tension between us singing like a live wire, every touch sending shivers down my spine.

“Olivia,” he murmured, his breath hot against my ear. “We need to talk about what’s happening here.”

I swallowed hard, forcing myself to maintain composure. “What do you mean?” My voice wavered, betraying my inner turmoil.

Alexander leaned against the wall. “I know what you said... that you didn’t want this.” He ran a hand through his hair,

frustration evident on his face. “But you can’t tell me you don’t feel this? You want to ignore everything over something as small as your job position?”

His words sliced through me like a knife, but I knew he was right. And yet our professional responsibilities had to come first. “I think it’s best,” I whispered, my gaze darting to the floor.

He sighed. “Fine,” he replied. “I’ll be strictly professional from now on.” His voice was firm, but I detected a hint of sadness beneath the resolve.

“Agreed,” I said, though I ached at the thought of suppressing the fire that burned within me.

Chapter Thirteen

Olivia

Alexander and I collapsed on the couches in the sitting room, finding a rare moment of respite from our demanding meetings. In the low light of the fading evening, his eyes seemed to hold a thousand secrets.

“Tell me something about yourself, Olivia,” he said, his voice inviting. “Something no one else knows.”

I hesitated for a moment. Swallowing hard, I decided to trust him with a piece of my past. “When I was younger, I used to sneak out at night to dance in the rain.”

Alexander’s lips curled into a genuine smile, his eyes twinkling with curiosity. “That sounds incredibly liberating. What about now? Do you still dance in the rain?”

“Sadly, no,” I confessed, a pang of nostalgia washing over me. “But sometimes, when it rains, I am reminded of those moments.”

“Perhaps one day, you’ll find the courage to dance again,” he suggested, placing a gentle hand on my arm.

“Maybe,” I replied, allowing myself to lean into his comfort. “Your turn. Tell me something about you, something you haven’t shared with anyone.”

He took a deep breath, his fingers drumming against his thigh as he searched for the right words. “All right. When I was in college, I secretly dreamed of being a writer. A novelist,

specifically. But my father had other plans, and I ended up in the corporate world instead.”

“Wow,” I responded, genuinely surprised by his admission. “I never would’ve guessed. Do you ever think about writing that novel?”

“Sometimes,” he admitted, his eyes distant as if envisioning a different path. “But I’ve learned to find fulfillment in other aspects of my life.”

The scent of Alexander’s cologne wrapped around me, drawing me in like a moth to a flame. I felt the urge to share more, to let him see the parts of me that few others had glimpsed.

His fingers tightened around mine, the intensity of our connection growing stronger with each passing moment. We sat there, our gazes locked, as the world around us faded into insignificance.

Alexander’s eyes roamed over my face, as if he was trying to memorize every curve and angle before committing it to heart.

“Fuck, I can’t take this,” he muttered so quietly I’m not sure I was supposed to hear it. “Can I…” he started, his voice barely a whisper, but it reverberated through me like thunder. “Can I touch you?”

My chest tightened, the desire making my skin tingle. Somehow, this felt more intimate than anything we had shared so far. “Yes,” I breathed out.

His fingertips traced along my collarbone, the pads of his fingers warm and soft against my flushed skin. The sensation

ignited sparks that spread like wildfire through my body.

Our gazes remained locked, unwilling to break the spell that wove itself around us. Alexander moved in even closer, and I felt his breath hot against my lips. My pulse accelerated, the space between us practically nonexistent now.

“I hope you’ll forgive me for this, but I can’t stand it any longer,” he said, sliding his hand behind my head and tipping it back.

I knew I needed to stop it, but I didn’t have the strength to. I wanted him as bad as he wanted me, and he searched my eyes, finding that affirmation written there before leaning in.

His lips met mine, gentle and tender at first, as if testing the waters. But as our mouths melded together, the kiss grew deeper, more passionate. Our tongues danced with each other, a sensual tango that sent waves of pleasure coursing through me.

Chapter Fourteen

Olivia

I felt Alexander's arms encircling my waist, pulling me up to my feet. The heat of his body aroused me, and I couldn't help but lean into him. He never broke away from me, his lips devouring mine with a hunger that left me breathless.

"Jump," he whispered against my lips, and I didn't need to be told twice. I wrapped my legs around his waist as he lifted me off the ground, his strong arms supporting me effortlessly. A surge of adrenaline coursed through me, synchronizing with the firmness of his hold.

As we made our way towards the bed, I caught sight of our reflection in the full-length mirror—Alexander's tall, muscular frame dwarfing my petite form, our eyes locked together in a heated gaze.

Alexander laid me down on the bed, and my back sank into the soft mattress, my body aching for him. With a predatory grin, he pushed my skirt up, revealing my bare skin beneath. A low growl escaped his throat as he took in the sight.

"Such a good girl," he murmured, his voice dripping with desire, "always ready for me."

My cheeks flushed at his praise, and I arched my back, silently begging for more. The anticipation built, my skin tingling with electricity as I thought about what was coming next. In that moment, I was completely his, and I couldn't

imagine wanting anything more than to surrender myself to Alexander.

As Alexander's strong hand encircled my wrists above my head, I felt an electrifying mix of vulnerability and excitement. His other hand traveled down my body, leaving a trail of goosebumps in its wake. My breathing became shallow; I was eager for him to continue his exploration.

"Alexander," I whispered, the sound barely audible. He smirked, obviously aware of the effect he had on me.

"Olivia," he admonished playfully, his voice low and sultry. "I want to savor every moment with you."

His fingers glided between our bodies, teasingly slow, making me squirm beneath him. I bit my lip, trying to keep quiet as waves of primal lust washed over me. I had never felt so exposed, so completely at someone's mercy, but there was nowhere else I'd rather be.

"Please," I pleaded, unable to contain myself any longer.

"Shh... just let go, Olivia. Trust me." The sincerity in his voice sent a wave of emotion through me, and I nodded, ready to give myself over to him completely.

With deliberate care, Alexander lined himself up between my legs, and I couldn't help but release a soft moan as he pushed in slowly. My body stretched to accommodate his size, the sensation both pleasurable and overwhelming. His grip on my wrists tightened ever so slightly, a gentle reminder of his control over me.

"Alexander," I gasped, my voice quivering with desire. He leaned in closer, brushing his lips against my earlobe, sending

shivers through my entire body.

“Let yourself feel, Olivia. Don’t hold back,” he murmured, his breath hot on my skin. The thought of completely surrendering to Alexander filled me with a hunger I had never known before, and I couldn’t help but let out a throaty moan in response.

“Good girl,” he praised, and the warmth of his approval spread through me like wildfire.

My breath caught in my throat as Alexander leaned down to whisper into my ear, his dominance taking over every inch of me. “You are mine, Olivia.”

His eyes, filled with lust and carnal passion, never left mine as he adjusted our positions. My body was completely at his mercy, and I craved the intensity of the connection we shared.

“Wrap your legs around my waist,” Alexander commanded, his voice firm. I obliged without hesitation, feeling him drive deeper inside me. The sensation left me gasping for air, my body trembling with need.

“Alexander... oh God,” I moaned, unable to contain my pleasure any longer. I gripped the bed sheets tightly in my hands, my wrists still held captive by Alexander’s strong grasp. As he moved faster, pushing me further into the mattress, our bodies became a symphony of passion—each movement a crescendo of ecstasy that threatened to consume us both.

“Look at me, Olivia,” Alexander growled, and I met his gaze once more, losing myself within the stormy depths of his eyes. It was as if he could see straight through to my soul,

baring all my vulnerabilities, desires, and fears before him. And yet, I was not afraid. This was where I belonged, entwined in that moment of raw and unadulterated passion with him.

“Tell me what you want,” he demanded. My mind raced, trying to find the words to express the yearning that consumed me.

“More,” I panted, desperation edging my voice. “Please, Alexander... I want more of you.”

“Good girl,” he praised, his lips curling into a predatory grin as he drove into me with renewed vigor. The pleasure was almost too much to bear, and my body tensed around him, teetering on the edge of release.

With each thrust, Alexander brought me closer to the edge of pleasure. His grip on my wrists tightened, the electricity between us burning hotter than ever.

“Are you close?” he rasped, his voice strained with exertion.

“Y-yes,” I stammered, my breath hitching as the pleasure threatened to consume me. He pressed his lips against mine, the taste of our passion mingling together.

“Let it happen, Olivia,” he murmured into our kiss, his voice commanding. “I want to see you unravel for me.”

A surge of exhilaration washed over me as I surrendered myself to his command, my body trembling on the precipice of ecstasy. The anticipation built within me, a coil winding tighter and tighter until I could barely breathe.

“Please, Alexander,” I begged, my words muffled by our kisses. “I need it... now.”

That's all it took. With one final, powerful thrust, Alexander pushed us both over the edge. My vision blurred as waves of pleasure crashed over me, drowning out everything but the overwhelming sensation coursing through my body.

"Olivia!" Alexander gasped, his own climax overtaking him. Our bodies trembled in unison, each shudder sending ripples of pleasure coursing through us.

As the aftershocks faded, Alexander released my wrists, our sweat-slicked bodies collapsing onto the bed in a tangled embrace. I buried my face in the crook of his neck, inhaling his scent mixed with the musk of our passion.

"God, Olivia," he whispered, his breath hot against my ear. "You have no idea what you did to me."

"Alexander," I murmured, my body still humming with the remnants of our passion, "you make me feel alive."

We lay there, limbs entwined, pulses still pounding, reveling in the aftermath of our desire. The world beyond our embrace faded away, leaving only the connection between us—raw, powerful, and utterly consuming.

Chapter Fifteen

Olivia

I jolted upright in the hotel bed, gasping for air. I was naked, and the cold sweat covering my body made me shudder. I glanced beside me—Alexander, his toned body on display under the white sheets, still fast asleep. I cursed myself for letting this happen again. My resolve crumbled around him like sand slipping through my fingers.

“Stupid... weak...” I muttered, forcing myself out of the soft bed, desperate to put distance between us. The cool hardwood floor greeted my feet as I stumbled towards the bathroom, pulling a blanket up and around my body.

“Olivia?” Alexander’s sleep-roughened voice cut through the air like a knife. His hand wrapped around my arm. “Where are you going?”

“Let go,” I snapped, yanking my arm away from his grip. But he only tightened it, his eyes darkening with concern and confusion. “I need to get dressed.”

“Stop,” he commanded. “Tell me what’s wrong.”

“God, I am so stupid,” I whispered, tears stinging the corners of my eyes. Despite his best efforts, I managed to break free from his grasp, putting a few precious feet between us.

But Alexander wasn’t giving up that easily. He leapt out of bed, crossing the space between us in an instant, pinning me against the wall. His powerful chest pressed against mine, our

breaths mingling in the air. I tried to ignore the fact that he was naked, but I could feel his arousal pressed against my hip. It only made my thoughts more scrambled.

“Is it because of our age difference?” he asked. His voice was hard, but I swore I saw a flash of insecurity in his eyes. “Do you think I’m some ancient relic taking advantage of you?”

A bitter laugh escaped my lips, the sound echoing through the room. “You think I care about our age difference? Is the powerful CEO actually insecure about something so trivial?”

“Then what is it?” His eyes bore into mine, searching for an answer.

“Fine,” I spat out, my chest heaving. “It’s because you’re my boss, and a relationship between us could derail my career if discovered.” *Or when you got tired of it.*

Alexander’s grip loosened as he absorbed my words, his expression softening. He released me, stepping back to give me space. There was a part of me that yearned for more—for commitment and something deeper. But could Alexander offer that? Could he truly commit?

“Olivia,” he said, running a hand through his disheveled hair. “I understand your concerns, but it isn’t like that. I wouldn’t fire you—I think I proved that when you called this off and I didn’t let it affect the workplace.”

I blinked, letting that soak in. I guess he didn’t. He could have taken my rejection out on me, but he didn’t.

Still, I wasn’t sure if he just wanted the forbidden fruit. We were trapped in a hotel, and I was an easy lay that he had to

work to get. I was hesitant to believe that he wouldn't toss me aside once someone better came along.

"It doesn't have to be bad," he continued. "Workplace relationships only become a scandal if the boss doesn't know—which—" He smirked, "he does. Or if someone is married." He raised his left hand. "I'm not. Or if it goes down in flames. I can assure you that I know how to keep my personal and business life separate, as I've proved. Whatever happens with us won't jeopardize you."

I stared at him, wanting desperately to believe that he was telling the truth. And as I turned it over in my mind, I knew that there was no reason not to believe him. He was right in every way.

And I wanted this. I really did. It wasn't just that it was exciting—both because he was my boss and because he was so much older—but I genuinely enjoyed being with him. I had started to let down my walls, share things with him I didn't expect. And the amazing sex didn't hurt at all.

"If there's any other reason, then I'll let it go," he added. "If you don't want me like this, if you have someone else, anything, I won't say another word about it." He sucked in a deep breath. "But if you keep pushing me away because of your job, I'm afraid I can't let you go."

Warmth burst through my chest, and his eyes softened as he studied me. Even though my head was screaming at me that it was an act, that he was a powerful CEO who knew how to play women, my body wouldn't hear of it. I wanted him. That's all there was to it.

"There isn't anything else," I said.

He smirked. “Are you going to keep making me chase you then?”

I sighed softly, even though a smile played on my lips. “Fine. I’ll give us a chance, but on one condition.” His eyes met mine as he waited for me to continue. “I need to be the only one you’re seeing.”

“Of course,” he replied without hesitation, his eyes locked onto mine with unwavering intensity. “You’re the only woman I want, Olivia. I promise you.”

“Okay then,” I said, barely able to contain the flutter of anticipation that danced through my chest. It was ridiculous how easily he managed to incite these conflicting emotions within me—infuriating and enthralling me all at once.

“Go on,” he murmured, releasing me from his spell. “Get ready for the day. We have much to do.”

With a nod, I rushed towards the bathroom. The cool tile beneath my feet grounded me as I leaned against the counter, taking a moment to process what just happened. A part of me was still uncertain about diving headfirst into this uncharted territory, but another part couldn’t help but feel excited at the prospect of exploring something deeper with Alexander.

My fingers trembled slightly as I grabbed my phone, quickly texting my best friend Mia the news.

I... slept with Alexander. Again, I sent, unable to suppress my grin.

Her reply was immediate. *I told you! And it was amazing right?*

It was. And he wants me to give this a chance. I sent it, and then I added, He promised not to see anyone else.

OMFG!!! I giggled as I read her response. OLIVIA! That's incredible. Are you going to? I would. I mean, I know he's yours and all, but he is super fine. And you know what they say about older guys.

I rolled my eyes and ignored that last comment. I am. I'm not really sure what that means, though. Is he wanting a permanent hook-up? Or is he trying to...date me?

He's trying to date you!!! Obviously. Before I answered, another message came through. I'm happy for you, but just be careful. He lives a very different life from us and I don't want you to get hurt.

She's voicing the exact same thing I'm afraid of. But I don't want to say that, so instead, I sent, I will.

I set the phone down and turned on the shower, staring at myself in the mirror. My skin was flushed, my eyes bright, and the excitement I was trying to shove down was glowing through me. Yes, I was afraid, but I also really wanted this.

As the shower began to steam up the room, I dropped the blanket I had dragged in here, my skin prickling with a mix of anxiety and desire. Inhaling deeply, I stepped into the cascading water, letting it wash away my doubts and fears. For now, at least, I chose to embrace the unexpected journey that lay ahead with Alexander. And maybe, just maybe, we would find something worth fighting for in each other.

Chapter Sixteen

Olivia

The muffled sound of Alexander's voice seeped through the thin hotel wall, waking me from my slumber. I blinked away the remnants of sleep and slipped out of the bed, padding barefoot to the connecting door.

"Tonight? That's perfect," he said, pausing for a response on the other end. My heart raced as I hoped that he was talking about us.

"Alright then, it's a date," he confirmed, hanging up the phone. I quickly retreated back into the bed, my face flushed with excitement. When he re-entered the shared suite, he looked up at me, his eyes softening as they met mine.

"Olivia, would you like to go to dinner with me tonight? Just the two of us, no work involved." His words made my spirits swell, and I couldn't help but beam, nodding enthusiastically.

"I'd love that, Alexander."

"Great," he replied with a smile, his gaze lingering on me before he left for a meeting.

Throughout the day, anticipation coursed through me like an electric current. As evening approached, I stood in front of the mirror, meticulously applying makeup and selecting an elegant yet subtly alluring outfit out of the limited selection of clothes I brought with me. I wanted to look perfect, to show Alexander how much this meant to me.

As I finished applying my mascara, I felt that familiar flutter in my stomach. That night was supposed to be our first real date, just Alexander and me. No business meetings, no negotiations—just us. I gave myself a once-over in the mirror: crimson dress hugging my curves, heels adding an extra bit of height, and hair cascading around my shoulders. It had been so long since I had felt that excited about a date.

My phone buzzed on the vanity, breaking my reverie. Picking it up, I saw Alexander’s name flash across the screen. I sucked in a breath.

“Hey,” I said, trying to sound casual. “You almost ready?”

“Olivia, I’m so sorry.” His voice was tense, rushed. “I have to stay late at the office. Something urgent came up.”

“Of course,” I replied, disappointment creeping into my chest. “It’s okay, don’t worry about it.”

“I swear, I’ll make it up to you,” he said, his voice softening. “Please, don’t be upset.”

“Really, it’s fine,” I assured him, even though the sinking feeling in my stomach told me otherwise. “We can reschedule.”

“Thank you for understanding,” he said before hanging up.

I took a deep breath, trying to shake off the melancholy fog settling over me. I changed out of my dress and into something more comfortable—leggings and an oversized sweater. Since he’d be late, I decided to go ahead and order room service too. Once the order was placed, I padded barefoot across the plush carpet and flopped onto the couch in

the sitting room of our shared hotel suite, starting to flip through TV channels.

The room service came quickly, and I ate my meal, trying not to stare at the clock. But as the time ticked by, I couldn't help the way my gut sank. By the time I finished eating and cleaned up, it had been nearly an hour since Alexander called.

Needing a distraction, I grabbed my phone and opened Instagram to mindlessly scroll through pictures. That's when I saw it: a post from a celebrity-spotting account. Thirty minutes ago, someone had submitted a photo of Alexander and Natalia, that damn supplier that had been chasing him. She was stunning, and I had told Alexander more than once that she was flirting with him. Underneath was the caption, *Does gorgeous billionaire Alexander Bennett have a new girl?*

In the photo, he was holding the door open for her, his body language attentive. Natalia's hand was splayed across his chest, her eyes locked on his as they entered a restaurant. There was no one else in the picture—just them.

A cocktail of betrayal and hurt churned within me as I stared at the image. “Un-fucking-believable,” I muttered under my breath. The fact that he had lied to me stung like a slap in the face. He had just told me yesterday that he wouldn't see anyone else, and now he had been out with her? When I was supposed to be on a date with him?

And as much as it hurt, I could have taken it if he hadn't made those promises yesterday. If he had let it be a mistake and then gone out with her, it would have hurt. But after what he had promised me? It felt like a punch to the gut.

I tossed the phone aside, anger and pain swirling inside me like a hurricane. All my excitement for our date had evaporated, replaced by an overwhelming sense of loss. How could he have done this to me? With her, of all people?

My chest constricted, and I wrapped my arms around myself tightly, trying to hold back the tears prickling at the corners of my eyes. What was supposed to be our night together had turned into a cruel reminder of how little I truly mattered to him.

I stared at the phone, all the terrible thoughts racing through my mind. Was this what Alexander really thought of me? Was I just a toy to him, a harmless distraction until someone more worthy stole his attention away?

It hurt. It was torture. I couldn't help but think about the long hours I had spent helping with the negotiations involving Natalia. I had been there, right by Alexander's side, working tirelessly to make sure everything went smoothly. And now, he was probably laughing with her over drinks about how easily he had played his little assistant.

"Fuck them," I whispered fiercely, forcing myself to stand up. My body felt heavy, as if I were carrying the weight of my own shattered expectations. I marched into the bedroom, switched into my pajamas, and washed my face clean. I wanted to scrub away the whole night and forget it.

I was so frustrated that I called down to the front desk, asking if they had secondary accommodations for us yet. I didn't want to be there when Alexander came back. But the receptionist informed me that the hotel was still fully booked, and there was nothing she could do. I groaned out loud as I

slammed the phone down and resigned myself to just going to sleep. I didn't want to know how late he stayed out with her.

As I slipped under the cool sheets, my mind raced with thoughts of Alexander and Natalia together. I clenched my jaw, trying to block out the images of their hands entwined, the way they might have leaned in close to one another, the words he might have whispered in her ear. It was a torment I couldn't escape, even in the darkness of my own room.

Just when I felt like I couldn't take it anymore, the door opened, revealing Alexander's tall frame standing in the light of the hallway.

"Olivia," he murmured, and I tried not to move. Maybe he would think I was asleep. "I brought you some apple crumble from the bakery you like down the street."

Stay strong, I told myself. Don't give in over apple crumble.

He sighed and sat on the edge of the bed. "I'm sorry. Work ran late, and since I only had limited time here, I needed to take the opportunity—"

At that, I flipped around, fury pulsing through me. "Don't fucking lie to me."

His eyes widened before his lips pressed in a firm line and his eyebrows pinched. "Excuse me?"

"You said you had to stay late at the office?" I gritted my teeth. "I know you were out with Natalia. So don't fucking lie to me. I already know the truth. You should have just had the decency to tell it to my face instead of going behind my back."

“Olivia,” he began, his voice low and hard. “It wasn’t like that. It was a business meeting. We want her as a supplier, and she insisted on going to dinner since it was getting late. She said she was leaving tomorrow and wouldn’t be back until after we were gone.”

“You looked really friendly to just be on business.”

He cocked a brow. “I find that hard to believe. I was completely professional all night.” I opened my mouth to argue, and his eyes darkened as his anger started to surface. “You’ve said before she was flirting with me, and I knew it. But you never once saw me act on her advances. If there was any other way I could have secured her business, I would have, but this was my only chance. Still, I didn’t do anything with her. We had a meal and finalized a deal. That’s it.”

I gritted my teeth, not wanting to believe him. “Then why did you lie to me about it? If it was nothing, why couldn’t you tell me that when you called?”

He sighed, throwing his head back in exasperation. “Because I knew it would turn into this. I knew if I told you where I was going to be, you would overreact.”

My fists balled up. “Because that’s what I always do?”

He shrugged. “It seems to be a pattern.” He must have seen me growing angrier because he added, “You are young. We all do at your age.”

Now I was seething. “So I’m fucking immature now?”

“Fuck- No,” he huffed, dragging his hand through his hair. “I just didn’t want you to think that there is something else going on.”

“Because there is!” I was starting to really lose it now. “People only lie to hide something, Alexander. You were hiding what you were doing with her.”

“Olivia, it isn’t like that,” he insisted. “Natalia would only meet with me one on one, and I was trying to secure a deal. It was just a business dinner, nothing else.”

“Is that why she had her hand on your chest?” I snapped back, unable to hold back my pain any longer. The weight of betrayal wrapped around me like a shroud as images of Natalia’s touch burned into my mind.

“Olivia, please, that was nothing!” Alexander’s voice rose in frustration. “There is no one else! It was all for the business, I swear!”

“Really?” I scoffed, shaking my head in disbelief. “If you had just told me the truth from the beginning, I might have believed you, Alexander. But you lied to me once, and now I can’t trust anything you say.”

“Olivia,” he said, his voice a mix between a command and a plea as he reached out for me. His fingers brushed against my arm, but I recoiled from his touch as if scalded by a flame. His eyes, once a source of comfort and desire, now reflected the chasm that had grown between us.

“Get away from me,” I hissed, unable to bear his touch any longer. The bitter taste of betrayal lingered on my tongue, and the last shred of trust between us crumbled into dust.

“Talk to me, Olivia,” Alexander demanded, his voice roughened with frustration and raw emotion. But I couldn’t give him what he wanted; not this time.

I rolled over on the bed, my back to him, feeling the cool sheets against my flushed skin. The air in the room was charged with tension, heavy with the weight of our broken trust. My heart ached, an ever-present throbbing that matched the rhythm of my quickened breaths.

“Olivia,” he said again, softer this time, almost gentle. His hand brushed against my shoulder, his fingers trembling with the effort to make contact. But I couldn’t allow myself to be touched by him—not when every caress felt like a lie.

“Come on,” he whispered, his breath hot against my neck, stirring the fine hairs there. “I’ve explained.”

“Explained?” I choked out, choking back the tears that threatened to spill over. “You lied. How do I know that you aren’t just lying now?”

“Damn it, Olivia!” He let out a frustrated growl, pulling his hand away from me as if burned by my words. “I told you there wouldn’t be anyone else! I am a man of my word, and it’s insulting you would think otherwise.”

“Insulting?” I echoed, my voice hollow and devoid of warmth. “Out of the two of us, you’re not the one who should be insulted. No one lied to you, went behind your back, and made you feel discarded.” I snorted. “You’re just embarrassed you got caught.”

“Olivia...” His voice was strained, the sound cutting through me like a knife. But still, I refused to look at him, refused to let him see the vulnerability that lay beneath my anger.

There was a long moment of silence, punctuated only by the ragged sound of our breathing. Finally, Alexander spoke

again, his tone resigned. “Fine. If you won’t listen to me, then there’s nothing more I can say.”

And with that, he walked away, the sound of his retreating footsteps echoed in the empty space between us. As the door closed behind him, I finally allowed myself to break down, tears streaming down my face as I clutched at the cold sheets for any semblance of comfort. But no matter how tightly I held on, it was clear that whatever we had—whatever could have been—had slipped through my grasp like water through clenched fingers. And all that remained was the bitter taste of betrayal and the memory of what might have been.

Chapter Seventeen

Olivia

I stood in the middle of the bustling office, heavy with the weight of Alexander's decision. The hum of conversation and clatter of keyboards did little to drown out the doubts that gnawed at me like a relentless tide, eroding away any semblance of confidence I once held.

"Hey, Olivia," Max, the receptionist at the company we had been working with for a few days, greeted me with a warm smile as he passed by, but I barely managed a weak nod in response. My thoughts were consumed by Alexander and the uncertainty plaguing our relationship. Did we ever share a connection as deep as I thought? Or was it all just a beautiful illusion?

"Olivia, are you alright?" Natalie, who I had been working side by side with all week, asked, her eyes filled with concern. I forced a tight-lipped smile, my insides churning with an intensity that threatened to spill over.

"I'm fine," I lied, "just a lot on my mind." I didn't want to burden anyone with my internal struggles. Besides, they had their own lives and problems to deal with.

And my secrets could have gotten me fired.

The growing insecurities within me intensified as I sat down at my desk, staring blankly at my computer screen. Was I nothing more than a fleeting distraction for Alexander, a

temporary escape from the demands of his career? What if I hadn't been enough to hold his interest, his passion?

"Olivia, can you get these reports to Alexander?" Michaela, their head of HR who had stepped in to help Eric, the CEO's executive assistant who was on leave, handed me a stack of papers as she walked by.

"Sure," I said, attempting to push my personal turmoil aside and focus on my professional responsibilities. But my emotions refused to be suppressed, bubbling beneath the surface like a volcano on the verge of eruption.

I made my way upstairs, finding Alexander alone in an office that Eric was letting us use while we were there. I rapped my knuckles on the door, and he looked up.

"Here are some reports from Michaela," I said as I handed him the papers.

"Thanks, Olivia," he said, his eyes lingering on me for a moment longer than necessary before returning to his work. It was in that fleeting moment that I was reminded of the passion we once shared, the fire that had burned between us.

"I'm going back to the hotel. I don't feel well."

He nodded, and I turned around, hating the way it made me hurt.

As I left his office, I was left to grapple with the turmoil within me, aching for the reassurance and understanding that seemed so far beyond my reach.

I scrolled through the latest memes Ethan had sent me when I heard footsteps coming down the hall. I sighed, knowing without a doubt it was Alexander.

I tapped out a quick shouted *LOL* to Ethan, feeling a little guilty that I hadn't told him that Alexander and I had both slept together and had a falling out. I had been dodging his messages a little. It made me miss home even more. It was even worse because I was ignoring Mia, too.

The scent of Alexander's cologne floated on the air as he stepped into the suite, a potent reminder of our once fiery connection. The aroma sent a shiver down my spine, teasing me with memories of tangled limbs and heated breaths. My senses sharpened, but the doubts that had taken root within me refused to be silenced.

"Olivia," Alexander said, leaning against the counter with a cup of coffee in his hand. His eyes were warm and inviting, but I couldn't shake the feeling that they hid something darker beneath the surface. "I think we need to talk."

I shook my head. "I told you I wasn't feeling well." I didn't even look up at him.

"You've been avoiding me," his voice deepened, his anger clear.

"No, I've been busy," I replied curtly, keeping my gaze focused on the ceiling above me. The pretense allowed me to avoid the intensity of his stare, but did little to quiet the turmoil brewing inside me. "Lots of work to get done, you know."

“Of course,” he said, taking a sip of his coffee. “But I was hoping we could talk, maybe clear the air between us. Things have been... strained lately.”

“Everything’s fine, Alexander,” I lied, my voice tight as I forced a smile onto my lips. The weight of his concern threatened to crush me, but I refused to allow him any closer. The uncertainty that plagued me was a barrier I wasn’t ready to dismantle. “I’m just swamped, that’s all.”

I didn’t tell him that there was nothing he could say to change my mind. I meant what I said. We couldn’t work. This was as close as we could ever be.

“All right,” he conceded, though I could tell he didn’t quite believe me. “But when you’re ready to talk, you know I’m here.”

“Thanks,” I mumbled, throwing an arm over my face.

I heard him heave a sigh, and then his shoes clicked across the floor until the bedroom door shut softly behind him. I knew he was showering, and the thought would have once sent a thrill through me. Now it just created an ache.

I ignored him when he ordered dinner and when he went to bed. And that night, I slept alone on the couch, finding it far more bearable than sharing the bed with him.

The hum of the office was a steady drone around me, but my thoughts were far from the work that I had been brought there for. My fingers hovered over the keyboard, tapping out an erratic rhythm that mirrored the dissonant symphony of emotions playing within me.

“Olivia,” Natalie, their marketing manager who had been generous enough to let me set up in her office all morning, interrupted my thoughts with her gentle voice. “Are you alright? You seem... distracted.”

“Sorry, Natalie,” I responded, trying to shake off the fog that had settled over me since last night’s encounter with Alexander. “I’ve just got a lot on my mind.”

“Let’s grab lunch together,” she suggested. “We can talk about it if you’d like.”

“Sure,” I agreed, grateful for the opportunity to unburden myself, even if only a little.

As we settled into our seats at a nearby cafe, the aroma of fresh coffee and warm bread enveloping us, I struggled to find the words to express the tangled knot of emotions that had taken root in my chest.

Natalie broke the quiet first. “What’s up?”

“I’m not sure how much I should say,” I confessed. “It’s not... work related.” She smirked, so I added, “Or appropriate.”

She giggled. “Now I’m interested.” She leaned forward, patting my hand. “Don’t worry. I won’t say anything. I’ve enjoyed having you around, and I hate seeing you like this.”

“Alexander and I... we’re not in a good place right now,” I confided, tracing the rim of my cup with a trembling finger. “I feel like I don’t know where I stand with him anymore.”

Natalie reached across the table, covering my hand with hers. “That must have been so hard for you,” she empathized, her touch offering solace amidst my turmoil. “I’ve seen things

like this, you know. Business trips put a lot of strain on relationships, even business ones. And these negotiations have been brutal.”

“Thank you, Natalie,” I murmured, not wanting to tell her that this relationship wasn’t business in the slightest. “Your support means more to me than you’ll ever know.”

Our conversation continued, a balm for the ache that had burrowed deep within me. But as much as Natalie’s kind words soothed me, I couldn’t help but feel a gnawing sense of unease.

“Olivia! You’re needed in the conference room,” Max called out as soon as we returned.

I nodded, reluctantly extricating myself from the safety of Natalie’s embrace. As I strode through the office, the weight of my professional obligations chafed against the raw edges of my heart, creating a friction that set my nerves on edge.

Upon entering the conference room, I found myself face-to-face with Alexander. My skin prickled with awareness, as if every inch of my body longed to be touched by his hands, yet recoiled at the thought of the vulnerability that would entail.

“Let’s get started,” he said, his voice steady and commanding. I couldn’t help but notice the way his jaw tightened as he looked at me, betraying the strain that simmered beneath his composed facade.

My fingers curled into fists at my sides, nails biting into my palms as I fought to maintain control. The meeting proceeded around us, a storm of words and ideas that we navigated with feigned detachment. But beneath the surface, our connection

crackled and sparked, a live wire that threatened to scorch everything in its path.

As the meeting concluded, I stood to leave, desperate for space to breathe and think. But Alexander caught my gaze, holding me captive for a moment that stretched into eternity.

“Olivia,” he murmured. “Let’s talk.”

“Later,” I managed to choke out, breaking free from his magnetic pull. I fled the room and sought refuge in the corner of Natalie’s office, where I intended to hide until we could get back home.

Chapter Eighteen

Olivia

The weight of a thousand emotions pushed down on me, threatening to crush my chest as I paced the confines of the suite. Alexander was out at a business dinner that he had said I didn't have to attend.

I had thought it would be nice to have a reprieve from him, but after an hour of overthinking everything, I wasn't so sure. I knew that I needed to get this out, and there was one person I felt like I could trust that actually knew Alexander.

I loved talking to Mia, but she didn't know him. It felt different to tell someone that understood everything about Alexander without me having to explain. My fingers trembled, but I managed to dial Ethan's number and pressed the phone against my ear.

"Olivia?" His voice was a soothing balm, calming my nerves. We had been texting off and on while I had been on this trip, and I had missed working with him.

"Hey, Ethan," I choked out, swallowing the lump that had lodged itself in my throat. "I... I need someone to talk to."

"Of course, Olivia. What's going on?" He sounded genuinely concerned, and I felt my defenses beginning to crumble.

I heaved a sigh. "You remember how you joked that something would happen between Alexander and me if we were going to be sharing a room?"

He squealed, the noise so high-pitched I jerked the phone away from my ear. “I knew it! Is he amazing? He looks like he’d be amazing in bed. You have no idea how long I’ve been staring at that man just picturing what he could do to me. You are so lucky!”

A lump lodged in my throat. “I wasn’t that lucky,” I mumbled.

He heard it immediately, and his voice dropped down to a somber tone. “What happened?”

I had been wanting so long to just let it all out. I told Ethan everything, about how this started before we came on the trip, about Alexander’s promises, and about how worthless I felt when he didn’t show.

“Everything’s just... overwhelming,” I confessed, sinking onto my couch. “Ever since Alexander came into my life, it feels like I’ve lost control over my own emotions. I don’t know how to handle this.”

“Take a deep breath, Olivia,” Ethan instructed gently. I followed his advice, drawing in a shaky breath and then releasing it slowly. “Just take it one step at a time. Tell me what you’re feeling right now.”

“Scared,” I admitted. “Vulnerable. Like I am standing on the edge of a cliff and the world is pushing me towards the edge.”

“I know that has to be difficult, especially trapped alone with him,” Ethan reassured me. His words wrapped around me like a warm blanket, easing some of the tension that had been coiled tightly inside me. “But you don’t have to hold it all in.

At least not with me. You are allowed to feel scared and vulnerable, Olivia.”

I bit my lip, tears pricking at the corners of my eyes. “I know, Ethan. And I’m grateful for your support. It’s just... I feel like I’m losing myself in all of this. I’ve never been so unsure of my decisions, and it terrifies me.”

“Olivia, you are an incredibly strong and resilient woman. You’ve faced challenges before, and you’ve always come out on top,” Ethan said. “You have the ability to confront these emotions head-on and make the right choices for yourself. I believe in you.”

His faith in me sent a flicker of warmth through my chest. “Thank you, Ethan.” My voice was rough, but it was laced with gratitude.

“You have so much to offer, Olivia. Your intelligence, your passion, your unwavering determination... all of these qualities make you a force to be reckoned with.”

His words seeped into my skin, and I felt myself slowly beginning to unfurl, like a flower opening its petals to the sunlight after a storm. “Ethan, I’ve been feeling like I’m in over my head lately. Like I’m not enough.”

“Olivia,” he said firmly, “that couldn’t be further from the truth. You’re more than enough. You know it, and I know it. But sometimes we all need a little reminder.”

“Thank you for being here for me,” I murmured, my fingers tracing patterns on the soft fabric of my bedsheets. There was a flutter in my chest, a stirring of something warm and deeply rooted that bloomed with every word he uttered.

“Always, Olivia.”

In that moment I realized just how invaluable Ethan’s support was. He listened intently, offering guidance when needed but never imposing his own opinions upon me. Instead, he encouraged me to find my own path, gently prodding me toward.

“Thank you, Ethan,” I said, filled with gratitude. “For everything.”

“Anytime, Olivia,” he replied softly, a smile evident in his voice. “I’ll always be here for you.”

The final click of the phone disconnecting filled the room, and a wave of determination washed over me. I stood up, my body thrumming with energy, and walked to the floor-to-ceiling window. The city’s pulse reverberated beneath my fingertips as they pressed against the cool glass; every sensation amplified and alive. I took a deep breath, inhaling the scent of rain and the electric charge in the air.

Ethan was right; I needed to confront the difficult decisions and emotions that lay ahead, not shy away from them.

I stepped away from the window, my heels clicking on the hardwood floor like a metronome, keeping time with my racing thoughts. Every fiber of my being buzzed with anticipation, desire, and fear, but I refused to let those emotions control me.

As I paced the room, my hands fiddled with the hem of my blouse, twisting the fabric between my fingers. It was a nervous habit I’d had for years, a telltale sign that I was

grappling with something significant. And this time was no different.

Chapter Nineteen

Olivia

The silence in our shared suite was suffocating as Alexander and I packed our things. It was our last day at the hotel, and we hadn't spoken to each other since yesterday's debacle. He had returned relatively early last night, finding me asleep on the couch. I vaguely recalled being lifted into strong arms and carried to bed—a tender gesture that surprised me coming from him. But neither of us had acknowledged it, and now this oppressive quiet hung between us like a thick fog.

“Did you check the drawers?” Alexander asked, his voice cool and detached, shattering the silence.

“Um, yes,” I replied, avoiding his gaze as I zipped my suitcase shut. The memory of his arms around me still lingered, warming my skin, but I pushed it away. This was no time for fantasies; my heart and career were at stake.

“Let's go then,” he said, grabbing his own luggage.

We made our way to the car waiting for us outside, the tension between us growing with each step. Once inside, I stared out the window, the passing scenery a blur.

Could I keep working for Alexander and protect my feelings at the same time? My body yearned for his touch, remembering the heat of our previous encounters. Yet, could I truly trust a man who toyed with my emotions like a master puppeteer?

“Olivia, are you okay?” His question caught me off guard, and I turned to face him, searching his eyes for sincerity.

“Fine, just tired,” I lied, averting my gaze once more.

“Get some rest on the plane,” he suggested, his tone unreadable.

“Thanks,” I muttered, and fell silent again.

As we boarded his private plane, those inner demons continued to torment me.

The plane’s engines roared to life, drowning out my thoughts as we took off. As I stole a glance at Alexander, I caught him watching me out of the corner of his eye, but he quickly looked away, ignoring me for the rest of the flight.

The memory of his strong arms carrying me to bed still haunted me, making it impossible to focus on anything else.

As I rested my head against the window, I watched the clouds pass by like lovers entwined, their ethereal dance only amplifying my longing for Alexander. My skin tingled with the phantom sensation of his touch, and I couldn’t help but crave more.

“Olivia,” he said suddenly, snapping me out of my daydreams. “We’re about to land.”

“Right, thanks,” I muttered. I couldn’t let him know how much he affected me, especially now that he seemed so distant.

The landing was smooth, but my heart continued to race as we disembarked and parted ways. As I returned to my

apartment, the silence within its walls was deafening, swallowed whole by echoes of desire and doubt.

No sooner had I closed the door behind me than there was a knock. I opened it to find Ethan standing there with an armful of snacks.

“Movie night!” he announced, grinning from ear to ear. Relief washed over me; I could use the distraction. “I know you just got back, but it’s been too long! I had to come over.”

“Thank God you’re here,” I said, stepping aside to let him in. “I’ve had one hell of a trip.”

As we settled onto the couch, Ethan’s presence provided a sense of comfort and familiarity that I desperately needed.

“Everything’s going to be okay,” Ethan reassured me, squeezing my hand. And for now, that was enough.

The scent of buttery popcorn filled the room, mixing with the faint lavender aroma from my candles. Ethan popped the DVD into the player, and we both sank into the plush cushions of my couch. The flickering light from the TV screen cast a soft glow over us, illuminating the mischievous glint in Ethan’s hazel eyes.

“Okay, so you’d never guess who hooked up at the office party last week,” he whispered conspiratorially, a wicked grin tugging at the corners of his lips.

“Who?” I asked, my curiosity piqued as I took a handful of popcorn and stuffed it into my mouth.

“Sarah from HR and Brad from accounting,” Ethan revealed with a dramatic flourish, making me choke on my popcorn and laugh simultaneously.

“Shut up!” I exclaimed, swallowing hard to clear my throat.
“I thought Brad was dating that intern!”

“Apparently not anymore,” Ethan said, smirking as he tossed a few pieces of popcorn into his mouth.

We continued to gossip and laugh, the stress and tension from the trip gradually melting away as I lost myself in the familiar banter between us.

“Hey,” Ethan said, his voice suddenly serious as he turned to face me. “Did anything else happen between you and Alexander?”

I hesitated for a moment as I recalled the agonizing silence that stretched between us during our journey home. “We didn’t talk the entire way back,” I confessed, my voice barely above a whisper. “I don’t know where I stand with him now—personally or professionally.”

Ethan reached out and gently rested his hand on mine, the warmth of his touch seeping into my skin like a soothing balm. “It’s okay to be confused,” he murmured, his eyes filled with empathy and understanding. “Just don’t let it consume you, all right?”

I nodded, my throat tight with unshed tears.

“Thanks, Ethan,” I whispered, leaning into his embrace as we turned our attention back to the movie. For now, I allowed myself to find solace in the arms of my best friend, pushing aside the questions that still lingered in the shadows of my mind.

Chapter Twenty

Olivia

I headed toward the dimly lit bar to grab another drink, a low hum of conversation and laughter wrapping around me like a velvet curtain. I had already had a few at Ethan's insistence, and I was starting to feel good.

It was a small place right down the street from our office and our usual hangout spot. Even the management graced it with their presence sometimes.

Ethan, Sarah, and a few others were still in the back corner playing darts. I set the glass on the bar and motioned for another, turning to watch them as Ethan threw a dart and missed the board completely. I laughed under my breath, shaking my head.

"Olivia," a familiar voice called out, and I swiveled in its direction to find Christopher leaning against the bar, a drink clutched in his hand. Surprise washed over me, mingling with the unease that had been gnawing at me all evening when I spotted Alexander's brother. What could he want?

"Christopher," I greeted him, my voice steady despite my inner turmoil. "What are you doing here?"

"Alexander mentioned you might be here tonight," he explained, his gaze penetrating mine as if searching for something deep within me.

“Did he send you?” I asked, trying to keep the bitterness from my voice.

“No,” he chuckled softly, shaking his head. “I just wanted to talk to you.”

I hesitated, but curiosity got the better of me. “Talk about what?”

“Alexander,” he said simply.

“Look, Christopher,” I began, my defenses rising, “I don’t need any more of Alexander’s games or manipulations.” I had no doubt he had told his brother everything, from his point of view at least.

“Trust me,” he replied, intense enough to make me pause, “this isn’t about any games. This is about the man behind them.” He motioned for me to join him at the bar, and as reluctant as I was to delve back into the twisted world of Alexander, I couldn’t deny the allure of understanding him on a deeper level.

“Alright,” I relented, sliding onto a stool beside him.

“Alexander has always been...” Christopher trailed off, searching for the right words, “complicated.”

“Complicated” seemed to be an apt description of the man who had captivated and infuriated me in equal measure. It didn’t, however, shed any light on what I knew about him.

“His life had been filled with challenges and setbacks,” Christopher continued as he leaned in closer to me. “He had to fight for everything he had, and that shaped the way he saw the world.”

“Does that justify his actions?” I asked, struggling to reconcile this new perspective with the Alexander I had come to know.

“Maybe not,” Christopher admitted, “but understanding where he came from might help you see why he was drawn to you, Olivia. He’s never connected with someone like he has with you. The intensity of it terrified him, and sometimes, that fear drove him to make questionable decisions.”

My breath caught in my throat as I processed his words. Christopher’s insight into Alexander’s complex nature offered a window into the man I had been trying to understand, one who had captivated me despite the turmoil he brought.

A blush crept up my neck as Christopher’s gaze lingered on me, the intensity of his stare piercing through any facade I might have been wearing. The weight of his revelation settled upon me, forcing me to confront the truth of Alexander’s feelings.

“Are you sure?” I asked, my voice barely a whisper. “He... he really feels that way about me?”

“Absolutely,” Christopher replied, his expression softening. “I’ve known him all my life, and I’ve never seen him so emotionally invested in someone. You’ve awakened something in him, Olivia, something he didn’t even know existed.”

My spirit swelled at his words, tendrils of hope unfurling within me. I bit the inside of my cheek, torn between the desire to believe him and the uncertainty that had haunted me since my relationship with Alexander had begun.

“Then why did he push me away?” I asked, my fingers absently tracing the rim of my wine glass, the cool condensation grounding me. “Why did he hurt me if he truly cared?” *Why didn't he trust me?*

“Because he was scared,” Christopher answered, reaching out to gently touch my hand. “And sometimes, fear can make us act irrationally.”

The sincerity in Christopher's eyes was undeniable, and I found myself yearning to trust his words. The possibility that Alexander's actions stemmed from vulnerability rather than malice forced me to reevaluate everything I thought I knew about him.

“Maybe you're right,” I murmured, my gaze flickering between Christopher's eyes and the warmth radiating from his touch. “Perhaps I should give him another chance.”

“Trust your instincts, Olivia,” he advised. “But remember that people can change if they are given a reason to.”

With that, he released my hand, leaving me feeling both exhilarated and exposed. I wondered if I had been too quick to judge Alexander. Through Christopher's eyes, I saw a man struggling with his own demons, desperate for connection yet terrified of its consequences.

Perhaps it was time for me to take a leap of faith and trust that Alexander could change. For both our sakes.

The scent of Christopher's cologne lingered in the air as I watched him walk away. Trusting him felt like a risk, but his words had shaken me to my core.

“Are you okay?” a voice asked, pulling me from my thoughts.

I glanced up to see Ethan, his dark eyes filled with concern.

“Yeah, just... thinking,” I muttered.

“Did Alexander send him?” he probed, thinly veiled anger on his face.

“No, but he did want to talk about him,” I admitted, fighting the urge to confess everything Christopher had shared about Alexander’s vulnerability.

“Listen, Olivia,” Ethan said, his voice dropping an octave. “We’ve all seen how much Alexander changed since you came into his life. It’s obvious he cares for you. I know he hurt you, but you seem to be hurting more now.” He dropped an arm around my shoulder. “Maybe he deserves a second chance.”

“You think so?” I questioned, my voice wavering. I couldn’t help but wonder if everyone around me was simply playing a game—Christopher included.

“Trust your instincts,” he advised, echoing Christopher’s earlier words and further fueling my doubts.

“Thanks, Ethan,” I murmured, forcing a smile onto my lips. He nodded as someone else screamed for him. It was his turn. I nudged him away. “I’ll be right there.”

Ethan hesitated, looking between me and the group before nodding and heading back there. His boisterous personality was immediately back on as he faked a broken heart at the score.

My fingers traced the edge of the glass in front of me, the condensation damp beneath my touch. Was it possible that Alexander truly loved me? Or was I setting myself up for heartbreak by giving him another chance?

“Olivia,” a deep voice called out, and my body tensed at the sound of Alexander approaching. His intense gaze locked onto mine, causing my breath to hitch. “May I join you?”

“Go ahead,” I whispered, feeling the heat rise in my cheeks as he sat down beside me.

It felt surreal. Him, here, now?

“About earlier...” he began, hesitating for a moment before continuing. “I want to apologize for my actions. I’ve been struggling with some things, and I didn’t mean to take it out on you.”

His vulnerability disarmed me, and I couldn’t help but feel my resolve begin to crumble. But what if this was just another manipulation?

“Alexander, can you tell me something?” I asked, my voice barely audible over the roar of blood rushing through my head.

“Anything,” he replied, his eyes never leaving mine.

“Did you lie to me about anything that night?” I bit my lip, scared of what he was going to say.

He sucked in a deep breath. “I lied about staying at the office. I knew that I was going to dinner with Natalia, I knew that it wouldn’t look good because I agreed to only be with you, and I didn’t put enough trust in you to believe that this was business.” He looked up. “But I should have. You know that

meetings are nothing more, and you were right. Me hiding it made it so much worse.”

But even as I yearned to believe him, my mind whispered doubts that refused to be silenced. This unexpected encounter had left me at a crossroads—and I didn’t know which path to choose.

Chapter Twenty-One

Olivia

The heat of frustration seared through my veins as I watched Alexander, his back turned to me while he busied himself with a stack of documents. After he had seen me at the bar, he hadn't stayed long, insisting he didn't want to intrude on me and my friends. And we hadn't talked since.

I pulled out my phone, trying to ignore him, and opened my thread with Mia. She was away on a trip, and it killed me not to have her around. *He's pissing me off.*

What did he do now? She answered immediately. I had told her about the bar incident last night, and she had sided with him, as frustrating as that was.

Breathe. It's petty, but I don't care.

You need to talk to him. I huffed, rolling my eyes just as the next one came in. *I mean it.*

The tension between us had grown too thick, suffocating the air around us, and I couldn't stand it anymore. I needed answers. I needed to understand.

"Alexander," I said, my voice trembling ever so slightly. He turned toward me, his stormy eyes meeting mine, betraying no emotion. "We need to talk."

"About what?" His tone was cool, detached, making my chest tighten with indignation.

“About us,” I snipped back, trying to hide the hurt. “You wanted to bring it up last night and then you just left.”

“You weren’t talking.” I hated how calm he was.

“Well.” I crossed my arms over my chest. “I’m ready to now.”

His jaw clenched, and I could tell he was trying to hold back his own surge of emotions. But I wouldn’t let him shut me out this time. Not when there was so much at stake.

“Fine,” he said, tossing the documents onto his desk with a deliberate thud. “What do you want to say?”

Initially, I had come in here to make up. I thought maybe we should clear the air. But he wasn’t leaving me much room to be rational.

So I wasn’t.

“Why did you put something else over me when you had already made a commitment?” My words came out sharper than I intended, but I couldn’t help it. The hurt was too raw, too real.

“Olivia, I told you. It was a spur of the moment thing.” His eyes narrowed, and I could see the struggle within him.

“Then you should have turned it down!!” I shot back, my hands trembling with barely contained fury. “I thought I meant something to you!!”

“You think you don’t? Really?” His voice rose, and I could hear the anger bubbling beneath the surface. “You’re going to discard everything I said now?”

“What choice do I have?” I felt the heat rising in my cheeks. “I wanted to believe you—until you blindsided me!”

“Blindsided you?” he scoffed, his eyes flashing with a mix of hurt and fury. “You think this was easy for me? You think I haven’t been agonizing over this decision since that night?”

“Then why the hell didn’t you just talk to me about it?” I demanded, my voice cracking as tears threatened to spill from my eyes.

“Because I knew you wouldn’t understand!” he shouted, his own frustration finally boiling over. “You never do! You think you know what’s best, but sometimes you don’t, Olivia!”

“Excuse me?” My vision blurred momentarily with unshed tears, but I refused to let them fall. Not now. Not when there was still so much left to say. “I’ve always supported you, Alexander. But I deserve to come first! If you don’t think so, then I didn’t mean to you what you did to me.”

I watched as Alexander’s chest heaved with each labored breath, his eyes ablaze with a mix of anger and vulnerability.

“Olivia,” he started, but I didn’t let him finish. The raw ache of emotion inside me demanded to be heard, and I refused to let it be silenced any longer.

“Look, Alexander,” I gritted out, my voice trembling. “We can keep working together. That’s fine.” I sucked in a deep breath. “We’ve argued before. But this... this feels different.”

“Maybe it is different!” he shot back, his words cutting like shards of glass. “Maybe it’s time we both face the fact that we can’t keep pretending everything is fine when it’s not!”

“Is that what you think we’re doing? Pretending?” My words were bitter, laced with all the hurt and disappointment that had festered inside me for far too long. “I thought we were fighting for something real here, Alexander. Something worth saving.”

“Then why didn’t you fight for me?” His question hung heavy in the air, thick with accusation. “Why didn’t you fight for us? You turned around and walked away the first second you saw a reason to. You didn’t try to understand. You didn’t give me a chance to make it up to you. You just left!”

My breath caught in my throat. “I fought for you...” I gritted my teeth as I started to waver. “But you were the one that fucked this up.”

It felt wrong as I said it. I had a lot of doubts. I was looking for a reason not to open myself up to him. I was hurt, and rightfully so, but I might have clung to it a little too hard.

“Did it ever occur to you that maybe I was fighting too, Olivia?” His voice strained, desperation seeping into every syllable. “Fighting to keep myself from falling apart while I tried to hold us together?”

“Then why didn’t you let me help you?” My vision blurred momentarily as the tears threatened to spill over once more, and suddenly I found myself at a loss for words. “Why didn’t you trust me enough to let me in?”

“Because I was afraid!” he admitted, his voice breaking. “Afraid that if you saw just how broken I really was, you’d finally walk away and leave me with nothing.”

And there it was. Like a slap in the face. We both had walls up the entire time.

“Then you should have let me in, Alexander,” my voice was barely audible through the maelstrom of emotions that now enveloped me, “That’s what you do when you care about someone. If you ever wanted us to work, you had to let me in.”

But I knew I didn’t let him in either. Neither of us were really trying. We physically wanted each other, but beyond that? I didn’t think either of us knew how to let someone in.

And I wasn’t going to hurt myself again trying with someone I knew couldn’t.

“Then let me now—”

“No!” I turned away before he could see the tears threatening to fall. I moved toward the door, grasping the doorknob. “The damage is done.”

“Olivia, don’t...” The desperation in his voice caught me off guard, but I couldn’t allow myself to be swayed by it. Not now, when the cost of losing myself in him had never been higher.

“Goodbye, Alexander.” My voice trembled as I choked out the words, a silent cry for help that he seemed unable, or unwilling, to hear. With every ounce of strength I had left, I turned on my heel and stormed away from the man who once held my heart so tenderly within his grasp.

As my footsteps echoed through the empty hallway, it felt as if the walls were closing in around me, suffocating me with the deafening silence that followed in the wake of our

shattered love. The bitter taste of anger and betrayal lingered in my mouth, a stark reminder of the gaping chasm that now lay between us.

Behind me, I could hear Alexander's ragged breaths growing fainter, each one a haunting melody of loss and regret. But it wasn't enough. It couldn't be enough, not after everything we had endured. And so, with tears streaming down my cheeks, aching with unspeakable grief, I left behind the remnants of a love that was once so beautiful, so pure, and braced myself for the storm that lay ahead.

"Olivia, please," his voice drifted toward me, a ghostly echo that wrapped itself around my very being like a vice. "I didn't mean... God, I'm so sorry."

But it wasn't enough. It couldn't be enough, not after everything we had endured. This wasn't just about him standing me up or lying about a dinner out. This was about how we didn't trust each other, how neither of us could let the other in.

We would never have worked.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Alexander

I hadn't been able to stop shifting since I got into bed, unable to escape the vice-like grip of guilt and regret. My chest tightened with each breath, the air growing stale within those four walls.

I sat up and a sudden burst of anger swelled within me. How did I let things spiral so far out of control? How could I have been so blind to the pain I caused her?

"Olivia," I whispered, the sweet taste of her name on my lips like an elixir. Even then, her presence lingered in every corner of that room—the lingering scent of her perfume, the indentation on the pillow where her head lay, the soft hum of her laughter echoing in my ears.

I slammed my fist into the mattress, feeling the weight of my decisions pressing down on me. The consequences of my actions had left a trail of destruction in their wake, and there was no one to blame but myself.

My mind replayed the last moments we had spent together—her eyes, red-rimmed and glistening with tears, the hurt written across her face like an open wound. It was a reminder of the pain I had inflicted upon her, a testament to my own selfishness.

But there was no going back, no erasing the damage done. All I could do now was accept the consequences and find a

way to move forward.

The cold wind brushed against my face, chilling me to the bone as I paced back and forth on the balcony. The knowledge of what I had done settled like a dense fog in my chest. The city below, once a symbol of opportunity and success, now only served as a reminder of the price I had paid for it.

It was in that moment, alone with my thoughts, that I realized how much I had sacrificed for a facade of power and control.

“Alexander?” A voice interrupted my introspection, and I turned to find my brother standing at the doorway. His concerned gaze met mine, and I couldn’t help but feel exposed under his scrutiny.

“Hey, Christopher,” I managed, forcing the words out past the lump in my throat.

“Are you alright?” he asked, stepping onto the balcony and closing the door behind him. “You seem... off.”

“Do I?” I responded, a bitter laugh escaping my lips. “I guess I’m just realizing how much I screwed up.”

“Come on, man,” Christopher said, clapping me on the shoulder. “We all make mistakes. But if there’s one thing I know about you, it’s that you’re not one to give up without a fight.”

“Thanks, Christopher,” I said, taking a deep breath.

“Anytime,” he replied, giving me a small smile before heading back inside.

As I returned my gaze to the cityscape, I questioned my priorities. My relentless pursuit of power and success had left me empty, devoid of what truly mattered. What good was it to have everything in the world if I had lost the person I cared about most?

I turned away from the cold embrace of the night and stepped back inside, ready to confront my demons and mend the fractured pieces of our relationship. Time was of the essence, and I refused to waste another moment wallowing in regret. Olivia deserved better, and I was determined to prove it to her.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Olivia

The moment the elevators opened on my floor, something was different. I stepped in, spotting Ethan, and his eyes were wide. They darted to the side, and I saw Alexander standing there in front of my desk, a bouquet of flowers in his hands.

The air in the office seemed to thicken as Alexander's gaze met mine, his eyes revealing an unfamiliar vulnerability. I tried to keep the anticipation and anxiety churning within me from showing but I don't know if I managed it.

Slowly, I walked forward until I was standing just in front of him, my breath catching in my throat. I could see the pain in his eyes, and it made me want to reach out to him. But I didn't.

"Olivia," he began, his voice low and uncertain. "There's something I need to say. It's long overdue."

He took a deep breath, and I was acutely aware of the rise and fall of his chest. His hands nervously tapped on the polished surface of the desk next to him.

"I've... I've treated you poorly." His admission caught me off guard, the words resonating like a physical blow. "I want to apologize for my behavior, for everything I put you through. I know it doesn't make up for the pain I caused you, but I want to try to make amends."

A torrent of emotions threatened to drown me as I struggled to process his words. Was this really Alexander? Was this him, trying to let me in—something I never thought possible? Or was this just another manipulation to keep me tethered to him?

“Alexander, I...” My voice cracked, unable to find the right words to express my confusion and turmoil.

“Please,” he interrupted, his tone softening further. “Just hear me out.”

Taking a moment to compose myself, I nodded hesitantly, granting him permission to continue.

“Looking back, I see how wrong I was. I realize now that my actions were driven by fear—fear of losing control, of being vulnerable. But keeping you at arm’s length only pushed you further away from me.”

His sincerity pierced through my defenses, making it difficult to maintain my emotional barriers. The thought of him genuinely changing for the better both excited and terrified me. Could there be hope for us after all?

Alexander clenched his fists at his sides, as if grappling with his own inner demons. “I want to be better,” he confessed, his voice barely a whisper. “For you, for us.”

My soul ached as I studied the man before me, no longer the arrogant, cruel CEO I had known for so long. Instead, I saw a man willing to face his mistakes and make amends, even if it meant exposing his deepest fears.

“Can you truly change, Alexander?” I asked, hope and skepticism warring inside me.

His eyes locked onto mine, determination radiating from him. “I’ll do whatever it takes, Olivia. Just give me the chance to prove myself.”

I stood there, staring at Alexander, my breath hitching in my chest as I tried to make sense of the storm brewing within me. The office walls seemed to close in on us, trapping me in this moment.

“Olivia...” Alexander’s voice was a desperate plea, his eyes piercing into mine, searching for an answer.

“Let me think,” I murmured, rushing out of the room and leaving him behind. My mind was a whirlwind of conflicting thoughts as I walked down the hallway. Should I quit? Would walking away from him protect my heart?

But there was a part of me that didn’t want to lose him completely. Despite the pain he had caused, I couldn’t deny the magnetic pull between us. Every heated glance, every stolen touch, drew me back to him like a moth to a flame.

As I paced in an empty conference room, flashes of our past together bombarded me. Our late-night conversations, the way his fingers would trail along my spine when no one was looking, the feel of his lips pressed against mine. I craved those intimate moments, even as I questioned whether they were ever genuine.

Could I trust him again? Was it possible that he had changed, or was I just setting myself up for another heartbreak?

“Olivia?” A soft knock on the door pulled me from my thoughts.

“Come in,” I said, trying to steady my voice. Alexander entered the room, his gaze steady.

“Are you all right?” he asked, taking a step closer.

“Am I all right?” I repeated, incredulous. “Alexander, you hurt me. I wanted to trust you, but when it came down to it, you broke that trust. You jeopardized us and my professional appearance, which you knew I was afraid of from the start.” I paused, sucking in a deep breath. “And yet... here I am, still unable to let you go.” My voice trembled with raw emotion, and I fought to hold back the tears.

“Olivia,” he breathed, closing the distance between us. His hand reached up to cup my cheek, his thumb gently wiping away a tear that escaped.

“Can you truly change?” I whispered, my voice barely audible. “Can I trust you? Really trust you?” I balled my fists up, trying to suppress the emotions. “Like tell you all my secrets and let you see every part of me and trust that you will be there through it all?”

“Let me prove it to you,” he pleaded, his eyes burning with conviction. “Let me show you that I can be the man you deserve.”

I looked into his eyes, searching for any hint of deception. All I saw was determination, vulnerability, and a desperate need to make things right.

“Give me time, Alexander,” I said softly. “I needed to see if this was real, if we could build something new from the ashes of our past.”

Alexander nodded, his grip on my face tightening for a moment before letting go. “As much time as you need, Olivia. I’ll wait for you.”

And with those words, I found myself standing at the edge of a precipice, torn between fear and hope, trying to decide if I should take the leap and trust him once more.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Alexander

I stood in the center of my living room, surrounded by a mess of papers and scribbled notes. I had been racking my brain for days, trying to come up with a grand gesture that could demonstrate the depth of my feelings for Olivia. The possibility of winning her back felt tantalizingly out of my grasp, and I knew it was going to take something truly special to mend our fractured relationship.

My mind wandered through countless scenarios, each more extravagant than the last. But nothing seemed to capture the intensity of my emotions. It had to be perfect—every detail, every word, every touch—all working together to convey the sincerity of my intentions.

Suddenly, an idea struck me like a bolt of lightning. I grabbed a fresh sheet of paper and began sketching out my plan, my hand shaking with excitement as the pieces started to fall into place.

I set to work organizing every detail. I spent hours researching the perfect lighting and props, ensuring that they enhanced the emotional impact without distracting from the message. Every element had to blend seamlessly, like strokes on a painter's canvas.

This was my one chance to prove to Olivia how much she meant to me, and the thought of her rejecting me sent my stomach into knots.

Standing before her in front of all my employees had been hard enough. I never let anyone at work see that side of me, and I had hoped she would see how vulnerable I was letting myself be. But I understood it wasn't enough.

I saw now that she had shared her insecurities with me, and while I had tried to nurture them with words, I hadn't taken them into account in my actions. I had made her feel the exact thing she was afraid of, and I didn't blame her for her reaction toward me.

I took a deep breath, allowing the anticipation and adrenaline to fuel my resolve. In the end, it wasn't about the grand gesture itself, but the love and commitment behind it that truly mattered.

With my plan set in motion, I knew there was no turning back. It was time to face the consequences of my actions and fight for the woman who had forever changed my life.

With my plan taking shape, I realized I couldn't pull this off alone. I needed the help of those who knew me well and understood the importance of this—friends and colleagues alike.

“Hey, Christopher,” I said after my brother picked up the phone. “I need your help with something important.”

“Of course, man. What's up?” His voice was warm and reassuring, just what I needed right then.

“I'm planning a grand gesture for Olivia, to show her how much she means to me. Could you gather the team and meet me at my place?”

“Of course,” he replied without hesitation. “We’ll be there shortly.”

When Christopher and the others arrived, I laid out my plan in detail. Their faces lit up with excitement, knowing the stakes couldn’t be higher.

As we worked together, mapping out every step of the plan, I couldn’t help but reflect on my own journey of self-discovery and growth. Ever since Olivia entered my life, she pushed me to become a better man—someone worthy of her love and devotion.

With every detail falling into place, I could feel the weight of our impending confrontation bearing down on me. But beneath the nerves and anxiety, there was something else—a flicker of hope that this would be the key to unlocking our future together.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Olivia

The air in the office hung heavy with tension as I sat at my desk, staring blankly at the computer screen. My fingertips hovered above the keyboard, but I couldn't focus on my work. Alexander's presence lingered in my thoughts like an unwanted guest, and I couldn't shake the feeling of unease that came with it.

"Here," he said softly, placing a steaming cup of coffee on my desk. The rich aroma wafted up to me, and for a moment, I was tempted to let my guard down. To pretend that everything was fine between us.

"Thanks," I muttered, keeping my eyes on the screen. I felt his gaze linger on me, searching for any sign of forgiveness. But I wasn't ready to let him off the hook that easily.

He hesitated for a moment before walking away, leaving me to wrestle with the feelings he stirred up inside me. It was equal parts desire and distrust; a potent mix that left me breathless and uneasy.

As the days went by, it became increasingly difficult to keep up the charade. Alexander made a point of doing little things to help me at work—refilling my stapler, fetching me a fresh pad of sticky notes, even volunteering to handle some of my more tedious tasks. He was trying so hard to prove that I could trust him with little things so we could work up to the

big things but I couldn't help wondering if it was all just an act.

"Olivia, do you have a moment?" he asked one day, standing in the doorway of my office. His eyes were full of sincerity, and I found myself nodding despite my reservations.

"Sure, what's up?" I inquired, trying to sound casual.

"Look, I know you need time," he began, his voice laden with regret. "But I want to make it right, Olivia. I want to prove to you that I'm not the same person I was before."

"I need time to see that, Alexander," I said quietly, my voice steady despite the storm raging inside me. "You don't change overnight and I don't forget everything we went through then either."

"Then let me show you how I changed." His voice was still deep and commanding and I almost gave in. "Let me prove to you that I can be the man you deserve."

"Time will tell, Alexander," I responded cautiously, unwilling to commit to anything just yet. "We'll see."

He nodded solemnly, disappointment flashing across his face.

"Okay," he said. "I'll do whatever it takes, Olivia. I promise."

As he walked away, I found myself gripping my coffee cup tightly, my knuckles turning white. The battle between my head and my heart raged on, leaving me torn and uncertain.

But one thing was clear: Alexander wasn't giving up without a fight. And neither was I.

“Hey, Olivia,” Ethan called out as he entered the small office kitchen. “You seem a little off today, everything okay?”

I forced a smile, attempting to appear nonchalant despite the turmoil within me. “Yeah, just one of those days, you know?”

He nodded sympathetically, poured himself a cup of coffee, and leaned against the counter next to me. His gaze was sharp and observant, making it clear that he could tell there was more going on beneath the surface. “If you ever wanted to talk about it...”

“Thanks, Ethan,” I replied, grateful for his concern but not quite ready to divulge the details of my emotional struggle. As if on cue, Alexander walked by the doorway, paused to shoot me a warm smile, and continued down the hall.

“Speaking of which,” Ethan said, following my gaze to Alexander’s retreating figure, “I noticed he’s acting differently lately. He seemed... kinder, somehow.”

I nodded slowly, acknowledging the truth in his words. “He’s been trying to make amends,” I admitted quietly.

“Wow,” Ethan whistled softly, clearly impressed. “I know it’s been tough—for both of you. But, you know, people can change. Maybe he is genuine this time.”

My fingers tightened around the ceramic mug as I considered his words. Was it worth risking it all again?

“Maybe,” I conceded, my voice barely audible even to myself. “But trust isn’t something easily rebuilt.”

“True,” Ethan agreed, placing a comforting hand on my shoulder. “But you’ll make the right choice.”

“Thanks,” I murmured.

As I returned to my desk, I couldn't help but watch Alexander from the corner of my eye. He was focused on his work, but every so often, he paused to glance my way, concern etched across his handsome features.

I chewed on my lip, torn between the past and the present, as I weighed the risks against the tantalizing promise of redemption.

My fingers hovered over the keys, hesitation clouding my thoughts. Alexander's presence was a magnetic force, drawing my gaze toward him, his back to me as he bent over his own work.

“Hey, Olivia,” he called, turning to face me, his eyes dark and intense.

“Alexander,” I replied, trying to maintain a neutral tone.

“Could we talk?” he asked.

Anticipation and fear battled within me as I reluctantly nodded. He led me to an empty conference room, the door closing with a soft click behind us.

“Olivia, I need you to know how much I regret hurting you,” Alexander began, his chest rising and falling with each deep breath. “I've spent so many nights thinking about what I did and how I could make it right.”

His words resonated within me, tugging at my frayed emotional edges. I watched as he clenched his fists, tension radiating from every muscle.

“Please,” he continued, desperation etching across his features, “give me another chance. I promise to prioritize you and our relationship above everything else.”

“Alexander,” I murmured, holding his gaze, “I appreciate your honesty, but I am still... guarded. I need time to work through this.”

He nodded, understanding and disappointment mingling in his eyes. “Take all the time you need,” he whispered, his fingertips brushing against mine for a fleeting moment before he withdrew.

“Thank you,” I said.

As we exited the conference room, he paused, turning to me. “Could you... come over tonight?” He didn’t provide anything more, and I stood there, staring at him as my body begged for him.

Even though my heart feared it, I nodded. A grin played on his lips, and he said, “I’ll send a driver.”

Chapter Twenty-Six

Olivia

The murmur of conversation and clinking glasses filled the air as I stood in the center of the room, surrounded by familiar faces.

I didn't expect Alexander's driver to bring me to the most exquisite restaurant in the city.

"Olivia." His voice reached me from the doorway, silencing the room. The sudden quietness felt heavy, like a blanket draped over my shoulders. I turned to face him, conflicting emotions swirling within me. He looked different then—vulnerable, his eyes filled with an intensity I had never seen before.

"Alexander," I managed to say as he took a step toward me.

"Olivia," he said again, louder this time, capturing the attention of everyone present. "I need you to know how deeply sorry I am for the pain I caused you. I am here because... I loved you, and I need you to understand that I would do anything to make it right."

His voice trembled with emotion. It wasn't just an apology—it was a plea for forgiveness, a desperate attempt to mend the fractured pieces of our relationship. And it was happening right there, in front of all our friends and colleagues, in the very place where our love had once blossomed.

"Alexander," I started, but he cut me off.

“Please, let me finish.” He took another step towards me, his gaze never leaving mine. “I was wrong, Olivia. I made mistakes, and I hurt you in ways I can never take back. But I want to make amends. I want to be the man you deserve.”

My breath caught in my throat as I struggled to process his words. The room was still, and the weight of every eye was upon us as we stood there, suspended in that moment of raw vulnerability.

“Olivia, I need you to know that I’m not perfect.” Alexander’s voice trembled as he continued his confession, the vulnerability in his eyes almost too much for me to bear. “I have always struggled with insecurities and fears of not being enough. I have hidden behind arrogance and a false sense of control because I have been terrified of being vulnerable.”

My chest tightened, as I watched him lay himself bare before me. He ran a hand through his hair, an nervous gesture that left strands standing on end.

“Alexander,” I whispered, torn between wanting to comfort him and the hurt that still simmered within me.

“Please.” His gaze pleaded with mine, eyes shimmering with raw emotion. “I wanted to be open with you, to share every part of myself—the good and the bad. I wanted to work towards a healthier relationship, one where we could both be our true selves without fear or judgment.”

“Can you really do that?” My voice emerged as a shaky breath, tinged with the shadow of doubt. “Can you really open up, let go of the control you hold so tightly?”

“I can try, Olivia.” His voice was a mix of determination and desperation. “For you, I will try with everything I have.”

A tear slipped down my cheek, betraying the turmoil within me. Our gazes locked, and for a moment, the world fell away. In the heat of his stare, I felt a spark flicker to life, a tentative ember that refused to be extinguished.

Blood pounded in my veins as I struggled to process the raw honesty of his words. My body ached to bridge the distance between us, to draw him close and lose myself in the familiar warmth of his embrace.

“Please,” he whispered, his vulnerability laid bare. “Give me a chance to show you how much I changed, how much I care for you.”

My breath caught as I looked up, meeting his gaze head-on.

“Alexander,” I responded. “You are asking for something I’m not sure I could give.”

His jaw clenched. “I know it won’t be easy, but we can work through this together. Let me help shoulder your doubts, your fears. Trust me to be there for you, Olivia.”

A sob welled up in my throat, choked off by the conflicting desires that twisted like a vice around my heart.

“Trust is earned, Alexander,” I whispered, desperation coloring my tone. “And I don’t know if you have done enough to earn mine back.”

He stepped closer, his warmth radiating against my skin, and I fought the urge to lean into him. “Then let me spend every day trying, Olivia. Show me how to make things right between us. Make me the man you deserve.”

“Alexander,” I breathed, my pulse quickening as I searched his eyes for any sign of deceit. “If we go down this path, it has to be different than before. No more secrets, no more lies. Can you promise me that?”

“Olivia,” he said with fierce conviction, “I swear to you, on everything I hold dear, that I will do whatever it takes to earn your trust, your love, and your forgiveness.”

A tear escaped, tracing a hot path down my cheek as I struggled to find the courage to take this leap of faith. The crowd around us faded into the background, their whispered words and curious stares forgotten as I faced the man who held the power to break or mend my spirit.

“All right,” I said. “I’m willing to try.”

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Olivia

The moment he opened the door of his penthouse, the heat from Alexander's hand seared my skin as he reached for mine, the intensity in his gaze penetrating deep into my soul.

"Olivia," he began, his voice hoarse with emotion. "I need to tell you something."

I swallowed hard, feeling the electricity between us crackle and pulse like a living thing. My body was on fire, but my mind was filled with trepidation. What could he possibly want to say?

"Go ahead, Alexander," I responded, forcing myself to maintain eye contact, even as every instinct screamed at me to look away.

He took a deep breath, his chest heaving beneath the thin fabric of his shirt. I could see the sweat beading on his forehead, and I knew that whatever he was about to reveal had taken immense courage to share.

"Olivia," he said again, this time more firmly. "I've been thinking about where it went wrong before. I was selfish, reckless, and careless with your heart. I never should have let things get that far."

"Alexander, it wasn't just you," I admitted. "We both made mistakes. We both hurt each other."

“But mine were worse,” he insisted, gripping my hand tighter. “I put my own needs above yours, time and time again. I prioritized everything else over our relationship, and I should have fought harder for us.”

“Alexander, please,” I begged. “Don’t do this.”

But he was relentless, driven by a determination I had never seen before. “No, Olivia. You deserve to hear the truth. I was a fool, blinded by my own ambition and arrogance. And I lost sight of what really mattered—you.”

His raw honesty left me breathless, and I could no longer hold back the tears that spilled from my eyes. My vision blurred, but not enough to obscure the fierce sincerity in his gaze.

“From now on, Olivia,” Alexander vowed, his voice thick with emotion. “I will prioritize us. Our relationship and our happiness come first. I will do whatever it takes to prove to you that I am worthy of your trust again.”

The echoes of Alexander’s promise lingered in the air, their weight heavy against my battered heart. I studied his face, searching for any trace of deceit that could shatter this fragile hope between us.

“Alexander,” I began hesitantly, “I’m ready to trust you, but it won’t be easy. I need to know that we can both confront the issues that have haunted our relationship and work towards a resolution.”

He nodded, his eyes never leaving mine. “I understand, Olivia. And I am willing to face those insecurities for the sake of our future.”

With a sigh, I allowed myself to take a step closer to him, our bodies inches apart.

“Tell me, Alexander,” I murmured, “what insecurities do you think we need to address?”

He hesitated for a moment, then took a deep breath. “For one, my work won’t be my most important thing anymore. I know I’ve let it consume me before, but I swear, Olivia, from now on, I will find a better balance.”

His hands reached out to encircle my waist, pulling me gently against him. I gasped at the sudden contact, my body betraying me as it responded to his touch. The scent of his cologne filled my senses, as delicious as ever.

“Another issue,” Alexander continued, his voice low and seductive, “was our communication. We have both been guilty of shutting each other out, and that needs to change. We have to be open with each other, even when it is difficult.”

“I agree,” I whispered, my voice trembling.

His arms tightened around me, and I felt the warmth of his breath against my ear as he whispered, “I won’t let you down again. I promise.”

As we stood there, locked in an embrace that seemed to straddle the line between past pain and future possibility, I couldn’t help but believe that that conversation might just be the turning point we had desperately needed.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Olivia

I took a deep breath as I watched Alexander pull up to the curb in his sleek black car. He stepped out, looking impossibly handsome in a tailored suit that hugged his muscular frame. I couldn't deny the attraction that burned between us like an unquenchable flame.

I had agreed to a date. A real date, the one he was supposed to take me on. And in that moment, I was both terrified and glad I did.

"Good evening, Olivia," he greeted me warmly, his eyes scanning my form appreciatively. "You look stunning."

"Thank you," I murmured, self-consciously tugging at the hem of my dress.

He opened the door for me, and I slid into the plush leather seat. "So, where are we going tonight?" I asked, needing something to focus on besides the heat pooling in my core.

Alexander flashed me a mysterious smile. "It's a surprise."

As we drove through the city, the world outside our cocoon dimmed, faded away.

We arrived at a secluded rooftop garden, lit by twinkling fairy lights that cast a romantic glow on our surroundings. My breath caught at the sight of a beautiful table set for two, complete with flickering candles and a bouquet of my favorite flowers.

“Alexander, this is amazing,” I said. I could see how much effort he had put into creating that perfect moment.

“Nothing but the best for you, Olivia,” he replied, pulling out my chair for me. His touch was feather-light on the small of my back, igniting a trail of fire in its wake.

As we dined on exquisite food and sipped wine that danced on our tongues, Alexander’s eyes never left mine, an electric connection pulsing between us.

“Olivia,” he whispered, reaching across the table to grasp my hand. “I know I can’t change the past, but I am committed to showing you how deeply I care for you.”

“Alexander, I appreciate everything you are doing,” I said quietly, my gaze lowering as I confronted the whirlwind of emotions inside me. “

“Thank you for letting me, Olivia,” he replied sincerely, his thumb gently caressing the back of my hand.

As we shared dessert, feeding each other bites of rich chocolate cake, I couldn’t help but steal glances at his lips, imagining how they would feel pressed against mine again.

The soft glow of candlelight flickered across Alexander’s face, casting shadows that only accentuated the intensity of his deep eyes. I watched as he leaned in, his lips brushing against my earlobe before whispering, “I thought we could enjoy a little wine tasting tonight.”

My breath caught in my throat, and for a moment, I was lost in the sensation of his warm breath against my skin. I forced myself to blink and refocus, reminding myself to be guarded.

But even with my reservations, I couldn't deny the thrill that danced down my spine.

As Alexander leaned in to kiss my cheek, his lips lingering just a moment too long, I found myself wavering in the tempest of my emotions. The desire to embrace him, to surrender myself to him, warred with the need to maintain my distance.

"Olivia," he breathed against my skin, his voice heavy with longing, "I understand your hesitation with me, but I'm glad you let me take you out tonight."

"Thank you, Alexander," I whispered, reaching for his hand and squeezing it gently, our fingers intertwining like two souls seeking solace in one another. "I've had a really good time."

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Olivia

I stepped into Sarah's cozy apartment, a sanctuary from the chaos of the world outside. Alexander's sister greeted me with a warm embrace, her petite frame full of energy and compassion.

"Olivia, it's so good to see you," she said, her eyes alight with genuine happiness. "Please, have a seat. I just made coffee."

Sarah and I had met in passing when she came to the office. We weren't strangers by any means, but I knew she was a little confused when I asked her if we could meet.

After my date with Alexander, I knew I needed to let go of everything that had happened between us. I wanted to move forward with him, and I thought if I could talk to someone as close to him as his sister, see his family who he put first, I could believe he could do the same for me.

"Thanks, Sarah." I sank into the plush sofa, my fingers tracing the intricate patterns on the embroidered cushions.

"Here you go." Sarah handed me a steaming mug, and I wrapped my hands around it, welcoming the heat that radiated through my skin.

"Thank you," I murmured, taking a tentative sip. Bitterness danced on my tongue, mingled with the faintest hint of sweetness. It was perfect.

Sarah settled beside me, her hazel eyes filled with concern. “You seem troubled, Olivia. What’s going on?”

I hesitated, unsure how to begin.

“Alexander,” I finally said, watching the steam rise from my coffee. “I am... I am struggling to understand him sometimes. To know if he truly loves me or if I am just a convenient distraction for him.”

Sarah’s gaze softened, and she reached out to touch my arm gently. “Oh, Olivia. I can assure you that my brother’s feelings for you are real. He has changed so much since meeting you.”

“Changed?” I asked, curiosity piqued. “How?”

“Before you came into his life, Alexander was... closed off. Guarded. He never allowed anyone to see his true self, rarely even Christopher and me. But with you, it’s different.” Sarah paused for a moment, her fingers tapping rhythmically on the ceramic mug.

“Alexander is committed to becoming a better person because of you,” she continued. “He has been learning to open up, to face his demons, and to genuinely care for someone other than himself. It has been remarkable to witness.”

I chewed on my lip, taking in Sarah’s words. Could it be true? Had Alexander truly changed for the better because of me?

“Olivia, listen to me,” Sarah said, leaning in closer. “My brother loves you deeply, and he is willing to do whatever it takes to make your relationship work. That much I can guarantee.”

I looked into Sarah's eyes, and I saw the truth in them. Alexander was trying, fighting for us, and I owed it to him—and myself—to believe in the possibility of our future together.

“Sarah, I am just so scared.”

“Olivia, it's normal to feel scared,” she said gently, placing a comforting hand on my knee. “But don't let fear dictate your decisions. You deserve happiness, and so does Alexander.”

My chest tightened at the mention of his name.

“Look at me,” Sarah urged softly, tilting my face up to meet her compassionate gaze.

“Alexander is trying so hard to be the man you need him to be,” she continued. “He's put in the work, faced his past, and learned how to love. He's doing this for both of you, and he's not giving up without a fight.”

I took a deep breath and let her words sink in, stirring up a strange mix of hope and trepidation within me.

“Sometimes, love isn't easy, Olivia,” Sarah added, dabbing at the tears that escaped from the corners of my eyes. “

“Thank you, Sarah,” I said, hugging her tightly. “I'll never forget this.”

“Go get him, Olivia,” she whispered, squeezing me back.

As I stepped out into the night, the cool air caressed my skin and invigorated my senses. As I walked, each step felt like a journey toward redemption, propelling me towards the future I now believed was possible with Alexander. My breaths came fast, the anticipation of confronting him both thrilling

and nerve-wracking. I felt alive—more alive than I had in a long time.

It didn't take me long at all to reach his place. It felt like I was flying there.

He trusted me with the key and I sneaked in unannounced.

The scent of his cologne filled the hallway, spurring me onward as my heartbeat accelerated. I could sense his presence just around the corner, and I knew that the moment of truth was upon us. Our love hung in the balance, and I was ready to fight for it with everything I had.

“Alexander,” I called out softly, stepping around the corner.

His head snapped up, surprise etched across his handsome face. His eyes, usually so calm and controlled, were filled with an almost palpable longing. It took my breath away.

“Olivia,” he murmured, his voice cracking ever so slightly.

“Alexander, we need to talk,” I said firmly, trying to steady my trembling hands. “About us.”

“Of course,” he replied, his eyes never leaving mine. “What is it?”

“I don't want to hold back. I want you,” I whispered, stepping closer to him. “No more secrets, no more hiding. Just you and me, Alexander.”

His eyes widened, and a slow smile spread across his face as he reached for my hand, intertwining our fingers and pulling me close.

Chapter Thirty

Olivia

Alexander had been acting strangely all day, his eyes gleaming with mischief and excitement. I couldn't quite put my finger on it, but something was definitely brewing in that mind of his. We walked together through the crowded city plaza, hand in hand, when I noticed several familiar faces appearing among the throng.

"Alexander," I said, narrowing my eyes at him, "what's going on?"

He turned to me, a wide, devilish grin spread across his face. "You'll see, my darling Olivia."

I rolled my eyes but couldn't help smiling back at his infectious enthusiasm. As we continued navigating the bustling square, more and more familiar faces emerged—friends, family, even some of our coworkers from the company where we had first met.

"Alright, everyone!" Alexander suddenly announced, drawing our entourage to a halt. His voice was authoritative yet tender, commanding attention without overshadowing the atmosphere of affection and warmth. "Gather round, gather round."

Our loved ones encircled us, their eyes shining with curiosity and joy. My heart drummed in my chest, its rhythm quickening as I tried to decipher what Alexander had

planned. He gently squeezed my hand, offering a reassuring smile before he began to speak.

“Olivia,” he said, looking deeply into my eyes, “from the moment I met you, I knew my life would never be the same. Your passion, your intelligence, your beauty—they captivated me like nothing else ever had.”

Heat flushed my cheeks; my breath caught in my throat as I listened to his heartfelt declaration. It felt as though there was an electric current humming between us, igniting every nerve ending and heightening my senses.

“Throughout our journey together,” Alexander continued, “I learned so much about love, trust, and partnership. And I want you to know that I will always prioritize you, your happiness, and our life together.”

My soul, my spirit, my being swelled with love for this man, my vision blurring with unshed tears as I drank in his words.

“Olivia,” he said, his voice brimming with raw vulnerability and desire, “I love you more than I ever thought possible. Will you marry me?”

A collective gasp echoed through the crowd, punctuating the gravity of this moment, but all I could focus on was Alexander—his tender gaze, his unwavering devotion, and the promise of a lifetime spent by his side.

The words hung in the air like a symphony, their melody filling my soul with an overwhelming sense of happiness and acceptance.

“Alexander,” I said, my voice trembling, “I love you, too.”

He smiled softly, his eyes glistening as he reached for my hand, threading his fingers through mine. It was the first time I said it back, but it felt so right.

“Olivia,” he whispered, his breath hot against my cheek, “I want nothing more than to spend the rest of my life by your side, loving you, cherishing you, and building a future together.”

The magnitude of the moment began to sink in. This was it—the culmination of our journey, the beginning of our forever. It was real.

“Alexander,” I said, “yes, a thousand times yes. I will marry you!”

As the words left my lips, the world around us erupted into a cacophony of cheers and applause, but all I could see, all I could feel, was Alexander and the searing intensity of his embrace. His mouth crashed against mine, our bodies melding together as if drawn by some irresistible force, an inferno of passion and desire burning between us.

It had been almost impossible to separate long enough to reach his apartment, and as soon as he shut the door, his lips found mine.

Our hands roamed over each other’s bodies, desperate to reacquaint ourselves with every curve and hollow, every shiver and moan elicited by our fevered exploration. The taste of him was intoxicating, dizzying, a heady mixture of lust and love that left me craving more.

“Olivia,” he murmured against my lips, his voice a husky growl, “I can’t wait to make you my wife, to worship your

body and your soul in a way that only I can.”

His eyes locked onto mine, the intensity of his gaze penetrating the very core of my being. I was all too aware of the delicious friction between our bodies, the heat radiating off him as he leaned closer, stealing my breath away.

“Neither have I,” I admitted, my words barely audible as my heart raced in my chest.

Alexander pulled me close, his fingers tracing patterns along the curve of my waist, his lips pressing against the sensitive skin below my ear, making me shudder with pleasure. “I want to explore every inch of you, learn all the ways I can make you shiver and moan.”

“Show me,” I begged, my body aching for his touch.

With a growl, Alexander lifted me onto a nearby sofa, the cool leather a stark contrast against my heated skin. His hands roamed over my body with practiced ease, each caress setting my nerves ablaze, branding me as his own.

“Olivia,” he rasped, his breath hot against my ear, “you are my everything, my reason for living.”

“And you are mine,” I replied.

Chapter Thirty-One

Olivia

The scent of roses and gardenias filled the air as Alexander and I stood in the middle of the potential venue for our wedding.

“I don’t know,” I huffed as I looked at Mia. “What do you think?”

Naturally, I had to have her at my side every step of the way.

“I love it,” she gushed, turning to look at me with bright eyes. “Do you?”

“Yes, Olivia, what do you think of this place?” Alexander asked. His eyes practically sparkled.

“It is beautiful,” I admitted, glancing around at the lush greenery and blooming flowers. “I just hope we can make everything come together.”

“Hey,” he said softly, pulling me close. “This is our day, and it will be perfect.”

Over the next few weeks, the joys and challenges of wedding planning consumed us. We spent hours poring over catering menus, debating guest lists, and discussing floral arrangements. At times, the stress threatened to overwhelm me, but Alexander always seemed to know when I needed a break.

One evening, after a particularly trying phone call with the caterer, I sat on the couch feeling drained. Alexander joined me, gently massaging my tense shoulders. The sensation of his strong hands working away the knots made my head spin.

“Relax, beautiful,” he murmured into my ear, his hot breath making me shiver. “You need to take care of yourself too.”

“Thank you,” I whispered, leaning back into his embrace. His lips brushed against my neck, leaving a trail of fiery kisses that caused my breath to hitch. The familiar ache between my legs intensified, and I craved the connection and pleasure only he could provide.

Alexander seemed to sense my desire, his fingers deftly unbuttoning my blouse and cupping my breasts. He rolled my nipples between his thumb and forefinger, eliciting a moan from deep within me. Wetness pooled in my panties and I knew that he was the only remedy for this aching need.

“Alex... please,” I begged, desperate for his touch. He kissed down my neck, his hands slipping beneath the waistband of my skirt and teasing the sensitive skin just above my pussy.

“Tell me what you want, Olivia,” he breathed against my skin.

“Make love to me,” I pleaded, unable to resist the power of his touch any longer.

Without hesitation, Alexander gently lifted me up and carried me to the bedroom. He laid me down on the soft sheets, worshiping my body with his mouth and hands as he undressed me slowly and tenderly. Our lips met in a

passionate kiss, tongues dancing together as our bodies entwined.

“Olivia, I love you so much,” he whispered, positioning himself between my legs.

As he slid inside me, all thoughts of guest lists and caterers faded away. In that moment, it was just the two of us—our love and desire enveloping us like a warm blanket. With each thrust, Alexander brought me closer to the edge, his name falling from my lips like a prayer.

When the waves of pleasure crashed over me, I clung to him, my nails digging into his back. Soon after, he followed, releasing himself deep within me. We lay there, tangled together, and I marveled at how lucky I was to have found someone who knew exactly what I needed.

“Thank you,” I whispered, pressing a soft kiss to his chest.

“Always,” he murmured, pulling me closer. “I’ll always be here for you, Olivia.”

The papers cluttered the kitchen table and my head throbbed as I stared at the guest list. The numbers just didn’t add up, and coordinating flower arrangements felt impossible. My chest tightened with anxiety, and I knew I was spiraling.

“Olivia,” Alexander’s soothing voice cut through the chaos in my mind. He stood beside me and pushed all the materials away from my overwhelmed gaze. “You need to take a break.”

“Alexander, I can’t,” I protested weakly. “There is so much to do, and we are running out of time.”

“Trust me,” he insisted, his eyes locking onto mine as he lifted me up onto the table. His lips captured mine in a passionate kiss, silencing my worries for a moment.

“Baby, I have so much work to do,” I whispered against his mouth, but Alexander didn’t relent. Instead, he pulled my pants down, leaving me exposed before him.

“Let me help you, Olivia,” he murmured, a wicked grin playing on his lips as he dove between my legs. I threw my head back, moaning loudly as his tongue flicked across my sensitive flesh.

“Fuck, Alexander,” I gasped, my hands gripping the edge of the table as waves of pleasure washed over me. He continued his ministrations, teasing me mercilessly until I could feel my climax building.

“Please, don’t stop,” I begged, my breath snagged as tension coiled under his skilled touch.

“Never, my love,” he replied, pushing me closer and closer to the edge.

My body quivered as Alexander’s tongue and fingers worked their magic on me. My senses were heightened, the scent of my arousal mingling with the faint aroma of the flowers I had been arranging earlier. He knew exactly how to touch me, his fingers curling inside me in a way that had my back arching off the table.

“Alexander,” I breathed out, my hands gripping his hair and pulling him closer.

“Give in, Olivia,” he murmured against my skin. “Let go.”

The coil within me tightened, and when Alexander added a third finger and pressed his thumb against my clit, I unraveled completely. A guttural moan escaped my lips as wave after wave of pleasure crashed over me. My vision blurred, and for a moment, everything but the feel of him faded away.

“Fuck,” I gasped as the tremors subsided, my chest heaving with each ragged breath. Alexander planted one final kiss on my inner thigh before helping me pull up my pants.

“Better?” he asked, his eyes alight.

“Much,” I admitted.

A few days later, we found ourselves at a lavish engagement party thrown by Alexander’s family. The room was filled with laughter and sparkling conversation, but I couldn’t help feeling overwhelmed as I was introduced to person after person. It seemed like everyone knew Alexander, and they all had stories to share about him.

“Olivia, this is my Aunt Catherine,” Alexander said, gesturing to an elegant woman with a warm smile. She took my hand in hers, and I braced myself for another onslaught of questions and anecdotes.

“Congratulations, dear,” she said. “I am so happy for you both.”

“Thank you,” I replied, my anxiety momentarily abating as I met her kind gaze.

As we made our way around the room, I remained focused on our connection and the love that had brought us to this point. But with each introduction, I felt more and more drained. I

had been struggling to keep up with everything we needed to accomplish in the last few days.

An hour into the engagement party, I felt Alexander's hand on my lower back, gently guiding me away from the crowd. The noise of laughter and conversation dimmed as we slipped away, his reassuring presence at my side.

"Come with me," he murmured, leading me down a hallway adorned with family photos and warm memories.

Anticipation quickened my pulse, unsure of what to expect but trusting him implicitly. He opened a door to a seemingly random room, ushering me inside before locking it behind us.

"Alexander?" I asked softly.

"You've been doing so well tonight, Olivia," he said. "I just wanted to give you a little break." He stepped closer, his hands resting on my hips, and looked deep into my eyes. "You look absolutely stunning."

A shiver ran through me at his words, and my cheeks flushed with both pride and desire. His gaze lingered on me, appreciating every curve and contour of my body. It felt as if he was undressing me with his eyes, and I couldn't help but squirm under the intensity of his stare.

"Turn around," he ordered, his voice husky with need. As I obeyed, I felt his fingers deftly lifting the hem of my dress, exposing my hips and the lace underwear that lay beneath. My breaths grew shallow, my skin buzzing as he unbuckled his pants, freeing himself.

"Alexander," I gasped, my voice shaky from the excitement building within me. I felt him press against me from behind,

his hardness teasing my entrance.

“Shh, love,” he breathed into my ear, one hand holding my dress up while the other gripped my hip tightly. “Just enjoy this moment.”

With that, he thrust into me, driving himself deep inside. A moan escaped my lips as he filled me completely, his strokes growing faster and more insistent.

“God, Olivia,” he groaned, his breath hot against my neck. “You feel so fucking amazing.”

The sensations overwhelmed me—the delicious stretch of him inside me, the firm grip of his hand on my hip, the way his body moved in perfect harmony with mine. My thoughts dissolved into pure, unadulterated pleasure, and I couldn’t help but whimper his name.

“Alexander... Oh, God, yes...”

His pace quickened even further, each thrust pushing me closer to the climax. My knees buckled as I surrendered to the ecstasy, and I clung to him for support.

“Come for me, Olivia,” he urged. “Let go.”

As if on cue, my climax crashed over me like a tidal wave, obliterating any semblance of coherent thought. My body shuddered as I cried out his name, every nerve ending alight with electric pleasure.

“Fuck, Olivia,” Alexander gasped, his own release imminent. With one final, powerful thrust, he buried himself deep within me, his body trembling with the force of his orgasm.

For a moment, we stood there together, panting and entwined, savoring the intimate connection that had brought us such intense pleasure. As our breathing slowed and our heartbeats synced, I was reminded once again of the depth of our love and the bond we shared.

“Thank you,” I whispered, leaning back against him. “I needed this.”

“Anytime, love,” he replied softly, pressing a tender kiss to my temple. “Now let’s get you cleaned up and ready to face the world again.”

He retrieved tissues from a nearby box, gently wiping away the evidence of our passion. As he adjusted my dress, ensuring it covered me properly once more, I caught my reflection in the mirror—cheeks flushed, eyes glazed but alive with renewed energy.

“Better?” he asked, meeting my gaze in the mirror. His dark eyes held warmth and affection and it was just the reassurance I needed.

“Much better,” I confirmed, offering him a grateful smile. “You always know exactly what I need.”

“Only because I pay attention to you,” he said, his fingers brushing a stray strand of hair behind my ear. “You are the most important person in my life, Olivia. I would do anything to make you happy.”

“Even if it meant sneaking away from a room full of people to fuck me senseless?” I teased, arching an eyebrow playfully.

“Especially then,” he smirked, his hand resting on my hip as he guided me toward the door. “Ready to rejoin the party?”

“Definitely,” I nodded, feeling more at ease than I had all evening.

As we stepped back into the bustling room, the noise and movement that had initially overwhelmed me now seemed manageable. Alexander’s presence beside me was a constant reminder that I was loved and supported, no matter how hectic my surroundings became.

“Remember, I’m right here if you need me,” he whispered in my ear as we navigated the crowd. “Just give me a signal, and I’ll whisk you away again.”

“Deal,” I said, squeezing his hand in response.

Chapter Thirty-Two

Olivia

“Your hair looks beautiful,” Ethan, my maid of honor, complimented, fastening an exquisite jeweled comb near my ear. His fingers deftly twisted my locks into a delicate updo, the finishing touch to my bridal look.

I knew that Ethan had been by my side through all my ups and downs, and I had to have him there to do it. He had cried when I had asked him to be a bridesmaid.

“Thank you, Ethan. I couldn’t have done it without you,” I replied, leaning forward to plant a grateful kiss on his cheek.

“Remember your first day?” Ethan asked, a playful grin on his lips as he straightened the delicate lace of my veil. “You looked so nervous, Olivia, but he couldn’t take his eyes off you.”

I laughed, recalling the butterflies that had fluttered in my stomach that day. “I was terrified of saying something stupid, but he made me feel at ease within minutes.” The warmth of his touch, the intensity of his gaze—it all came flooding back to me.

“Hey, don’t cry now,” Ethan warned gently, dabbing at my eyes with a tissue. “We wouldn’t want your makeup to smudge before you even walked down the aisle.”

“Right,” I agreed, taking a deep breath to steady myself. “No tears, just smiles.”

“Alright, Olivia,” Ethan said. “It’s time to marry the man of your dreams.”

The intricate lace of my wedding gown felt like a gentle caress against my skin as I stepped into it. The scent of fresh gardenias filled the room, enhancing the electrifying atmosphere. Ethan stepped away as Mia helped me slide the dress up over my hips and settled it around my waist.

“Olivia, you look absolutely stunning,” Mia breathed, her voice filled with awe.

Ethan knocked on the door now separating us. “Let me see!”

I giggled. “Come in.”

Even though Ethan had been there when I had picked out my dress, he still gasped and clutched at his chest. “Oh, Olivia, Alexander won’t be able to take his eyes off you,” Ethan added.

I blushed at their words, excitement and gratitude flooding through me. Today was the day Alexander and I would finally pledge our love and commitment to each other in front of our friends and family.

“Almost there,” Ethan murmured, stepping back to admire his handiwork. “Just need the veil.”

He retrieved the exquisite lace veil from its hanger and gently placed it on my head, securing it with a few well-placed pins. I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror, my heart swelling with a mix of pride and vulnerability.

“Alright, Olivia,” Ethan said, his eyes wet with unshed tears. “It’s time to go make Alexander the luckiest man alive.”

“Thank you,” I whispered. “Thank you both for being here with me today.”

“Of course,” Mia replied, squeezing my hand reassuringly.

“We wouldn’t have missed it for the world. Ready?”

“More than ever,” I replied.

“Then let’s do this,” Mia said.

Arm in arm, we stepped into the sunlight, ready to embrace the journey that lay ahead—a journey filled with passion, devotion, and an unbreakable bond that would see us through whatever life had in store.

Chapter Thirty-Three

Olivia

I stood before Alexander, our eyes locked in an unbreakable connection. The soft rustle of leaves and gentle murmur of our loved ones created a tender symphony around us.

“Olivia,” he began, “from the moment we met, I knew you were the one who would change my life forever. Your passion, your strength, and your unwavering love have transformed me into a better man.”

“Alexander,” I said, my voice catching in my throat, “you have shown me what it meant to truly love and be loved. You have taught me to embrace my desires, my dreams, and to never settle for anything less than extraordinary.”

Our gazes never wavered, our souls intertwined by the promises we made. The air around us crackled with energy, charged with the intensity of our love.

“Facing every challenge together, we have grown stronger and more resilient,” Alexander continued, his grip on my hands tightening ever so slightly. “I vow to always cherish, protect, and support you, Olivia. To nurture our love and ensure it flourishes, no matter what trials we may face.”

A tear escaped my eye, tracing a warm path down my cheek.

“Alexander,” I whispered, feeling the weight of each word as they left my lips, “I vow to walk beside you, hand in hand, through every obstacle and adventure life had in store for us.

Together, we will build a life filled with love, passion, and endless possibilities.”

The world around us faded away, leaving only the two of us standing before each other, bound by our vows and the love that coursed through our veins. The future stretched out before us—a canvas waiting to be painted with the vivid colors of our dreams.

“Olivia, do you take Alexander to be your lawfully wedded husband?” the officiant asked, his voice gentle but firm.

“I do,” I replied, gazing into Alexander’s eyes, where a passionate fire burned.

“Alexander, do you take Olivia to be your lawfully wedded wife?”

“I do,” he answered, his voice deep and resonant, sending tingles throughout my body.

“By the power vested in me, I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss the bride.”

Alexander’s hands cupped my face, his fingers softly brushing against the tear tracks on my cheeks. Our lips met in a searing kiss that ignited a wildfire within me. The world around us faded as we lost ourselves in each other, merging into a single entity bound by our love and devotion.

With a reluctant sigh, we broke apart, our foreheads pressed together, sharing breaths and basking in the glow of our newly formed union. The room erupted in applause, and I couldn’t help but grin at the sight of our loved ones celebrating our happiness.

“Congratulations, Mrs. Bennett,” Alexander whispered, his eyes shining with desire.

“Thank you, Mr. Bennett,” I teased back.

The applause of our friends and family crescendoed as we faced them, their joy filling the room with an electric energy. I glanced at Alexander and found myself almost overwhelmed with love and pride as we stood together on the precipice of this new chapter.

“Thank you all for being here,” I said, my voice choked with emotion. “Your love and support mean the world to us.”

“Indeed,” Alexander added, his fingers intertwining with mine. “We promise to nurture and grow this love you witness today, and let it guide us through every challenge and triumph life has in store.”

“Let’s raise a toast!” Christopher called out, holding up a glass of champagne. The crowd followed suit, glasses clinking and sparkling like the anticipation in the air.

“Here’s to a lifetime of happiness, adventure, and passion,” I declared, my eyes locked on Alexander’s, a silent promise passing between us.

“Cheers!” everyone echoed, their voices lifting in harmony.

As we sipped from our glasses, I stole a glance at Alexander, admiring the way his strong jaw tensed when he swallowed, the curve of his lips that hinted at the man who knew how to make my body sing. My arousal flared, need pulsing through me, desperate to explore every inch of this new life we had promised each other.

“Are you ready for the celebration?” Alexander asked. The desire in his eyes was palpable, making my breath hitch.

“Absolutely,” I replied. “But first, let’s escape for a moment, just the two of us.”

His eyes darkened with lust, making my thighs clench. “Lead the way, Mrs. Bennett,” he murmured, his hand pressing into the small of my back.

“Follow me, Mr. Bennett,” I teased, taking his hand and leading him towards the secluded garden behind the venue, where we could steal a few precious moments alone.

Chapter Thirty-Four

Olivia

The warmth of Alexander's hand in mine sent shivers down my spine as we reentered the reception hall. The room was a kaleidoscope of color, with twinkling lights casting warm, golden hues on the faces of our family and friends.

"Olivia, look at all these people here for us," Alexander whispered in my ear, his warm breath tickling my skin. I gazed around, taking in the smiles and laughter that filled the room, a vibrant symphony of love and support.

One by one, our loved ones approached, each offering heartfelt congratulations and affectionate embraces. My cheeks ached from smiling, but I wouldn't have had it any other way.

"Your love is inspiring," Aunt Susan said, her eyes glistening with unshed tears. She hugged us both tightly before stepping back, allowing others to share their sentiments.

"May your life together be filled with endless passion and adventure," my best friend, Mia, grinned mischievously, winking at us. Alexander squeezed my hand, his thumb tracing circles on my palm, igniting a familiar heat within me.

"Thank you, everyone," Alexander addressed the crowd. "We are truly humbled by your love and support."

As he spoke, I watched him, captivated by the way his words carried the weight of a thousand promises. He was my rock,

my steadfast partner in this journey, and I knew without a doubt that our love would only grow stronger.

“Olivia,” Alexander turned to me, his eyes locking onto mine with an intensity that stole my breath. “You are my sun, my moon, my everything. I vow to cherish and protect you for all eternity.”

Our guests fell silent, their collective gaze honing in on our shared moment. Emotion swelled within me, and I struggled to find the words to express my love for this incredible man.

“Alexander,” I began, my voice barely a whisper. “You are the light that pulls me from the darkness, the fire that ignites my soul. I promise to stand by your side, in both pleasure and pain, as we navigate this beautiful, chaotic world together.”

Tears caught in my throat, but I refused to let them fall. This was our moment—a sacred bond forged in joy and laughter, sealed with the unbreakable strength of our commitment.

The spotlights converged on the dance floor. Alexander took my hand, our fingers intertwining as we stepped forward to share our first dance as husband and wife. The delicate notes of our music filled the room, creating an atmosphere that felt at once intimate and electric.

“Ready?” he whispered, his breath tickling my earlobe as he pulled me closer.

“Always,” I replied.

Our bodies melted together effortlessly, each movement infused with our passion for each other. Alexander’s strong arms guided me across the floor.

Around us, the room pulsed with infectious energy, laughter and lively conversation providing a rich underscore to our dance. Our friends and family watched us with rapt attention, their expressions a mix of warmth and admiration.

“Olivia,” Alexander said. “I can’t believe how incredibly lucky I am to call you my wife.”

“And I can’t wait to explore all the amazing adventures that lay ahead for us, my love,” I responded.

We continued to glide across the floor, lost in the rhythm and one another. The world beyond us faded into a blur of colors and sounds as we surrendered ourselves to the moment.

“Let’s make a promise,” Alexander suggested as the song neared its end, his eyes locked on mine with unwavering intensity.

“Anything,” I breathed.

“Let’s promise never to take any of this for granted,” he said, gesturing to the room filled with our loved ones. “Let’s cherish every single moment we have together, no matter how big or small.”

“Deal,” I agreed, sealing our pact with a lingering kiss that sent shudders of pure desire coursing through my veins.

The scent of jasmine floated through the air, mingling with the laughter and excited chatter that filled the reception hall. I watched as friends and family members danced and embraced each other, their joy contagious and reaffirming. The music swelled around us, a vibrant symphony of life and love.

“May I have your attention, please?” Alexander’s best man, Christopher, tapped his champagne glass gently, silencing the room in an instant. He stood beside us, grinning widely. “As Alexander’s brother, and only friend—” The crowd chuckled. “It is my great honor to propose a toast to this incredible couple.”

“Hear, hear!” someone shouted from the crowd, eliciting a chorus of cheers and raised glasses.

“Olivia,” Christopher began, turning to face me with a smile that reached his eyes, “you have brought so much light into Alexander’s world; you have made him happier than I have ever seen him before. And for that, I will be forever grateful.”

“Alexander,” he continued, directing his gaze toward my new husband, “though we have known each other for my entire lifetime, I can say without a doubt that today, seeing you stand beside Olivia, has been one of the proudest moments as your brother. May you both continue to grow and love one another, navigating the storms of life hand-in-hand.”

“Cheers!” the crowd echoed, raising their glasses high before taking a sip of the bubbling liquid.

“Thank you, Christopher,” I whispered, tears pricking at the corners of my eyes.

“Anything for you two,” he replied, pulling us both into a tight hug.

As the music picked up again, Alexander entwined his fingers with mine and led me back onto the dance floor. Our bodies melded together, swaying in time with the rhythm as we lost ourselves in each other’s eyes. The heat of his skin radiated

through the thin fabric of my wedding gown, the intensity of his desire for me written across his face.

“Olivia,” he murmured into my ear, his breath hot against my neck, “I can’t believe we are finally married.”

“Neither can I,” I confessed.

“Let’s savor every moment of tonight,” he suggested, his words sending a thrill coursing through my veins. “And every day that follows.”

“Deal,” I responded, pulling him closer as our lips crashed together in a searing kiss that left us both breathless and wanting more.

Chapter Thirty-Five

Olivia

The last of the champagne flutes clinked together in a final toast as our wedding festivities began to wind down. Alexander, my dashing new husband, took my hand and led me away from the crowd, a mischievous gleam in his eyes.

“Ready for the next adventure, Mrs. Bennett?” he asked playfully, causing butterflies to flutter in my stomach.

“Absolutely, Mr. Bennett,” I replied, squeezing his hand as we left the reception behind.

A sleek black limousine waited for us at the entrance, and Alexander held the door open for me. With a playful wink, I slid into the plush leather seat, and he followed suit, closing the door behind him. The driver started the engine, and we were off to begin our honeymoon.

As the limousine glided through the night, anticipation coiled between us, igniting familiar sparks of desire that danced on my skin. I couldn't help but think back to our first encounter, where the chemistry was instant and undeniable. The warmth of Alexander's hand on my thigh brought me back to the present, reminding me that we were now one—united by love and passion.

“Are you excited?” he asked, his voice husky with desire.

“More than you can imagine,” I whispered, leaning in to steal a quick kiss.

Arriving at the private airstrip, we stepped out of the limousine to find Alexander's luxurious jet waiting for us. The sight was breathtaking and spoke to the power and wealth my husband possessed. I couldn't help but feel a rush of excitement knowing that this magnificent aircraft was about to whisk us away on our first journey as husband and wife.

"Shall we?" Alexander asked, offering his arm with a grin.

"Let's do it," I responded, linking my arm with his as we walked toward the plane.

Once on board, I marveled at the opulent interior—plush leather seats, a fully stocked bar, and a spacious bedroom in the back. No matter how many times I flew in his jet, I never got accustomed to its luxury. It was clear that no expense had been spared, and I couldn't help but feel incredibly lucky to be embarking on this adventure with the love of my life.

"Would you like a drink?" Alexander asked, gesturing toward the bar.

"Maybe later," I responded coyly, feeling the pull of desire guiding me toward the bed curtained away at the back of the plane.

"Ah, I see," he smirked as he followed me.

We stood at the threshold of our aerial bedroom, Alexander's strong hand gripping mine. The air between us crackled with anticipation, our connection electric.

"Olivia," he murmured, his voice low and sensual. "I've been waiting all day for this." He pulled me into a deep, searing kiss, his lips insistent and hungry. My senses were

overwhelmed by the taste of him—a blend of champagne and passion.

His hands deftly moved to the back of my dress, fingers nimble as they worked to undo the bodice. With each release of fabric, my skin tingled in response, yearning for his touch. As Alexander pushed the dress down my body, I pulled away from his embrace just enough to allow it to pool at my feet.

“Wait,” I whispered, my chest heaving with desire. “Let me take off your jacket.”

His eyes darkened with lust as he watched me, his breath hitching in anticipation. I reached up to unbutton his tailored suit jacket, my fingers trembling with excitement. As the fabric slid off his shoulders, I was struck by the sheer power and virility of the man before me.

“Your turn,” he said. I nodded, biting my lip as I reached behind my back to unhook the clasp of my bra. The straps slid down my arms, and I caught a glimpse of his pupils dilating with eagerness.

“God, Olivia,” he breathed, his gaze raking over my exposed flesh, leaving a trail of goosebumps in its wake. “You are absolutely stunning.”

“Alexander,” I gasped, the sound caught somewhere between a sigh and a moan as our eyes locked, communicating the depth of our love and passion. I knew he was holding back, allowing me to set the pace and explore my own desires.

“Come here,” I said, needing him closer, wanting to feel the heat of his skin against mine. We collided like magnets, our

bodies melding together as if they were always meant to be one.

“Olivia...” Alexander murmured against my lips, his voice filled with devotion and desire. “I love you more than anything.”

“Show me,” I commanded, taking his hand and leading him to the bed. The plush sheets and soft lighting beckoned us toward the intimate space, promising pleasure and connection.

“Olivia, you are breathtaking.” Alexander’s eyes widened as they took in my body. I could see the hunger and desire in his intense gaze.

“Let me take care of you,” I whispered, pushing him onto the bed and straddling his hips. My body pressed against his, our skin hot and slick. I moved in slow circles, feeling the hardness of him beneath me, fueling my own arousal.

“Fuck, Olivia,” he groaned, gripping my hips tightly. His fingers dug into my flesh, leaving delicious marks of possession. “You feel amazing.”

“Alexander,” I breathed, tipping my head back as desire coursed through me. “This is just the beginning.”

I leaned forward, tracing my lips along the column of his throat, feeling his pulse race under my touch. He shuddered beneath me, a low growl escaping his lips. With each movement, our bodies became more entwined, the heat between us growing unbearable.

“Can’t get enough of you, Olivia,” he murmured. I savored the way he said my name, how it sounded like a plea and a

promise all at once.

“Show me how much you want me,” I challenged, my eyes locked with his. He met my gaze, determination and love burning within them.

His hands tightened on my hips before in one swift motion, he flipped me onto my back.

“You have no idea how much I love you,” he murmured into my ear. His hands continued their exploration, gliding over the curve of my breasts and down my stomach.

“Alexander,” I moaned as his fingertips grazed the edge of my lace panties. He looked up at me, his eyes dark with desire, but behind them, an unshakable tenderness remained.

“Tell me what you want,” he said, his voice tantalizing. “Tell me how I can make you feel good.”

“Touch me,” I whispered. “Please, don’t tease me anymore.”

His lips curled into a wicked grin, and he pinned my wrists above my head. The sensation of being fully exposed to him, vulnerable and wanting, made me gasp with pleasure. He leaned in, his mouth brushing against my earlobe as he whispered, “You are mine. And I am going to bring you so much pleasure, you’ll never forget this night.”

“Please, Alexander,” I begged, unable to hold back any longer. “I need you now.”

Chuckling, Alexander released my wrists, and with one hand, he swiftly undid his pants, the sound of fabric against skin heightening my anticipation. As he settled between my thighs, our gazes locked onto each other, and I could see the unbridled passion burning in his eyes.

“Ready?” he asked, his voice a husky, low timbre.

“More than,” I replied, unable to hide the tremor in my words.

With a teasing grin, Alexander pushed deep into me, stealing my breath away. My back arched involuntarily off the bed, our bodies melding together with an intensity that was both thrilling and overwhelming. A gasp slipped from my lips, but before I could form any more coherent thoughts, he started to move.

“God,” he groaned, his hips meeting mine in a steady rhythm. “You feel so incredible.”

My hands roamed over Alexander’s body, fingertips tracing the contours of his muscles, the dampness of his skin, committing every inch of him to memory. The raw power and strength beneath my touch sent a primal thrill through me.

“Alexander... I love you,” I whispered, my breath hitching as our bodies continued their passionate dance.

“Olivia,” he murmured, “I love you too, more than anything in this world.”

The familiar heat within me built relentlessly, our movements growing increasingly urgent. Sensing my impending climax, Alexander’s fingers found their way to the sensitive bundle of nerves between my legs, expertly pushing me over the edge.

“Alexander!” I cried out, my body convulsing with pleasure as I clung to him for dear life.

“Olivia!” he echoed, his own release washing over him with a guttural moan. I felt him shudder against me, our bodies melding together in a symphony of pleasure.

Exhausted, we collapsed into each other's arms, our breaths mingling as we rode out the aftershocks of our passion. Our eyes met, and Alexander's lips curved into a tender smile.

"Forever, Olivia," he whispered, his fingers entwining with mine as we drifted towards sleep, wrapped in the warmth of our love and the promise of our future together.

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My Bossy Billionaire

Chapter One

Jennifer

A light rain began to fall as I flew over the sidewalk. My shoes, worn smooth from walking, slid on the rain-soaked concrete but I managed to keep my balance by grabbing the rusted edge of a downspout.

My sides were aching, my calves cramping when I saw the restaurant come in sight. *Jerry's Place* occupied the corner lot of a high-end strip mall, not far from a movie theater. The restaurant specialized in upscale comfort food.

I saw my favorite waitress move by in her signature green apron. Amanda, one of my coworkers I was pretty friendly with. She saw me coming as I strode toward the front doors.

My smile faded when she shook her head emphatically and pointed toward the back. My gaze followed her gesture and I spotted Dill, the general manager. He looked like too much flesh poured into a mold meant for a much smaller man. I swear that he was born with a scowl indelibly etched on his face.

I couldn't go in the front way or Dill would know that I was almost an hour late. He wasn't even supposed to be there that day. Normally Dill didn't show up until the lunch crowd at the earliest, if he showed up at all before the big dinner rush.

If he was at the restaurant early, then it meant he was looking for trouble or had already found it. I knew I had to find another way inside the restaurant, but how I would do that was another story. There was a rear entrance, but usually it was only opened to throw away garbage or to take deliveries.

I jogged around the back of the building, hoping I would get lucky. Fortune smiled as I saw the heavy dull gray door wedged open by a broom handle. Nearby, Jacob, our maintenance man, heaved a huge plastic bag bulging with trash into the massive dumpster.

It made a huge thud in the dumpster bottom, and a whiff of pungent, sun-dried ketchup rose up to greet my nostrils. I covered my mouth and nose and waved at Jacob as I went by.

“Good morning, Jake.”

“Good morning, Jennifer. How’s it going?”

“I’m late.”

“Naw, really?” His wide, expressive face split into a grin. Jake wasn’t much older than me, and his pudgy physique made him seem like he was just out of high school. His dark brown coveralls already had a dark sweat stain on his chest and armpits. “What else is new?”

I knew he didn’t mean anything by it, but he wasn’t exactly wrong, either. I quickly took my place at the dishwashing station. I scowled at the sight of dishes piled high on nearly every spare surface.

“What the hell happened here?” I sputtered. It looked to me like the closing dishwasher didn’t finish his job. In fact, it

looked like there had been literally no attempt to even start his job.

“Oh, the dishwasher broke.”

I turned around to find a dark-skinned, tall man with lanky limbs. His eyes were sympathetic, but also resigned.

“Again? And he didn’t wash them by hand? Why do I always inherit these messes, Ramone?”

“I think they said he had a gig and he didn’t have time.”

“And I do?” I knew that I was late, but come on... this was entirely too much.

“Better get started doing them by hand.” Ramone peered out of the kitchen into the lobby. “Dill is on his way back here.”

“Shit, shit, shit.” I raced to the sink and started filling the largest of the three stainless steel sinks. The first was for the wash, filled with soapy water automatically dispensed by a big tube adhered to the wall.

The second sink was for the rinse and the third and final one would be filled not with water but with a pink sanitizer solution. I had all of three grotesquely baked on pans in the sudsy water when Dill burst through the thin doors separating the kitchen from the restaurant lobby.

His piggish eyes narrowed to slits as he searched the kitchen for something to bitch about. I blinked sweat out of my eyes and tried to concentrate on my job. The kitchen air felt stifflingly hot. Plus, I was elbow-deep in hot soapy water, leaning up against a metal sink that conducted heat like a champ.

To say it was miserable in that kitchen was an understatement, and I'm not just talking about the temperature. Kitchens are loud, noisy places to work. There's always someone bringing stock out, or clumping a heavy bag in a box refreshment refill onto the floor, or chopping, or throwing meat into a searing pan of olive oil.

I had grown used to the cacophony over time. I could differentiate Dill's stride from the other sounds. Every time it drew near I cringed.

"Ricky, what in the fuck are you doing?"

I glanced sidelong at the fry station, where young college kid Ricky struggled to lift a box of vegetable oil up onto the stainless steel fryer.

"I'm refilling the oil in the fryer, Dill."

"I can see that, idiot, but look." He pointed at a bag in a box of vegetable oil on the floor, one which held a teaspoon's worth of product in it. "There's still a ton of grease left in that bag. Don't you dare open a new box until the old one is completely empty."

"Sorry, Dill."

"Not as sorry as you're going to be. Big changes are afoot, and if you're not going to shape up, you're going to ship out." His eyes darted over to my station and I cringed, but he kept going and gawked at Ramone. "Ramone, what the hell, man? Aren't you cutting those chops a little bit on the thick side?"

"This is the way I always cut them, Dill," Ramone said, shrugging his shoulders.

“Well, always cut them a little thinner from now on. Food costs are up, and profits are down.”

That was his favorite refrain. Food costs are up, profits are down. It always seemed to be the case, even when some superhero tentpole blockbuster opened up at the cinema down the way and we were swamped with guests lined up out the door.

He especially liked to use that line whenever anyone asked for a raise.

I saw him edging toward the kitchen doors, as if he were going to retreat for now. I silently begged any god who was listening to just make him leave. He teetered on the verge of going through the doors and hope soared in my heart.

Then, he turned around and stared right at me. My heart skipped a beat as he came to my side.

“You,” he says. “What’s with the huge pile of dishes?”

“The dishwasher broke,” I said.

“I know the dishwasher broke, Jenny. I have a guy coming to look at it later this week.”

“Later this week?”

“What I want to know is,” he continued as if I had not spoken, “why you only have a handful of dishes done. Haven’t you been here since nine o’clock?”

He checked his watch, and I cringed on the inside.

“Oh, she was giving me a hand with the trash,” Jake said, coming to stand beside us. “Sorry, I needed somebody to hold the door open for me.”

“Why didn’t you put a broom in it like normal?”

“I had a little accident here and had to borrow the broom for a minute,” Ramone said to Dill without turning his head.

“All right, fine. Next time, Jake, you don’t distract her from her job, do you hear me?”

“Yes sir, Dill.”

“And as for you,” Dill spun and pointed a finger at me. “You need to stay at your station unless I tell you to move. Do you understand?”

I nodded and turned back to finish my dishes. Dill grabbed my arm and forced me to turn back and face him.

“I said, do you understand?”

“Yes,” I said.

“Good. Don’t let it happen again.”

We watched him head off, and then Ramone cackled.

“He’s really on the warpath today.”

“Hey, thanks for covering for me guys,” I said. “I really appreciate it.”

“No problem. You’re one of us,” Jake said with a grin. It faded a bit as he turned to me. “Um, why were you late today anyway?”

“I worked a double last night. The closing dishwasher came in four hours late, and by the time I got out of here it was almost closing time. I barely got any sleep at all.” I sighed, and gestured at the mountain of dishes. “Of course, looking at

how it turned out, I might as well have stayed on and finished this crap last night rather than having to do it today.”

“Did you ever hear back from that fancy business college you were looking to get into?” Ramone asked.

“No, but even if I did, I don’t have time for that. I have to work overtime just to pay rent and eat.”

“You can do it, Jenny,” Ramone said.

“Yeah, you can do it, honey,” Amanda said as she breezed through on her way to refill a water pitcher. “Whatever it is.”

“Going to business school,” Jake said helpfully.

“Oh yeah,” Amanda said on her way back through, giving me an encouraging smile. “You can do it. I bet you’re way more hard-working than all of those trust fund babies put together.”

It felt good to have the camaraderie and support of my coworkers. It didn’t change the fact that I was bone tired, but it did make me feel a little bit better.

“Hey,” I said to Ramone, “do you know what Dill meant when he said that there were big changes in store?”

“Oh, that? We have a new owner.”

I sighed and covered my face with my hand... which got soapy water in my eyes. I blinked rapidly to clear them and shook my head.

“It’s probably bad news. When they get a new owner most places fire a bunch of staff.”

I tried not to think about it and got to work. I struggled to get the mountain of leftover dishes done, but they kept giving me

more and more. I couldn't make any headway on the new stuff because I was still grinding out the old.

The end of my shift approached, and I had finally cleared out the old dishes and actually caught up on the newer ones. My fingers ached to the bone, and my back had a crick in it. All I wanted to do was go home and take a long, hot bath.

Dill burst into the kitchen and I cursed inwardly. Great, I had thought he'd torn into me enough for one day. Apparently he had not.

"Jenny," he sputtered, coming up to me and putting his hands on his, shall we say, ample hips. "Table number five just said that they found a spot on their glasses."

I felt something burning in my chest.

"Yes, they probably did because the dishwashers are broken, and that means no jet dry. I do my best, Dill, but it's next to impossible to get all the spots off."

"Hey, take it up with them," he said with a shrug. "Or with the new owner. All I know is they said they have spots on their glasses."

Suddenly, my fatigue disappeared and I felt blood boiling in my veins.

"Take it up with them?"

I knew he didn't mean it, but I didn't care anymore. I untied my apron and threw it over the edge of the sink. "Fine, I will take it up with them."

He opened his mouth to say something, but I just stormed past him. My anger had reached a boiling point. I charged out

through the kitchen door, my gaze scanning the room. A group of businessmen sat around at one of the tables, laughing and talking with each other. I saw their tailored three-piece suits and big smarmy grins and I seethed with anger.

I spied the biggest stuffed suit of them all, it was obvious that he was the center of attention of the group.

“So, who’s the Princess with the Pea who wants to complain about spots on their glasses?” I addressed him, even though the question was more or less for everyone. “Is it you? Are you the one who can’t handle a freaking spot on their glass? Hmm? Do you know that I’ve spent eighteen hours at this place over the last thirty, and the dishwashers are broke, and I’m doing all of this by hand, and your damn glass is clean and sanitized, I promise you that.”

I glared at him and snorted.

“You act like you own the place, but all you do is manage the money that you probably inherited. I’d bet a porterhouse steak that you’ve never done a day’s worth of manual labor in your entire life.”

His eyes widened for a split second, and then he stood up... and up. The guy was well over six feet tall, with a broad chest and tapered waist that said he kept himself in excellent shape. His eyes flashed at me, and I felt my heart catch in my throat.

Jesus Christ, what a dream. He’s stunning.

His gaze traveled all over my body in a matter of moments. I could feel him appraising me on a variety of scales, and my cheeks burned.

“I’m sorry,” he said in a voice more confident than God. “I didn’t catch your name.”

“I didn’t give it, but it’s Jenny. Jennifer.”

“Well, Jennifer,” he said in a maddeningly calm voice. “I’ll take that bet.”

Chapter Two

Jennifer

There were only three of us left in the kitchen. The cooks, the waiters, and the maintenance crew had all gone home for the evening. There was just me, Dill and the handsome stranger in a suit.

“What’s going on, Dill?” I looked over at the tall, brown-haired man whose dazzling blue eyes seemed to pierce me to my soul. “Why did you make me wait until closing time and why is he back here?”

Dill snickered, thrusting his hands into his pockets.

“This is Marshall. And you should know why he’s here. Apparently, the two of you have made some kind of wager.”

I turned a frown on Marshall. His strong jaw and stoic expression just oozed confidence. He was ten, maybe fifteen years older than me, but somehow looked more masculine than most of my peers. I couldn’t meet his gaze for long without feeling a shiver tremble down my spine and I totally hated the fact that he made me feel this way.

“I guess that we did.” I cocked my head to the side. “But I’m not sure what he’s doing here.”

“I’m here to answer your challenge.” His voice was deep as the ocean. That blue-eyed gaze dazzled me in spite of myself. “You said that you bet I couldn’t do manual labor. I’m here to prove you wrong.”

“Prove me wrong?” I looked him in the eyes, trying to pretend he wasn’t handsome. Or had huge warts on his nose. It didn’t help. “I’m looking at the skin on your hands there, Marshall.”

“What about my hands?” he looked at his hands and frowned. “Do I have something on them?”

“Yeah, a whole lot of hubris.”

Dill’s mouth dropped open. I’m sure he didn’t know what hubris meant, but he probably knew from my tone it was an insult.

“Jenny, you can’t talk to Mr. Lane like that,” he huffed. I saw the glint of fear in his eyes. “It’s not proper.”

I rolled my eyes. Just because the guy was an uppity customer who bitched about a dirty glass didn’t make him King of the Kitchen.

“Yeah, yeah, anyway, back to your hands.” My brows climbed high on my face. “They’re much too pretty for dishwashing. I’d say that you had a maid and a butler and never even had to wipe your own...”

“Jenny!” Dill snapped. His ruddy face glistened with nervous sweat. “Watch it.”

“He’s already pissed about the stupid spot on his glass,” I growled. “Who cares if he hears me curse? And I stand by what I said. No way has this guy done an honest day’s work in his entire life.”

This whole betting thing started to annoy me. Typical man, turning it into a pissing contest. I hadn’t even been serious about it when I’d said it. I mean, what did I bet on, a porterhouse?

“Oh, haven’t I?” His voice was still the epitome of calm. I got the feeling I could prick him with a needle and he wouldn’t so much as flinch.

“No, you haven’t.” I turned to the huge pile of dishes. “Okay, MISTER Lane, take a gander at the yon metropolis of dirty dishes.”

“I see it.” He shrugged as he regarded all of those messy plates, some of them with crud dried onto them. “Although, I would hesitate to call this a metropolis of dirty dishes. More like a small hamlet. I’ve seen some metropolises in my day.”

Then he turned to me and smirked, as if totally unimpressed with a monumental amount of work.

“Oh, is that so?” I put my hand on my hip as I glared at him.

“Yes, as a matter of fact, it is so.”

“Pretty confident, aren’t you?” I tugged at my collar, to release the heat. The kitchen was still so damn hot. Or maybe it was him. “Or should I say arrogant?”

“Ah, I’ve been called arrogant before, many times.” His brows arched ever so slightly. “But, I must say that you’re

only arrogant when confidence is married to incompetence. I am far from incompetent, therefore I'm not arrogant."

It looked like neither of us was willing to give an inch of ground.

"Listen here, you puffed up—"

"Whoa, whoa," Dill said, cutting me off mid-sentence. He turned a terrified glance my way, then plastered on a smile as he faced Marshall. Or should I say Mr. Lane. "Let's not start slinging mud here."

"I agree." Marshall gestured toward the monstrous pile of dishes, his 'hamlet.' "So, if I can wash all of these dishes will that settle our bet?"

I looked at him, then at the stack of dishes, then back again. I tried to clamp my lips down on a laugh, but it escaped anyway.

"Are you kidding me? You're going to wash dishes in that outfit?" I shook my head in disbelief. "Yeah, right."

"You don't think that I will?"

I regarded him for a long moment while Dill shifted nervously from foot to foot. It seemed to me that he was utterly serious. I had to consider that he was taking my challenge for real.

"I'm starting to think you're insecure enough about the size of your dick to try," I said at length.

"That's it," Dill sputtered, his face turning redder than a tomato. "Jenny, you're—"

“It’s all right,” Marshall said, cutting off Dill’s tirade before it could really get off the ground. Dill closed his mouth, his eyes anxious as he stared up at Marshall.

“So, if I wash these dishes, then I win the bet?” Marshall asked casually.

“What?” I let out a bark of laughter. “Oh hell no, it’s not going to be that easy. I mean, at this time of night, I’ve had washed a gazillion dishes already and I’d be tired. You’re going into it all fresh.”

His lips twitched a smile. I saw the glimmer of a dimple. Oh my god, he was gorgeous.

“I see. So you would like it to be more fair.”

“Yes, I would.”

“Then... how about a time limit?” he gestured to the dishes. “If I can wash these in a time specified by you, then I win the bet.”

“Um... how long?”

“That’s up to you.”

I considered it for a long moment. How long would it take me to wash those dishes if I were fresh? That was to be my metric. I did the calculations in my head and turned to him confidently with a number in mind.

“Okay, if you can do those dishes in fifteen minutes, I’ll admit that you do know how to work for a living, and I’ll buy you a porterhouse.”

“Fifteen minutes?” he looked over at the dishes and shrugged.

“Seems too easy.”

I wanted to strangle him. I bit back an angry retort as he opened his mouth to speak again.

“And quite frankly, I don’t eat a cut of meat as basic as a porterhouse.”

“Oooh, look at Mr. Fancypants.” I made a gesture in the air with my fingers. “Too precious to eat a porterhouse.”

“If you like.”

None of my insults seemed to be getting through to him. In point of fact, he was getting to me, in more ways than one. I swallowed the lump in my throat and spoke.

“So, what do you want? Lobster or something?”

“No,” he said. “I’ll claim something if I win, though, to be sure.”

Claim something? Like what, flying to Japan for fugu or something?

“Oh, all right, fine.” My eyes gleamed with malice. “I’ll let you claim a ‘mystery prize’ on one condition.”

“And what condition would that be?” He still hadn’t lost his cocky veneer. I was hoping to end that.

“That you do it in five minutes.”

He smirked, cocking his head to the side.

“Challenge accepted.” He turned to Dill. “Dilbert, would you time me, please?”

“Of course, Mister Lane.”

I looked over at the general manager.

“Dilbert?”

“Hey,” he sneered as he drew his phone out of his pocket. “Oh, all right. Go ahead, get it out of your system so we can move on.”

“Dilbert, this isn’t something you get out of your system all at once.” I blew air out of my lips. “This is the kind of thing you *savor* for... years and years and years.”

He sneered at me and turned toward Marshall.

“Are you ready, Sir?”

“All set.”

“On your mark, get set... go!”

Marshall dove into the dishes, not even bothering to remove his expensive watch first. To my shock, he looked like he knew what he was doing. Marshall dumped the grodiest dishes into the sudsy water first, then started working on those less difficult to clean.

The cooks used a lot of different little pans and dishes in their tasks, and they were among the hardest pieces to clean. Like the metal tin for mayonnaise. That thing was a huge pain in the butt to clean because it was so narrow.

Marshall sprayed it out like a champ and then dunked it in sudsy water. He worked quickly, piling up dishes in the rinse sink, then dumping more dirty ones into the wash sink, and finally transferring the rinsed dishes into a dark pink sanitizing solution.

“He’s... good,” I said to Dill quietly.

“He knows what he’s doing, all right,” Dill said with a firm nod.

“I actually started my career from the bottom.” Marshall’s eyes darted over to me for a moment before returning to his task. “I’ve busted rocks, I’ve unloaded trucks, worked in mail rooms, and yes, washed dishes.”

“Well, if you washed dishes, then you should have understood how hard it is,” I snapped. “But no, you had to complain, didn’t you?”

Marshall laughed, and for the first time it didn’t sound smarmy or mocking.

“I actually didn’t complain at all.”

“You... what?” I screwed up my face in confusion and turned to Dill. “Didn’t you say that the person who complained was from table number five?”

“Yeah, table number five, right next to the server’s station.” He pointed out the kitchen window and I grimaced when I realized I’d gone to the wrong table.

This whole situation was my fault. I felt blood rushing to my head and this empty feeling in my stomach as my anger dissipated.

And the worst of it was that it looked like this guy might actually win. There were very few dishes left in the wash, and he quickly unloaded those remaining in the disinfecting solution to the drying racks overhead.

I felt a rush of shame that I had prejudged him. Clearly this was not a man unfamiliar with hard labor. His shirt was dark with water stains, and a sheen of sweat shone on his forehead. I started getting worried.

I looked over at Dill's phone, mostly to make sure that he wasn't helping Marshall cheat. He had about a minute left.

I turned back to watch Marshall. I figured maybe breaking his nerve might help. A few well-placed taunts can bring down an army.

"Only fifty seconds left, Marshall. Tick tock."

He flashed his gaze over to me, and then he had the gall to smile. He went into turbo mode, quickly scrubbing the rest of the dishes and plunging them into the sanitizer water. I watched the time tick down, then looked up when he had five seconds left.

My mouth hung open in shock. There, behind him, was a fully laden shelf with clean dishes. I ran my hand down my face and shook my head in disbelief.

"I don't believe it." I sighed. "Well, I'm honest enough to admit when I'm beat. And I'm beat. To the victors go the spoils, and all of that."

He looked me up and down.

"So what do you want?" I asked at length.

"You."

Chapter Three

Jennifer

"You can't have me," I said bluntly, shaking my head. "What century is this? You don't just get me in bed because you won a stupid bet."

“I never said anything about getting you in bed.” His smooth voice hit my ears like velvet and honey. My mouth flew open when I deciphered the words. “You’re getting ahead of yourself, Jennifer.”

“I... it was implied,” I said, a petulant tone coming into my voice.

“I think not. I only meant that I wanted the pleasure of your company. Any other implications were born purely of your own *fantasy*.”

A thrilling shiver went down my spine when he said the word *fantasy*. And the worst thing was that he wasn’t even trying.

“Well, what do you mean by the pleasure of my company, then?”

“Just that. I thought it was fairly obvious on the surface what I wanted.”

His eyes burned into me. I’ve seen creepy guys undress me with my eyes before, and it was so disgusting. This was different. His gaze simply said to me that he knew the thoughts dancing like lightning through my mind.

“Now, Jenny,” Dill said, clearing his throat. “Don’t welch on a bet.”

“Dilbert, you can go ahead and lock up for the night. Jennifer and I will be leaving now.”

“We will?” I looked down at myself. “Look, man, I’ve been busting my ass in this kitchen all night. I am dead tired. I have a film of dirty dishwater on my skin. I’ll ‘give you the pleasure of my company’ as you so quaintly put it, but I insist on a chance to shower and change.”

“I see.” His blue eyes looked right through me. I felt a hot flush come to my cheeks. My heart hammered in my chest so hard I thought for certain he must be able to hear it. “I appreciate that you want to look your best for me.”

I bristled, putting my hands on my hips and glaring. He maintained his composure. I’ve even made the King of the Kitchen Ramone wilt with this look. It didn’t seem to work. If anything, he got the same light in his eyes that one gets when faced with a ferocious kitten attacking a ball of string.

“I just don’t want to be gross.” My belly rumbled. “You’d better be planning on feeding me.”

“Your needs will be satisfied.”

His eyes smoldered, and my knees grew weak.

“Did you go to school on how to make everything sound dirty?” I blurted.

“Is what I said dirty, Jennifer?” His eyes ran up and down my form. “Or did you just want it to be?”

I turned my back on him, unable to deal with the feelings he kept stirring up inside.

“Let’s just get this over with. I’m going home to shower and change.” I checked the time and laughed. “I hope you know a restaurant open this late that doesn’t have golden arches in front of it.”

“I’m sure I can find something worthy of your palate.” His eyes open a bit wider. “Unless of course you would like to postpone?”

Postpone? And have thoughts of him running through my mind for a day or two? Hell no. I didn't want him bouncing around in my skull. I just wanted this whole thing done with.

“Oh no, buddy. We're doing this now so I don't have it hanging over my head. You wanted to collect your bet, well, you're going to collect tonight.”

His lips parted in a grin as we reached the restaurant lobby. It always looked a little different with all the lights off.

“Will I?”

I steamed, in more ways than one. It wasn't just the searing looks and innuendos which he somehow made me feel guilty for even though he said them. It was the whole package.

“Do you want to meet back here after I shower and change...”

My voice trailed off as I pushed open the door and beheld the sleek black limousine parked in front of Jerry's Place. No fucking way.

“How about if I give you a ride instead?” He said it oh so casually, as if he hadn't set this whole thing up.

“If you insist.”

His eyes sparkled as the driver hastened to open the back door for us. He tipped his hat to me and smiled, but his job was to be unobtrusive and I didn't really take in his features. The driver in a way was like the limo, another accouterment of a super rich man.

“Allow me,” Marshall said, offering me his hand. I took it a bit suspiciously, and got in the back seat. I scooted over,

marveling at how much room there was as he got in as well.

I refused to let it show on my face how much the size and opulence of the limo captivated me. He glanced over at me and arched his brows.

“Would you like something to drink?” he reached out and pressed a button without telling me. I yelped as a mini fridge sleekly built into the center console opened soundlessly. Inside there were bottles of expensive mineral water, sports drinks, wine, champagne, and soda pop.

“Um, sure, I’ll take a water.”

He handed me the bottle, and it was huge with all sorts of electrolytes and other words hard to pronounce on the label. I have to admit, it hit different from the ninety-nine-cent bottled water I got at the gas station down the street from my crib.

“You know,” I said, “I stand by what I said before. A lot of rich people are just lucky, and that’s why they’re rich. People like me don’t get a fair shake.”

“Do you think that a fair shake is all you need?” He didn’t specifically challenge me with tone or even expression, but again it was implied somehow.

“Yeah, and I can’t get it because of all the gatekeeping. The upper one percent want to keep it in the family. They don’t want anybody else to sit down at their exclusive table.”

“I have an idea of how to prove you wrong.” He sipped his water, eyes never leaving me. The cologne he wore mingled with the kitchen dish soap for a really strange but pleasing combination.

“Oh, is that so?” I didn’t bother to keep the derision out of my tone.

“Indeed. But not tonight.” He screwed the cap back on his bottle and his fingers lingered on the tip while he spoke to me. I almost called him out for the phallic implications, but I was afraid he would turn it around on me.

“Tonight, Jennifer, I just want you to relax, and have a good time.”

Again, nothing dirty there, but I still felt a tremble in every fiber of my being. I wanted to hate this guy. He was the type of elite keeping me down, after all. But god, part of me was thrilled with the idea of getting naked with him.

Just the idea, though.

I was tired, sweaty, tired, hungry and did I mention I was tired?

We pulled up outside of my place and I rushed inside to shower and change. I have certain standards, and I didn’t want to go out looking like crap. I was unfair to him and while I couldn’t bring myself to admit it to his face, I did want to make amends by playing along.

For now.

I slipped on a blue dress with a flared skirt, a slight ruffle at the bottom. I liked it because it was comfortable, just a little bit flirty with its baby doll neckline, and most of all because it was clean. The skirt tended to flounce up while I walked, which made it seem like it would reveal more than it should, but the ruffle kept it weighted enough that never happened.

A pair of black pumps and just a bit of makeup finished my look. My hair was still slightly wet but I did what I could with it, pulling it back into a high ponytail and using a butterfly clip to hold it in place.

I clumped over to the window in my heels and peered out the window to see if maybe he'd gotten bored and left. My face twisted into a confused frown because I couldn't comprehend what I saw at first.

Marshall stood on the sidewalk next to the limousine, wearing an absolutely clean suit. Whatever happened to the old one and how did he manage to change so quickly remained a mystery. He looked amazing though. I never had a thing for older guys, but he just had that energy while being handsome, tall and visibly athletic.

I couldn't watch any longer and headed back down the steps. When I reached the street he opened a limo door himself.

"You look ravishing."

He stepped up to me and took my hand, kissing it briefly, then holding it while I crawled into the limo. I felt really self-conscious on the ride over. I was wearing a thrift store dress, and he had on a suit worth more than everything in my apartment combined.

"Where are we going?" I tried to break the silence to quiet my thoughts.

"You'll like it."

"You have to tell me though."

"I am afraid that I don't. I won so I set the terms."

The limo pulled to a stop outside of the tallest building in town, the Lane Tower. If he is THAT Lane, then he is even richer than I thought.

Marshall stepped out first and then offered me his hand as I exited.

“Is there a restaurant up there or something?” I said, squinting at the building.

“Or something.”

“Are they going to care that we’re showing up this late?”

“They will. I own the building, so they naturally will take care of us.”

I rolled my eyes to the night sky.

“I should have known you were going to say that.”

I was going into that thing—debt fulfillment, bet payoff, date, whatever you wanted to call it—determined not to be impressed. But once we got on the roof, a perfect warm breeze hit me. The cityscape looked gorgeous, glowing with merry light, and the stars overhead shone down with glittering brilliance. I didn’t feel tired anymore, it felt as if the breeze lifted me up in the air and filled me with glow.

Damn, it was a perfect night for romance. I was starting to think I was in a whole lot of trouble. The question was, did I want to get out of it or not?

There was a single table set, with a vase and a discreet rose. A string quartet started up a slow, romantic tune, and a man in a professional chef’s uniform, hat and all, prepared food on a searing grill.

This was definitely no restaurant, just a roof, and I have no idea how he managed to organize all of this.

The smells made my mouth water. A sommelier stepped up to the table and started asking me about my taste in wine. I had no idea how to answer, but they never made me feel stupid for my ignorance. They suggested that the dry white would pair well with the rib tips we were to enjoy.

“Okay,” I said as I set my fork down and dabbed at my mouth, carefully not to smudge my gloss. “I’ll admit, Marshall. I’m impressed.”

He smiled with the corner of his mouth and nodded to someone behind my back. The music stopped and a couple of waiters began to clear the table.

I turned slightly and a crick in my neck that had been cropping up made me wince. As the servants discreetly packed up and moved off the roof, he rose from his seat.

“What are you doing?” I asked as he stepped behind me.

“Relax, Jennifer.” His hands felt like magic, working out the knots of tension. His fingers were so strong, but so careful. My head lolled back as he worked on me.

“Oh god, that feels nice,” I gasped. “Just a little to the left, would you?”

“Here?” He moved his fingers, and I let out a grunt as something shifted in my neck. The crick was gone and I sagged with relief.

“Yes, that’s perfect.”

His hands didn't stop working. Goosebumps rose on my skin as he worked his way out to my shoulders. His fingers kneaded the muscle between the deltoid and neck, and I couldn't help a gasp from escaping my mouth.

"Jennifer..." my name was a throaty, one-word poem whispered in my ear. Then his lips touched the base of my neck. "Here?"

I shivered as a hard throb formed between my legs. I squeezed my thighs together and felt my heart beat faster. I could have told him no. I didn't.

"Yes," I said, my voice sounding eager, but maybe just a little unsure on another level.

He kissed my neck again, and I felt pleasure tingle through my skin up to my brain, making me feel giddy. I'd never had a guy spend so much time on my neck before.

His fingers slid down my shoulders, over my arms in a gentle caress. I felt my heart thudding so hard I thought it would pop. He repeated the gesture, each time tugging the straps a little more off my shoulders.

I shivered as he drew the dress down to my waist. We were alone on the rooftop of the tallest building in the city. Nobody could see us, but my skin still turned red at the prospect of being exposed outside.

My mouth flew open in a gasp as he swept his fingers up and under my breasts, lifting them from the weight of the world.

"Here?"

I nodded, unable to speak, my eyes fluttering closed. He kissed my neck again as his thumbs and forefingers teased

my nipples. He was in no hurry, slowly massaging and teasing my pink nipples until they stood at attention.

“Stand up,” he said, grasping me under the breasts. I rose to my feet, standing on watery knees as he slipped my dress off fully. My skin broke out in new goose pimples as I stood there exposed to him, wearing only a pair of tiny black panties and heels.

“You are a work of art,” he said, his eyes oozing desire. He took me in his arms and then kissed my lips for the first time. I moaned deeply into his throat, his tongue lashing against my own.

I gasped with a slight surprise when he lifted me and put my bottom on the now cleared table. His fingers hooked into the triangle of cloth in front and pulled. My mouth flew open as the panties flossed me, vanishing between my swollen, glistening wet pussy lips.

“You like that, don’t you?”

His voice was not an accusation, or a sneering put down. It was a rhetorical question, one we both knew the answer to. I liked it very much, and that was obvious to all.

The cloth felt good stimulating my clit, but he soon stopped tugging and hooked his fingers in the waistband instead. I moaned softly as he slipped my panties off.

I felt a hot flush on my skin. I was now completely exposed to him. He gently spread my legs a bit wider, his palms warm on my inner thighs.

“Jennifer...”

He stroked his fingers across my pussy and I shuddered. My legs shook as he pushed his fingers inside of me. Marshall took his time. Some guys jammed their fingers in there and went at it like a jackhammer.

This was a slow, sensual exploration. He sought out all of my pussy's secrets, all in the name of finding out what I liked. Marshall used the fingers of his free hand to pry my lips open a bit more widely. Then he worked the third digit inside of my dripping wet pussy.

Marshall worked his fingers in and out, pushing up the back of my clitoris into his gently massaging thumb. Every lingering thrust pushed me that much closer to an orgasm. Pulses of pleasure emanated from his fingers through my pussy and then spread to the rest of my body.

I was right on the edge. Just a little more, maybe even just the right word from Marshall, would have shoved me right off the precipice of a monumental orgasm. Suddenly, I grabbed his wrist and pulled away.

“Stop.”

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About Laura Olsen

Laura loves billionaires. She decided to become a famous author to get a chance to meet one, but until then creates them on the page instead. And she makes sure that each and every one of them is hot and powerful, just the way she likes them.

If that's the way you like them too, visit Laura's website to learn more about her work and get access to exclusive bonus short stories featuring heroes and heroines from her novels:

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