



his
Cruel
BILLIONAIRE
scorecard

ADELINE BLOOM

His Cruel Billionaire Scorecard

A Grumpy Boss, Enemies to Lovers, Sports-
Romance

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HIS CRUEL BILLIONAIRE SCORECARD

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DEDICATION

To all women out there who ever had a crush on their boss, former boss, or current boss...or perhaps still do, this one is especially for you



TROPES AND TRIGGERS

Here are the major tropes included in His Cruel Billionaire Scorecard:

1. Forced proximity romance
2. Taboo relationship
3. Second chances
4. Tattoo lover
5. Bad boy
6. Alpha male
7. Sports romance
8. Fake relationship
9. Intern romance
10. Grumpy boss
11. Enemies to lovers

Warning: This book contains the following above tropes (and related sub-tropes) in very adult situations. If you are emotionally sensitive to any of the above following situations, often described in graphic detail, so please read only at your own risk. Thank you for understanding in advance.



BLURB FOR “HIS CRUEL BILLIONAIRE SCORECARD”

A Bad-Boy Boss, a Good-Girl Intern, and a Fake Romance. What Could Go Wrong?

When someone tells you the boss is a jerk, you should probably listen. Especially if he has piercing blue eyes, delicious tattoos, and a bad boy reputation.

Or if his name is Roman Knight.

I couldn't contain my excitement when I was offered the internship of my dreams at the most prestigious sports management firm in New York City. But I should have known that snagging this internship would be the easy part.

Keeping it... well, that's proving to be more difficult than I thought.

My brand-new billionaire boss may be sexy as sin, but I'm at the bottom of his scoreboard and at risk of losing my job. Little does he know; I don't give up that easily.

What I didn't bargain for is having to get this... close.

One bad business deal forces us together and I steel myself for the worst. But the more time I spend with him, the harder it is to keep my inappropriate thoughts in check. Between his flirty bickering and seductive scowls, I catch

glimpses of the compassionate and broken man he keeps hidden.

I need to keep my distance.

But when Roman's world blows up, he asks me for a favor that I am helpless to refuse: be his fake girlfriend and help him save his company.

With our budding romance now sports industry news, I have no choice but to go along for the ride and hope that our secrets stay hidden for his sake... and mine.

After all, it's not real. He doesn't really want me. Right?

Don't fall for your boss, Olivia...

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Chapter 1

The sun peeked through the curtains, casting a warm glow of soft shafts of light into Olivia Walker's room.

The soft sound of chirping birds merged with the gentle hum of her alarm clock, signaling the start of a new day.

Olivia opened her eyes and stretched her arms above her head, feeling a surge of energy coursing through her veins.

“Finally,” she sighed.

She turned towards her bedside table, and as if on cue, the alarm clock came to life - a soft melody that seemed to dance through the air cheerfully announcing the beginning of the day. The numbers from her clock glowed—
6:40 a.m.

Olivia swung her legs over the side of the bed, her feet meeting the plush carpet beneath them. She reached out to silence the alarm, her fingers brushing against the clock's petite buttons. With each press, the melody gradually faded away, leaving a contented silence in its wake.

She had been awake for more than 3 hours now because today marked the beginning of her internship at a prestigious sports company in the heart of New York City.

She hummed a cheery tune as she stepped out of her pajamas and entered the bathroom to turn on the shower, letting the hot water wash away the tension that had worked its way through her lower back and shoulders throughout the night.

Olivia stepped out of the shower, refreshed.

It had been a restless night of tossing and turning.

All her work clothes had been carefully laid out; a chic, knee-length dress in a soft shade of blush pink. The dress was a classic A-line silhouette that skimmed her figure with grace and elegance. Its subtle texture added depth to the fabric, giving it a touch of sophistication without overpowering the overall look.

“All of which are very expensive,” she said to no one in particular. She heard a mew from her door; at the entrance of her room was Sandy.

“Oh hey you,” she picked up her gray cat, spinning her around just the way she liked, and Sandy mewed back happily before Olivia set her down.

“Wait, I’ll get you something to eat soon. I’ll treat you to something special so watch the house while I’m gone okay?”

Without a response, Sandy bounded out of the room.

Her cat was mostly antisocial, but today was one of the few days where she paid attention to her owner.

Olivia dressed hastily, pairing her dress with an equally expensive tailored, ivory blazer that exuded refinement and professionalism.

She smiled in recollection of the conversation she had with Avery, her best friend, when they went shopping two days ago for her first day of work outfit.

They’d argued long over the prices of the clothes, Olivia insisting that they go to a cheaper store, and no one would be able to tell the difference. Avery scoffed at her, telling her that it was a high-end job and she had to dress the part, finally convincing her on an outfit instead of the five she’d picked out.

“This blazer has clean lines and a slightly structured shoulder that gives you a polished appearance. Its neutral tone allows your vibrant personality to shine through without overwhelming the outfit. Come on, Olivia, just buy it already. Your paycheck will recoup the price anyway.”

Olivia knew better than to engage her friend, who was a shopaholic, but she also had an eye for the best clothes.

“And I don’t look too bad myself,” Olivia said with a wide grin, turning and checking herself out in the mirror before blowing a kiss to her reflection.

She grabbed her nude pumps before putting on a delicate gold necklace with a small pendant and a dainty bracelet that added a subtle hint of shimmer. Her hair, styled in loose waves, cascaded gently around her shoulders, framing her face with natural grace.

She felt satisfied with her look and picked up her black bag. Her cat mewed again impatiently from the living room - a sign she was hungry.

“Sandy! I’m coming!”

Stepping out of her apartment building, Olivia was immediately greeted by the bustling cityscape that pulsed with energy.

The streets of New York teemed with activity as yellow taxis whizzed past, their horns blaring impatiently. Pedestrians briskly maneuvered through the crowded sidewalks, their determined strides echoing the rhythm of the city. Olivia marveled at the city’s symphony of sounds, a medley of car engines, animated conversations, and street vendors’ calls.

Joining the throngs of people on the busy sidewalks, Olivia immersed herself in the vibrant pulse of the city. The air was thick with the aroma of freshly brewed coffee wafting from cozy cafes, mingling with the scent of warm pretzels and intermittent wafts of exhaust fumes.

She’d just come down from a taxi, stopping a few minutes away from her place of work, choosing to walk the remaining distance to still her nerves.

Finally, arriving at the towering office building, Olivia gaped at its imposing structure. The sleek glass exterior shimmered with the glare of the morning sunlight.

She waved her ID at the guard, who tipped his cap before letting her in with a smile.

Passing through the revolving doors, Olivia entered a sleek and modern lobby adorned with sports memorabilia. The company's logo embellished the walls.

A receptionist greeted her with a warm smile, presenting her with a security pass and providing directions to the elevators.

“Lovely day, isn't it?” She asked the man who occupied the elevator as she stepped in with a smile. But he didn't look up from his phone and simply grunted. Not a friendly one, then.

Glancing at her reflection in the polished metal doors, she adjusted her blazer and smoothed down the hem of her dress, trying to project confidence.

But her attention traveled back to the stranger; he was dressed impeccably in an expensive suit that hugged his broad shoulders and tapered down to his lean frame. Her gaze instinctively traveled down his form, taking in the sleek lines and quality craftsmanship of his attire. Something about his silhouette, the way he carried himself, intrigued her. There was an air of danger surrounding him. His cologne's subtle masculine scent was overpowering too. Was that cypress?

Though she couldn't see his face, she caught a glimpse of his hands as he furiously typed away on his phone, completely absorbed in his world. The movement of his hand caused his suit sleeve to ride up slightly, revealing intricate dragon and tiny Chinese characters tattoos peeking out from under his sleeves. The tattoos contrasting against the sharp lines of his attire had her recoiling at the unexpected yet intriguing sight.

The elevator continued its ascent, and with each passing floor, she stole glances at him.

The elevator finally reached the top floor, and as the doors slid open, she reluctantly tore her gaze away from the enigmatic stranger. Stepping out into the bustling lobby of the office building, she didn't have time to wonder who he was before Linda, the secretary who had briefed her before and discussed her schedule, appeared.

"I've been looking all over for you, I'd like to show you around the office now-" She stopped mid-sentence to look up, her expression changing suddenly. "Oh! Mr. Roman, I didn't know you were here," obviously flustered; she stepped out of the way, and he merely grunted a response, his eyes resting on Olivia, who turned around to see his face.

Olivia wobbled a bit on her heels, seeing him clearly for the first time: his face, chiseled and defined, exuded an air of confidence that seemed to radiate from within. Strong, angular features framed piercing blue eyes that were a mesmerizing shade of deep blues, like the calm ocean on a sunny day. Thick, dark lashes over those blue eyes, casting mysterious shadows whenever he blinked.

A well-groomed beard accentuated his jawline, adding a touch of rugged masculinity to his overall polished appearance. There was a hint of stubble, expertly maintained, that gave him an edginess amidst his refined exterior. His lips, perfectly curved and inviting, held a subtle hint of a wicked smile as if he knew a secret that the rest of the world had yet to discover.

His hair, a rich shade of jet black, was styled with precision, each strand in place. It was a testament to his attention to detail, mirroring the meticulousness that resonated in every aspect of his being. The way it framed his face only served to enhance his attractiveness, adding to the aura of sophistication that surrounded him.

His broad shoulders, visible even under the tailored suit, hinted at a sculpted and toned physique. The suit itself, now viewed from the front, accentuated his form in all the right places, showcasing his fit physique. The fabric seemed to cling to him as if it were designed solely for his body, tailored to perfection.

And those tattoos glimpsed earlier came into full view. Intricate designs adorned his exposed skin, telling a story of artistry and personal expression. They added an element of rawness and rebelliousness to his otherwise polished appearance, making him all the more captivating and enigmatic.

“I take it you’re Olivia Walker?” He asked as if she were no more than a passing fly.

“Um... Yes, yes, I am,” Olivia stammered, feeling foolish from the heat rising on her cheeks and spreading.

“You’re late,” he barked, putting a hand in his pocket.

“That’s strike one. Meet me in my office and tell the other intern the same.”

Chapter 2

“Thompson, I’ve been reviewing the financial reports, and I must say, I’m not pleased with the numbers. Our profits have been stagnant for the past quarter. We need to find ways to increase our revenue streams,” Roman took a seat in his swiveling leather seat, rolling up his sleeves.

Thompson just gave a tiny smile; when Roman was tense, he tended to roll up his sleeves, which he’d been doing a lot lately.

“So that’s why you requested I wait in your office? Your concern is that we’re not making profits?”

“2% down since last quarter, I’d say we’re hemorrhaging,” he stopped writing and tossed his pen.

“Look,” Thompson said, sighing and pulling his chair closer to Roman, who had a scowl on his face now.

“I understand your concern, but let’s not forget that sports are not just about the money. It’s about the passion, the love for the game. We need to focus on providing exceptional experiences for our fans and athletes.”

“Again with this sentimental crap? Passion and love won’t pay the bills, Thompson. We need to strike a balance between our love for the sport and generating revenue. How can we achieve that?”

Thompson put his feet up against the table, watching for the distaste on Roman’s face, but his face was expressionless. He enjoyed teasing his friend, whom he had known for more than 13 years now, but when it came to business, Roman was as serious as a nun.

“I hear you, Roman, but let’s not lose sight of our core values. We built this company on the foundation of promoting sportsmanship and fostering a sense of community. If we prioritize profit over everything else, we risk losing what makes us unique.”

“Unique or not, we need to keep our shareholders happy. They’ve invested their hard-earned money in this company, expecting returns. We can’t neglect the business side of things,” Roman said, getting up, suddenly feeling more fidgety than he did this morning since stepping out of the elevator.

He had a work process and principle that he applied to everyone who worked under him, and his principle was that every cog in the machine was important, and if one was missing, it would affect everyone else.

It was that damn intern. What was her name again? But his thoughts were interrupted by Thompson, who got up, patting Roman on the shoulder.

“Of course, I understand the importance of delivering returns, but let’s also remember the long-term vision. By creating a positive and inclusive sports environment, we’ll attract loyal fans and sponsors who align with our values. That will ultimately drive sustainable growth.”

Roman considered it. “Sustainable growth, huh? I’ve heard that before. But it’s time we see some tangible results. We need to explore new revenue streams, sponsorship opportunities, and perhaps even consider expanding into emerging markets.”

“Roman. I’m already researching potential partnerships with international sports organizations. Stark Company is interested in a meeting this week. We can tap into the ultra-global market and introduce our brand to a wider audience. This will not only boost revenue but also promote cultural exchange through sports. I gotta go now.”

“You wisecracker,” But this time, Roman had a hint of a smile on his face.

“Now, that’s the kind of proactive thinking I like to see, Thompson. Keep pushing those boundaries and exploring new avenues. We can’t afford to rest on our laurels if we want to stay ahead of the competition.” Thompson walked to the door, turning the handle, “Don’t worry, Roman. I’ve got our team working on innovative marketing strategies and collaborations with influential athletes. We’ll create buzz, engage our fans, and generate the revenue we need without compromising our core values. Now, point me in the direction of that new intern you hired; I want to see if my charms work on her.”

Roman's smile turned into a thin-lipped stare.

"I just brought in two new interns and if any of them falls for you, consider them fired. I hope you have a job lined up for them."

A knock sounded on his door, and it creaked open slowly; it was Olivia.

"I'm sorry Mr. Knight, I'll come back," she apologized.

"No, wait," Thompson said.

"Sit down." Roman commanded.

"Thompson will soon be out of here. Besides, I need you to start immediately."

Olivia nodded and sat down on a couch far away from them, watching Thompson banter with Roman, who didn't seem very pleased.

They seemed like old friends, and Olivia lost interest in their conversation, her eyes trailing to meet this Roman Knight, over and over, analyzing his body language as he talked. He seemed like the person that spared no effort in every physical detail—his hair was perfectly styled, and his clean-shaven face is adorned with a subtle hint of cologne, adding to his allure.

As he swiveled around in his chair to talk, all she noticed were his broad shoulders and muscular arms. He also carried himself with a sense of purpose and ease, making it clear that he was a man who knew what he wanted.

The office itself was equally impressive—the walls were adorned with tasteful artwork, and the furniture was of the highest quality. His large desk dominated the space; it was the first thing she noticed as she stepped inside.

Olivia always believed that it was only in the movies where you were immediately greeted by an atmosphere of elegance and sophistication until she walked into this one.

The space was furnished with plush leather armchairs and sofas, polished wooden desks, and tasteful decor that exuded opulence. But she should have expected it, given he was quite wealthy, making a fortune very young and establishing his company a year later.

So, this is where I'm going to be working, she thought with a slight smile. If only she could take a picture now and send it to her sisters.

The office boasted floor-to-ceiling windows that provide an unobstructed view of the surrounding cityscape. You could see skyscrapers piercing the sky and bustling streets below. The natural light that flooded the space created a warm and inviting ambiance.

The walls were adorned with beautiful artwork and shelves lined with carefully selected books giving the space an intellectual flair. Olivia was sure you could enjoy this office's stunning views while you worked, especially at night when the city lights twinkle like stars, creating a serene and peaceful atmosphere.

Her thoughts were interrupted by Thompson getting up and slapping a jovial hand across his friend's shoulder, howling at a joke he made and

thought was funny. "I'll be seeing you later, my friend."

"Don't count on it."

Roman just managed a lazy grin and sat back down, now steadily resting his eyes on Olivia. His piercing eyes made her self-conscious immediately.

"Well then," Thompson said, stopping at the door.

"I look forward to seeing you here in two weeks, take care Olivia," he said warmly and laughed, closing the door behind him.

"Well, Olivia. Is that what you go by?"

"Yes, Olivia is fine."

"I'll need you to take some notes. It's hard to keep track of these things; I'm going to be having a conference meeting in the next twenty-five minutes, I don't see you taking notes."

"I have a good memory, I don't need notes," she said, making him regard her with something else in his eyes.

"If you say so. Remind me of a call I need to make to Dubai to one of our prospective clients."

"You mean Mr. Bedlam of the Socrates tech workshop?"

He looked a bit taken aback that she knew.

Eat it, she thought. She was not going to be fired so easily.

Thompson peeked in again, “Olivia, if I could get your number...”

“Get out of here, John,” Roman said.

“Oh man you’re so harsh,” John said with a hearty laugh.

Olivia took this opportunity to make her way back to her desk while Roman sunk back into his seat with a sigh as his door closed. True, his friend was not the most discreet in terms of relationships, but when it came to business, despite how unserious he looked, John was a very shrewd man.

But he was not the kind to leave his affairs in the hands of another person and sit back—his experiences in life taught him just as much.

Roman picked up his phone to dial his secretary, Linda, and then decided against it and instead tore out a piece of his yellow paged book and began to jot furiously. After a few minutes of intense concentration, he stopped to take a breather, leaning against his chair, looking at his phone longingly, resisting the urge to pick it up right now and go to his email. His phone was on silent so as not to disturb him, but he was tempted to pick it up.

He had made a call just this morning, asking for a meeting with one of the biggest sports fashion industries in New York, and offered a deal that was currently on the table. He had a meeting 2 hours from now with executives of the industry, which he was looking forward to.

A soft knock sounded on his door, and he frowned. It was against his policy to be interrupted in times like this. “Come in,” he barked.

The heavy door creaked a little, and to his mild disappointment, the person standing in front of him was not who he was hoping to see.

It was Jane, the other new intern. Why was he hoping it was Olivia again?

He focused on Jane; she was a mousy little thing who had the bad habit of looking at her feet and twiddling her thumbs. Jane was quite a bright woman, if only she weren't so subservient.

Gotta instill some confidence in this one. He thought.

"I'll only let you off the hook once because you are new, what do you want?"

"I am sorry, I was not informed that you didn't take visitors."

"I don't take visitors for the first 2 hours when I come to work unless it is urgent, or I request them to come by themselves. You understand?"

"Yes, I do."

"What do you want?"

"Well...I wanted to thank you for this opportunity. It has been my dream to work as an intern here and..."

"Oh, I don't care," he said, interrupting her, causing her head to snap.

That was better.

"Just keep in line, and we won't have a problem. Is that all, Jane?"

She seemed surprised he recalled her name. Of course, he did. He knew everyone down to the night guards.

He made it a point of duty to know a little bit about everyone who worked under him.

“That is all sir,” Jane said, bowing a little before practically flying out of his office, leaving him alone in the silence.

He tapped his pen against his chin impatiently, his mind already far away from his work.

Roman didn't understand why he was looking forward to seeing that woman, that intern, again.

“I'll give her a piece of my mind next time I see her.”

He got up, walking out of his office, which suddenly felt too stuffy to observe everyone as usual when he had nothing to do or was waiting on a call.

Roman didn't take 3 seconds before he spotted her downstairs.

Roman watched as Olivia interacted with his secretary, Linda, her laughter filling the air. His gaze lingered on her as he took in her appearance. She had a graceful charm about her, with chestnut brown hair falling in soft waves that framed her face. Her eyes, a mesmerizing shade of brown, sparkled with a strange kind of warmth.

He could appreciate that she was dressed in a pricey pencil skirt and jacket. Olivia exuded an air of elegance and professionalism. Her outfit was tasteful and refined, accentuating her slender figure. The outfit hugged her curves modestly, hinting at her femininity without being overly revealing. The jacket added a touch of sophistication, completing the ensemble.

As Roman observed her, he couldn't help but think her style was a bit too tame for his taste. He was drawn to those who exuded a more daring and adventurous aura. While he appreciated her beauty and poise, he found wanting someone who possessed a bolder and edgier demeanor. He tried to conjure up images of her in a sleeveless, backless dress but couldn't. He shook his head, free of fantasies.

His phone buzzed in his pocket, and he pulled it out, "Go for Roman."

"Hello, this is Mrs. Glockenspiel from Canfield Haute Couture. I'm the personal assistant to Mr. Giovanni. He says he would like to meet you now as he has a flight to catch by 5:00 p.m."

Roman pocketed his phone with a sigh. Taking in one last look at Olivia as she talked animatedly with Linda.

He'd deal with her later. He thought as he swung open his wide office door and grabbed his jacket. Now, he had a business to run.

Chapter 3

“Dammit!” Olivia swore as the bathroom opened quite suddenly for the third time, startling her, and causing her to knock over her bottle of mascara on the sink, spilling its black ink.

“Oh my god, no. I’m so sorry, did I do that?”

“No, it’s alright. It’s fine, don’t bother about it.”

Olivia sighed and turned to see who it was.

“I’m Jane, by the way, Jane Drew,” the woman said with a smile, stretching out a hand.

She was bashful and looked shy in her coke glasses.

She was dressed in a black suit and pants.

“I’m Olivia,” she said, her expression softening.

“Oh, Olivia? You must be the other intern?”

“Yes, I am, nice to meet you.”

“Listen, I’m sorry about your makeup,” Jane said apologetically, letting go of her hand.

“Oh, don’t worry about it, I just had this silly idea of making myself look presentable today.”

“Really? You don’t need makeup. You’re beautiful enough.” And she did.

Jane thought, regarding Olivia’s physical appearance, from her long curly brown hair to her deep brown eyes and the thick lashes framing her face.

“How are you finding Mr Roman?”

With a hushed voice, Jane leaned closer and whispered, “I heard a rumor that he keeps a scoreboard. Can you believe it?” She stifled a laugh, finding the idea utterly ridiculous.

Olivia’s face flushed, partially from embarrassment and partially from the realization that Jane had a more playful side to her personality. She chuckled, appreciating the levity that Jane brought to the situation. “A scoreboard? That’s insane!” Olivia exclaimed, feeling a sense of camaraderie. Then she remembered his words from earlier.

“Honestly, I kind of have a small crush on him,” Jane admitted her voice barely above a whisper. “I mean, he’s undeniably hot, right?”

Olivia laughed at Jane's candor. It was refreshing to hear someone acknowledge the undeniable attraction.

"I can't deny that he's good-looking," Olivia replied, her voice laced with amusement." But we can't let that distract us from our work."

"You know what? I heard we have a meeting with him at eight."

"What? I had no idea, it's five minutes past. We're already late for the briefing meeting!"

"Yeah, yeah, I'll check on it. Share prices are doing well this morning." Roman jogged up the steps as he talked."

"Okay then, don't get too greedy now, remember the executive rerun? Okay Allen, bye."

Roman ended the call, feeling unusually pleased.

Work today was not going to be as nearly as hectic as the meeting he had with Mr. Glockenspiel the previous evening.

The man had insisted on reviewing the documents there with him over three times.

While Roman appreciated thoroughness, he found it bordering on the edge of neuroticism, and Roman was glad to catch a break.

He'd gone straight back to his office after the meeting and worked for a few more hours before heading home, and now today felt like a holiday to him—not one of those kinds of days where he felt uncomfortable taking a break, but he felt like he deserved this one.

All he needed to do today was brief his employees for the sake of the new interns that joined.

As Roman strolled down the hallway, nodding absentmindedly to his employees' greetings, lost in thoughts about the upcoming meeting, he suddenly felt a jolt of impact from someone colliding with him. He turned to see the brown-haired intern, Olivia, dodging unsuccessfully and falling flat on her back, her curly brown hair a wild mass from the collision. Her eyes widened in surprise and embarrassment.

Concern overriding his initial annoyance, Roman quickly reached out a hand to help Olivia regain her balance. However, frustration welled up within him, and he reprimanded her harshly.

“Watch where you're going!” he scolded, his tone laced with an unexpected sharpness.

Olivia's face flushed crimson, and she scrambled to collect herself. She could feel the eyes of nearby colleagues upon her, intensifying her embarrassment. She stammered an apology.

Roman, momentarily taken aback by his harsh reprimand. He inwardly scolded himself for his outburst, particularly toward someone new to the company.

Regaining his composure, Roman softened his tone. “Just be more careful next time,” he advised. Olivia, though momentarily flustered, met his gaze with renewed determination.

She groaned and took his hand as he hoisted her up roughly.

“Thank you, Mr. Roman, I’ll be sure to remember that.”

“Come on, let’s go already,” Jane whispered, eyes wide.

As Olivia nodded in acknowledgment, her embarrassment transformed into unwavering resolve. She wasn’t going to show her embarrassment here.

She straightened her posture, meeting her boss’s gaze, who watched Olivia as she took her friend’s hand, and they left.

“Mr. Roman,” Jane said, nodding in acknowledgment at her boss, and he nodded back.

“Watch her and make sure she doesn’t run this time. Go ahead, I’ll be joining you soon.”

Olivia bowed her head, taking her walk of shame in front of the other employees who’d gathered at the small commotion, whispering.

“Don’t make eye contact with them, Olivia, it’s fine. It’ll blow over soon.”

Olivia walked alongside Jane, her head slightly ducked in embarrassment. She couldn’t shake off the mortification she felt. Jane, ever supportive, patted Olivia’s hand reassuringly.

“Meeting in 5 minutes people, gather in the conference room!” Roman announced, watching his interns walk away.

In a few minutes, Roman made his way to the conference room, his mind preoccupied with thoughts of the impending meeting; his encounter with Olivia replayed in his thoughts. The collision had left a slight scowl on his face. No one should be running in the office, he thought.

What was she? A child?

He dealt with a few more calls before strolling in.

As the meeting began, Roman’s scanned the room, his eyes briefly catching Olivia’s. The memory of their encounter lingered, momentarily distracting him from his businesslike demeanor. He found himself noting how attractive she was, despite the recent mishap. Her embarrassed expression only added to her charm, and he couldn’t deny the flicker of intrigue this clumsy woman ignited within him.

Olivia noticed Roman’s piercing gaze upon her. She felt her cheeks grow warm as she avoided direct eye contact, acutely aware of his presence. She couldn’t deny the attraction she felt towards him, even in her embarrassment. There was something about his commanding presence, his attractive features, and his piercing blue eyes that captivated her.

Trying to regain her composure, Olivia focused her attention on the meeting. She listened intently to Roman’s words or pretended to.

Her mind was still simultaneously processing his expectations and the lingering impression he had left on her.

She admired his suave leadership style, even if it came with a touch of sternness. There was an undeniable magnetism about him that drew her in, despite the momentary misstep.

In her thoughts, she didn't notice when Roman clapped his hands, and a board was wheeled in, with everyone's names on it, with various rankings.

“And here we have the scorecard and I will be providing you information based on your performances so far.”

Olivia sat up in surprise, looking around for any signs of surprise among the other employees, but they just looked on. This was normal!

So, he does have a scorecard!

Olivia snickered.

“Find something funny, Miss Olivia?” Roman asked, and everyone turned to her.

“Oh no, no, sorry sir, please continue,” everyone except Jane fixed her reprimanding stares.

Roman resumed his lecture, although attempting to maintain his professional demeanor, a band of headache had formed itself around his head, partially thanks to this woman, and he found his gaze wandering back to her throughout the meeting. He noted the way she tried to compose herself every

time his gaze landed on her, fidgeting with her pen and looking away awkwardly.

As the meeting progressed, Roman's initial annoyance began to dissipate, replaced by curiosity. Although he acknowledged Olivia's attempt to commit to professionalism, he also found it slightly amusing his reaction to her.

"Well, that's about it, everyone," Roman continued, walking around the room, his voice carrying a subtle edge.

"You know I called this meeting to discuss the future of our company. We've faced challenges, but I believe in our collective strength to overcome them and emerge stronger."

Olivia sat among the employees, her heart fluttering as she watched Roman speak, walking closer to her as he talked.

"I know some of you believe you can take a lax attitude towards this job, but I'll remind you that only the best succeed here, hence the scoreboard."

He was heading straight to her. Olivia's breath hitched in her throat. He was talking about her.

His aura of confidence and the enigmatic air that surrounded him was a powerful, heady perfume.

He rolled up his sleeves, showing his tattoos.

He turned around sharply, addressing everyone now, but Olivia was lost now at his tattoos; they were so many peeking out from beneath his rolled-up

sleeves.

“I think that’ll be all for now, for today,” Roman gestured, his gaze sweeping across the room, ensuring he had the undivided attention of his team. “Today, I’d like to introduce our two new interns, Olivia and Jane.” He gestured toward Olivia, his lips curving into a faint smile. “Olivia brings valuable experience and a drive that aligns with our company’s vision. That is why I chose her. I hope she keeps up her hard work and prevents any future falls.”

Laughter floated around the room, and Olivia bowed her head.

“Olivia, stand up please, Meet everyone.”

Olivia got up slowly; the smirk on his face felt like he was taunting her.

This cocky man, who did he think he was anyway?

“Hi, I’m Olivia. I hope to-”

“You know what? Never mind, you can go back.”

A faint sense of something... crept into Roman’s senses as his eyes briefly met Olivia walking back to her seat. There was something about her, an energy that both intrigued and unnerved him. He couldn’t quite put his finger on it, but he sensed there was more to her than met the eye. He reminded himself to remain focused on the task at hand, pushing aside any personal distractions that threatened to cloud his judgment.

Clearing his throat, Roman redirected his attention to the room. “As we move forward, remember that we are a team. Together, we can achieve greatness. I expect dedication, creativity, and a relentless pursuit of excellence. Let’s show the world what we’re capable of.”

The room burst into applause, and Olivia found herself grinding her jaw in annoyance at Roman’s dismissal words and his commanding presence. Even though she admired his leadership style—a perfect blend of authority and collaboration, she made her conclusion: her boss was a class-A jerk.

Chapter 4

Olivia and Avery found themselves tucked away in a corner booth at Bean Hive Café, a popular neighborhood spot in New York City. The café, with its warm and inviting atmosphere, was the perfect setting for their long overdue catch-up session.

The interior of The Bean Hive Café is designed with exposed brick walls and local artwork, and cozy vintage furniture that invited patrons to sink into comfort. The soft lighting and mellow music created a laid-back vibe, making it an ideal spot for intimate conversations.

As Olivia and Avery settled into their seats, a friendly barista approached their table with a smile. Avery ordered a tall glass of refreshing iced tea, while Olivia, a coffee connoisseur, opted for a velvety cappuccino with a sprinkle of cinnamon on top.

Sipping on their drinks, Olivia and Avery swept into animated conversation. The café buzzed with activity around them as they caught up

over steaming cups. The aroma of freshly ground coffee filled the air.

Between sips of their drinks, Olivia and Avery shared a slice of decadent chocolate cake, its rich flavor and creamy texture adding an extra layer of indulgence to their evening.

“Hmm, delicious,” Avery smacked her lips, savoring the dessert.

The café provided the perfect backdrop for the soft jazz melodies playing in the background, creating a soothing setting for their conversation.

“Okay that’s not funny,” Olivia said, scolding Avery, who doubled down in laughter, holding her stomach, and attracting the stares of people in the restaurant.

“Are you telling me you saw this hunk and one of the first impressions you leave is falling ass down in front of him?”

“I regret telling you this.”

Avery laughed again, shaking her head, and taking a sip of her drink.

“That’s not what I meant to do obviously, but it just happened.” Even hours later, Olivia still felt her stomach drop at the memory of falling in front of him.

“So, tell me, what did he do after that?”

“Helped me up to my feet and told me to be more careful in a very condescending manner if I might add!”

Olivia exclaimed, sipping her ice-cold coffee and letting the caffeine work itself into her system.

She liked nothing more than spending her evenings talking to her friend. They'd not had the opportunity to catch up for the past week due to her new job.

“Enough about me, you have to tell me about your auditions.”

Avery took another sip of her sweet tea—too sweet, in Olivia's opinion.

“Isn't that a little too sweet?”

“I don't think so.” Olivia winced as her friend took another sip.

“I don't know...really,” Avery began, setting her cup down.

“Oh honey, they haven't emailed you yet, have they?” Olivia clicked her tongue sympathetically.

“Let me give you a hug,” Olivia said, getting up from her chair and pulling her friend in for a tight hug before going back to her seat.

Just last week, Avery had messaged her excitedly that her auditions went well and that the judges were impressed, but then they asked her to wait for a call.

“I was supposed to get the main role, but then I guess they found another favorite to pick,” Avery moaned.

Olivia felt bad for her; if anyone deserved the role, it was Avery.

“Perhaps someone related to the casting director...”

“Favoritism. Has to be it.”

“This has happened too many times,” Olivia said, swirling the straw in her drink, watching the frothy bubbles work their way to the rim of her cup.

For as long as she could remember, Avery had wanted to be an actress and worked very hard for it. She’d moved from the Midwest to New York to make her dream come true. They’d met in college at a drunken party blackout and had bonded immediately.

Olivia was her biggest fan.

“You know what pisses me off? It’s not so much that you got talent and all, but the fact that just being related to someone in the casting crew or a call for a few favors because they have influence, they get the role instead of you.”

“Olivia....”

“Look, you have to agree that you’re the best for the show and then all of a sudden there is nothing. I’m sorry Avery, I’m sure you’ll get something better.”

“Thank you for trying to cheer me up. But you know what works? Maybe we should visit my favorite store?” Avery began, hopefully.

Olivia laughed at the twinkle in her friend’s eyes.

“You mean the craft store?”

“You know exactly what I mean! Come on let’s go,” Avery said, pulling a giggling Olivia up to her feet.

Whenever Avery wanted to cheer up, she always visited a craft store. Acting was not her only talent; making things with her own hands was what she excelled at, but she preferred crafting to be her side hobby.

Olivia had lost count of the time she’d asked her friend to turn crafting into a small business, but Avery had always insisted on not profiting from everything that brings one joy.

“I’ll never enjoy crafting if I choose to profit off it.”

They took a taxi to the craft store, and there was Tim, the attendant who was at the register. He was in his late thirties, a friendly guy who ran a family store.

Immediately the electric doors beeped and slid open; Tim waved and gave a welcoming smile at the sight of both of them.

Olivia leaned over to whisper to her friend, “He has a big crush on you, you know?”

“Stop it, that’s silly,” Avery said, laughing as she waved back at Tim, who was already scooching from behind the counter.

There were only a few people in the store.

“Avery, Olivia, hi. If there’s anything you need, I’d be happy to help.”

Olivia, taking the hint, decided to play along.

“Okay, I’ll see you two in a bit.”

“Don’t tell me you’re leaving me here,” Avery began. “That’s not funny; it defeats the entire purpose of coming here.”

“Don’t worry about it, I think you’ll have fun, besides, Tim wants to help,” Olivia said, backing away and winking at him, and Tim shot her a grateful smile.

Olivia had known for the longest time that he had a crush on her friend, and some time ago, Tim had shyly admitted it, asking for her help, and Olivia promised to set up both of them.

The idea of both of them as a couple did not sound like such a bad idea because they looked great together as a couple.

“Okay, I’ll be going now. I’ll see you later, Avery. I have to turn in early anyway,” Olivia said, her mood changing as soon as she remembered her boss.

No need to hang dark clouds over both of their heads, and besides, tomorrow was a new day for better opportunities since she was already setting a record for getting demoted five points on her first day of work.

She would also break the record for being the fastest to climb up his silly scoreboard.

She stepped out of the store, and her phone pinged, signaling in a text message.

Her heart skipped a beat. It was her boss.

I expect better from you tomorrow, it read.

Olivia let out a loud, frustrated groan as other people walking beside the store turned to look at her, and she smiled. “My bad, sorry!”

That arrogant jerk.

She’d show him.

Roman pocketed his phone. Just 6 miles away from Olivia’s location was Roman at a casino, losing hands at his game very badly. A small crowd had gathered at his table.

Roman was known for dealing with the best hands and having the best poker game, but tonight, everything was falling apart very quickly.

“What’s wrong, Roman? You’ve never failed this badly,” Allen said.

Sitting across from Roman was Allen, a seasoned gambler known for his cool composure and calculated strategy. The tension between them was palpable, as they both knew that the next hand could change the course of the game.

Allen was a shareholder in his company, and every Thursday, they came here to play poker, usually betting on frivolous things.

Roman had never lost to Allen before, but tonight, he was raking it in.

“All in,” Allen said, moving all his chips to the middle of the table.

“Call it in.”

The casino was ablaze with the intoxicating energy of risk and reward.

Roman, with his deep blue eyes focused and determined, found himself at a loss at the high-stakes poker table. The air was thick with anticipation as the small crowd around him scrutinized their hands, calculating their every move.

With a confident flick of his wrist, Roman pushed all of his chips toward the center of the table, “all in.” The spectators leaned in; their eyes fixed on the unfolding drama.

The atmosphere crackled with intensity as the cards were dealt, each one potentially altering the outcome of the game.

As the dealer revealed the community cards on the table, Roman’s heart sank. The cards didn’t favor his hand as he had hoped. The room fell into a hushed silence as the final card was revealed—he had been outplayed.

With a mixture of frustration and resignation, Roman watched as Allen’s winning hand was revealed, and the crowd erupted into applause,

acknowledging Allen. Roman, though disappointed, maintained his stoic facade, hiding any visible signs of defeat.

In the realm of high-stakes gambling, fortunes could be won or lost in an instant. Roman had made a daring move, but luck had eluded him this time. He understood the inherent risks involved, the ever-present possibility of losing it all.

No, that was not it. Something has been throwing him off his game all day long—and not just in poker.

As the chips were swept away by the dealer, Roman took a moment to gather his thoughts. This would not deter him.

With a nod to Allen, acknowledging his victory, Roman stood up from the table. The crowd parted.

“Better luck next time, Mr. Roman,” someone said.

There was friendly laughter.

“Okay I’ll allow you just this once,” Roman said, laughing a little as he got up, and Allen stretched out an arm to Roman and shook it profusely.

“Sorry but this is the first time I’ve ever won against you, and I’ll make sure I treasure this moment.”

“Hmm,” Roman grunted before snapping his fingers, and his assistant Scott appeared beside him, bringing out his jacket secret for his boss.

Roman took a deep breath.

“My cigar, please. Scott.”

Scott brought out a cigar from his jacket pocket and lit it, presenting it to his boss.

He took in a deep exhale of his cigar, letting the heady whiff of the smoke fill his head.

“All right, I’m done here,” and Scott nodded, stepping out of the way.

He had to turn in early. Tomorrow was another day of work and another day of seeing her.

Chapter 5

“Dammit,” Olivia whispered, banging her head slowly and repeatedly against the wall.

Their boss had decided it was best to display his scorecard in the lobby where everyone could see it with everyone’s rank.

“You know you’re the second to the last on the rank,” Jane said.

“Just below Todd, a guy who is known for slacking off.”

Jane put a comforting hand on her shoulder, “don’t even think about it too much,” she said, “just... you know? Try and get your ratings up.”

“How do I do that? And why is there a commotion this early?”

“It seems like there’s big news.”

Around the workplace, people were walking up and down helter-skelter and very fast too, and Olivia spotted Linda, the secretary.

“Hey Linda,” she was holding a stack of heavy-looking files and on a call; whoever was at the end of the line was not having the best day of their life.

“You think I’m not going to fire you? I’m going to recommend it to Mr. Brockman; you’re taking off this immediately, you understand?”

If you can’t get this done within the next 2 hours, let me know right now so I can put another person in. I’ll let you know, and I will be leaving a very nasty review!”

“Yikes,” Olivia said.

Linda ended the call and noticed the two interns, and her face lit up as if she had just seen a running stream in the middle of the desert.

“Oh my god, there you guys are,” Linda said, running towards them and nearly tripping on her heels as the length of her skirt didn’t allow her to run farther than she wished to.

“Please be careful and don’t trip on our account.”

“Never mind that,” Linda panted.

“Take this, thank you,” she said, dividing and handing the files to both Jane and Olivia.

“Damn. These files are heavy. What’s all this about?” Olivia asked as Linda pulled a handkerchief from her breast pocket, mopping up the sweat on her brow.

“We’re handling Mr. Grant.”

“Grant? Like Grant Lake? The basketball star?” Jane asked, her eyes widening in shock.

Linda fixed her with a look of disdain.

“Don’t tell me you haven’t gotten yourself affiliated with the amount of sports stars we are managing?”

“Oh no, I have, mostly. I’m sorry, but I’m just surprised as Mr. Grant is such a big star!”

Linda threw her hands up as if to say, ‘duh’!

“Of course, he’s a big star like all the others we manage, and we’re a big sports agency company.”

Linda crossed her arms, “the only problem here is that he was supposed to sign with Mr Marcus Reeves, you know?”

“Our biggest industry rival?” Olivia asked.

“Yes, and due to some personal reasons, he decided to give us a try, but only if we can prepare a smattering dinner for publicity, charity, and marketing.

He's planning to leave his team for another, you know? But whatever, it's not in my place to say; just know that we need someone to step up and manage him, but the management system of an athlete, especially one as big as him, is complex, and the indicators are overwhelming—you have to think of the publicity he has and to think of his personal needs. You have to think of his culture too, it's not even 9, and I'm already exhausted."

"Now you're looking for someone to manage the event for tonight and make sure it goes seamlessly, right?"

"Yes! Yes! That's exactly what I want, and you know what? I'm leaving it in the hands of you two," Linda said, putting a hand on each of the stacks of files they were holding.

"Don't screw this up."

Jane turned to Olivia after Linda left to resume her phone call and disappeared, barking orders.

"Olivia, I'm so scared. I hope I don't get demoted like—"

"Like me?"

"You know I didn't mean it that way."

"I don't mind, of course, you should do everything possible not to go down a rank like I have, Jane. I'll see you in an hour and I'll let you know what I've come up with," Olivia said, smiling.

"I'll be in my office."

Hopefully, Jane should have figured it out by then, Olivia thought.

Unbeknownst to Olivia, Roman, the enigmatic CEO of the company, observed the scene from his glass-walled office on the upper floor. A smile of amusement on his face.

Two hours later, the commotion hadn't yet died down; in fact, it had risen to a fever pitch.

Everyone was on their feet and contributing.

Mr. Grant wanted to host the dinner party in about seven hours, and the majority of sports representatives, celebrities, and reporters were going to be there. It was supposed to be a charity/publicity ball, but everything was under the guise of politics.

Everyone was giving their all. If a company like Mr. Roman's was going to be in charge, they had to show that they could pull off such huge work on such short notice, and everyone was putting in their best.

An hour later, a knock sounded on Jane's door.

"Come in," Jane said, and Olivia had to chuckle at the sight of her friend.

Sitting at her desk, surrounded by stacks of papers and a labyrinth of folders, Jane's face displayed a mix of confusion and frustration. Her eyes darted across the computer screen, trying to make sense of the complex athlete management system. But the intricacies of managing a star basketball

player were proving to be overwhelming, pushing her beyond her comfort zone.

“Oh, you poor thing,” Olivia said, a mixture of sympathy; she was done with her share of the planning, of course. She leaned in and whispered.

“Hey, Jane. Need a hand with that athlete management task? I’ve got some experience in that area. Let me help you out.”

“You’re already done with your part?”

“Of course, I am, but I’m only going to submit it to Mr. Roman when you’re done with yours, understand?”

Jane, relief washing over her face, nodded gratefully. She passed her notes and documents to Olivia.

In a few minutes, Olivia’s nimble fingers danced across the keyboard, skillfully navigating the athlete management system of the star basketball player.

As the minutes ticked by, Olivia’s proficiency became apparent. She juggled multiple tasks effortlessly, displaying a keen understanding of the intricacies involved in athlete management. Her confidence and efficiency impressed Jane.

“You look like you know what you’re doing.”

“Rude.”

“Sorry.”

As Olivia continued to type and manage the athlete’s needs, Jane’s tension began to ease.

“There. All done,” Olivia said with a flourish a few minutes later and bowed a little as Jane clapped.

“Let’s print this out and show them to him for approval. I guess we’re off the hook,” Jane said with a burst of relieved laughter.

“And thank you so much, Olivia, if you ever need help...”

“Of course, I know.”

“Just that management is not my thing,” Jane said, hanging her head.

“Cheer up,” Olivia said, retrieving the warm printed sheets.

“Come on, let’s go.”

“God, he makes me so nervous,” Jane whispered as she pressed the elevator button to their boss’s office floor.

Olivia had to agree, but of course, she’d never say it out loud.

The man made her nervous in a way that she found very unsettling, it was more than the hot guy pull he had going for him, and so she was determined to spend as little time as possible in his presence.

Jane knocked on the door, and his deep voice echoed from behind.

“Come in,” his deep, authoritative voice called.

Roman looked up at them slowly, running fingers through his silky dark hair that fell in perfect waves.

Olivia’s breath hitched at the sight of his impossibly sculptured face; prominent cheekbones, a hard slash of a nose, chiseled lips set in a grim line, and a square, determined jaw.

He was on a call when they entered, and judging by his body language, it was bad news.

Olivia’s eyes roamed the luxurious office but continued to be drawn to the handsome man seated behind the swiveling chair. He exuded an air of confidence and charisma that was almost palpable; dressed impeccably in a tailored shirt that fitted him perfectly, his chiseled jawline and striking blue eyes never failed to catch her attention.

Behind those eyes was something unreadable.

“What do you have for me?”

“So here are the plans concerning this evening’s program.”

“All done already?” He asked, raising a thick brow.

“I thought Linda said this was going to take at least a day. Well, let me see what you have.”

They handed in their files, and he looked over at Jane's own first, flipping slowly. "Wow, that's impressive; I think we can apply this... Yes, especially the last one. We can use it at dinner tonight."

"I hope you've both chosen what you're going to be wearing tonight?" he asked, looking up from the files.

Jane and Olivia looked at each other blankly before bursting into laughter, and by Roman's hard-pressed look, they realized he was serious.

"Oh my god, are we going to meet Mr Grant?" Jane asked.

"Of course, you are, you work here," Roman said, emphasizing as if they were stupid.

"You can leave, Jane. Olivia, stay."

She looked confused for a moment at his request.

Jane put a hand on her shoulder as if to say 'good luck.'

Don't leave me. Olivia pleaded with her eyes.

Jane fixed her a 'What can I do?' look before turning the handle and stepping out, leaving two of them alone.

"Am I so bad you can't stand my presence for only a few minutes?" Roman said, getting up and picking up her file.

"Um...no, sir."

Roman shrugged, “looking at your file, if both of you weren’t here to submit your files, I’d take a bet and say you did the two yourself.”

He was in front of her now, looking down at her, his expression stern.

Olivia suddenly felt small, overwhelmed by his masculine scent and sudden closeness.

She backed away a little; it felt like he was undressing her with those eyes; she could not lie even if she wanted to.

“Yes, Jane was having some struggles with management, and she’s very new to it—“

“So are you,” he said, interrupting and moving closer to her; the distance between them was barely a hair’s breadth. Olivia felt hunted. He had the eyes of a predator on its savory prey. It was a few tense moments before he backed off. “Well, that’s okay, I suppose. That’s why you’re two; you’re supposed to be a team. And this is all very impressive,” Roman said, waving the file. “You may go now.”

She turned to leave, relieved.

“And Olivia? Please wear something classy tonight.”

Chapter 6

Six hours later and stepping into the grand foyer of The Plaza Hotel, Olivia's eyes widened in awe as she took in the breathtaking interior. Crystal chandeliers hung from the high ceilings, casting a warm and elegant glow upon the marble floors. The air was filled with a melodic hum of conversation, mingling with the enchanting melodies of a live jazz band that set the perfect tone for the evening.

Waiters dressed in impeccably tailored black suits gracefully weaved through the crowd, carrying trays containing exquisite hors d'oeuvres and flutes of champagne. The tantalizing aroma of delectable delicacies wafted through the air.

Olivia's gaze wandered across the room, searching for a familiar face.

Everyone looked expensively dressed. The women donned glamorous evening gowns, each one more stunning than the last. Sequins sparkled under the shimmering lights while elegant silk drapes cascaded down the fashion-

forward elite figures. The men, equally dashing, sported tailored tuxedos, exuding an air of sophistication and refinement.

Amidst the glamorous crowd, Olivia caught glimpses of prestigious celebrities and influential figures who were gracing the event.

She recognized a famous actress conversing animatedly with an equally renowned philanthropist, their laughter echoing through the room.

On stage was a musician who effortlessly strummed a guitar, serenading the guests with soulful melodies that melded seamlessly with the jazzy tunes of the band.

Linda had given them a stern warning beforehand not to involve themselves with the celebrities, or else Olivia would have thrown herself at them; all she could do was gush and swoon from afar.

The guests mingled and engaged in animated discussions.

Olivia watched them exchange business cards, share anecdotes, and immerse themselves in the enchantment of the evening.

“Unreal, isn’t it?” Jane asked, sidling up beside her fellow intern.

“You look beautiful, Jane,” Olivia said.

“Oh, stop it, you look breathtaking, Olivia.”

Jane stood beside Olivia, her presence a contrast to the glitz and glamor of the event. Jane wore a simple yellow gown that flowed gracefully around her

slim figure, her brown hair was neatly pulled back, and her trademark Coke bottle glasses rested gently on her nose, adding a touch of nerdy charm to her appearance.

“Let’s ogle and cross our fingers, hoping nothing goes wrong with this event.”

As celebrities passed by, their eyes lit up with delight, and Jane couldn’t contain her excitement. Her animated gestures and enthusiastic conversations drew attention; Olivia had to draw her back twice, reminding her of the strict rule.

“Oh my god, is that Mr. Solana?”

Olivia had to laugh at Jane’s genuine excitement and knowledge about the celebrities. Her excitement was contagious and refreshing.

“There he is,” Olivia whispered.

“The star of today’s show.”

Reporters were clamoring around him now. Mr. Grant Lake, handsome and standing over six feet tall, his slicked-back hair reminded Olivia of Roman, her boss.

“You think it’s alright to meet him? He’s our client after all,” Jane argued.

“Yeah, and we planned this, tonight’s happening because of us.”

“Absolutely not!” Linda said, appearing beside them. There were two glasses of champagne in her hands, presumably for the next celebrity she had to talk to.

“Just look at him go, admit it, Linda, you like him.”

Linda laughed, “It doesn’t matter if I do, okay, skedaddle you two.”

“Yeah right, if we can’t talk to him, neither can you.”

The buzzing hall had transformed into a stage for their newest client, the basketball star whose presence commanded attention. Cameras flashed, capturing his charismatic smile and confident demeanor as he engaged with the guests.

Olivia’s attention had tuned out Jane and Linda’s bantering; her eyes roamed the hall, searching for her boss.

Her very hot, mysterious, possibly dangerous boss, she reminded herself.

Olivia’s gaze found and lingered on Roman.

Attractive, as usual.

He moved through the room with an air of ease and confidence. Dressed casually yet impeccably, he exuded an effortless charm that seemed to draw everyone’s attention.

Linda mentioned he would be appearing briefly, hence his casual style, his choice of clothing, a simple yet stylish gray shirt that painstakingly

showcased every single chiseled physique and accentuated the attractive contours of his muscles. Olivia couldn't help but notice how the fabric clung to him in all the right places, hinting at the strength and athleticism that lay under. She wondered what it felt like to feel that body, her beneath him, maybe.

Olivia watched Roman interact with celebrities and gracefully field questions from eager reporters; the women themselves couldn't seem to stay away from him. A hint of jealousy streaked through Olivia as a woman grabbed his arms, laughing a little too loudly at what he said.

With charismatic grace, he pried her arm gently from his with a smile.

His natural ease in the spotlight is captivating, and it's clear that he's no stranger to attention and adulation, like a painting you could watch for hours, right? It's the combination of confidence, charisma, and a touch of mystery that makes him truly irresistible.

"Don't drool too much, honey; he'll know you find him attractive."

With legs for days, blonde hair, and eyes that mirrored Roman Knight, standing suddenly beside Olivia was a woman that looked like she had walked out of some top magazine catalog.

Her dress was wine-colored and looked like it was made to meld with her body; needless to say, she was stunning.

"I'm not staring..." Olivia began, mouth dry and embarrassed to be called out by this runway model.

“Sure, you weren’t honey.”

And before Olivia could respond, she disappeared into the crowd.

What a strange, intense woman, Olivia thought. She needed to find Jane and have a drink.

He couldn’t wait to get out of there.

More than five women had already propositioned him, and if he waited a little longer, more people would become drunk and reckless. He didn’t want to be here for that.

He’d done and supervised everything he came to do anyway, and he hated parties; they reminded him of that night...

Where was that pesky intern anyway? And as if on cue, he heard her laughter. He’d recognize that throaty voice anywhere.

She was with Jane; they looked like they were about to cross from buzzed to drunk.

Roman’s gaze locked onto Olivia, and he couldn’t tear his eyes away. Her sequined coral-green backless gown clung to her like a second skin, accentuating every curve and hinting at her graceful silhouette. The dress dazzled under the ambient light, casting an ethereal glow around her.

Her brown, curly hair cascaded down her shoulders, adding a touch of wildness to her polished look. Roman found himself fascinated by the way

her locks bounced and swayed with every subtle movement, framing her face in a way that seemed effortlessly beautiful.

Olivia's natural beauty was enhanced by a touch of lip gloss that emphasized the soft curve of her lips. Her jade earrings dangled delicately, complementing the hues of her gown and adding a touch of sophistication to her overall appearance.

It was not just her physical attributes that caught Roman's attention but also the air of snarky confidence and self-assurance that she exuded. Olivia carried herself with a poise that commanded attention, drawing him in and leaving him wanting more.

He signaled a waiter for a drink, still watching her. He shooed away reporters with a stern look, choosing to indulge in the sight of her, totally unaware of his fixed gaze on her.

All of a sudden, Olivia felt eyes on her, and she turned and caught her boss's eye.

Uh-oh. He was walking towards her now. Too late to run.

He gave a wicked smile like he was baring fangs instead of a smile.

"Good job today," he started.

Only now did he realize how her lashes were impossibly long.

He also noticed for the first time the way she was nervous made her cuter, and before Roman could catch himself, he was smiling.

“It seems I’m going to be bumping you up two ranks now.”

Relief sagged on her shoulders, “Thank you so much. I promise to continue to exceed your expectations.”

“No, you didn’t exceed it. You’re capable of more, you’re an impulsive but intelligent woman, Olivia, and your passion shines through. But be more careful,” Roman signaled a waiter.

“I’m not going to be here for long,” he said, his sharp eyes appraising her before grabbing a flute, taking a gulp, and returning the empty flute to the tray.

“So soon, sir?”

“Call me Roman.”

“I think I’m more comfortable calling you Mr. Roman...sir.”

“Suit yourself. I’ll see you at work tomorrow, be around by 6am sharp,” he said before disappearing into the crowd while Olivia took a deep sigh of relief. Proximity to her boss was not helpful or good for her health at all.

Chapter 7

Olivia promised herself that she would be as professional as possible—she needed this job.

She raised a cautious fist to knock.

“Come in,” the deep, musical voice called. “Yes, what do you want?”

The narrowed and glittering blue eyes appraised her head to toe as if slowly stripping Olivia of her modest, three-piece hand-me-down navy suit.

He rapped his fingers against the mahogany desk, impatiently waiting for a response.

“Um...you asked me to be here... it’s concerning the meetings you have to take today.”

“Okay, I’ll call you back. I better hear some good news about Fedrin stocks, I have a lot riding on this,” he barked into the phone, hung up, and

dropped the phone on his desk.

He'd discarded his jacket, leaving it on his chair, and his shirt was unbuttoned a little too low, causing Olivia's eyes to stray and wonder what he looked like without the shirt.

Goodness, get a hold of yourself! Olivia scolded herself.

The office was quiet now, with the only sound being the occasional beeping of his computer and his manicured fingers tapping against the desk.

A knock sounded on the door, interrupting them, and he held up a hand as if to stop her from speaking.

"Wait outside, there's someone I'm expecting now. You can come in after he's done," he said and stood up from the swiveling chair.

Behind his desk, the blue shirt was stretching against his muscles.

Goodness was he tall. He moved with the grace of a cat—almost silently towards the door, his footsteps muffled by the rug. He passed her to the door; she caught the heady whiff of his cologne.

"Glad you could make it," his voice caught a hint of humor as he opened the door for someone laughing behind it.

"You know I wouldn't miss it. Oh, is that your new intern?"

Roman Knight looked her over again like she was a piece of decorative furniture and grunted. Whatever happened to the way he looked at her last

week at the party? Did she imagine it?

“Come in,” he said, and Olivia moved out of the way for her new boss’s visitor.

“Hello, you are?” He asked, stretching out a hand to shake hers.

Olivia looked up to see a tall, handsome man staring down at her. He had a charming smile and warm brown eyes that immediately caught her attention.

“Olivia Walker, Mr. Roman’s intern.”

“No problem at all,” the man said with a smile. “I’m John Batterman, but you can call me JB. I assume you’re newly employed?”

John Batterman? If only he wasn’t holding her hand, she would have swooned.

Olivia nodded, feeling a bit flustered. “Yes, I just started last week. It’s an honor to meet you.”

“Well, welcome to the team, Olivia,” JB said warmly. “If you have any questions or need help with anything, feel free to ask his secretary and if Roman gives you trouble, I’m always happy to assist.”

Olivia felt a flutter in her stomach at his friendly gesture, but Roman was in his seat, watching them with a slight scowl.

“Thank you, JB. I appreciate it,” Olivia said, trying to sound as professional as possible. “I’ll return when you’re finished here.” Olivia said.

“You keep your hands off my intern, you hear me?”

With a burst of hearty laughter, JB unbuttoned his suit and sat down.

“Well, can you blame me? I can’t count how many of them you’ve fired, we can’t keep count of how many good assistants and interns you’ve lost. Now you don’t even have one assistant and you’re burdening your poor interns with double the workload I assume. I wouldn’t mind keeping her, she seems nice enough.”

Roman just scowled his face as JB relaxed into his seat, grinning at his friend.

In a few minutes, she was back again in his office, waiting for her boss as he typed on his computer without sparing her as much as a glance.

According to Linda, there was an impromptu meeting today, and it was going to be held in their conference hall. They were also going to be having a business call with one of their clients in Morocco. Olivia had to be there to observe.

They were forming a partnership with a third company concerning tech product mobilization, and they needed an efficient way to save money and maximize profits.

“Okay, it’s time, get up and follow me. Where is Jane?”

“She’s already in the conference hall, Mr. Roman.”

This was all very fun for Olivia as she quickly immersed herself in her work, taking down notes and nodding in approval whenever her boss spoke during the meeting.

The only time she was distracted was whenever Roman raised his baritone voice to argue an opinion or approve a point, making her stomach drop.

After about 30 minutes of this, the meeting was over, and she stood up, organizing her notes.

In a few minutes, the conference room had cleared, leaving only Olivia, her boss, and Jane to work on organizing the week's schedule.

"You seem to be enjoying this," Roman remarked, fixing her that intense look behind his unreadable face.

"Oh yes, yes," she enthused. "I've always had a bit of an interest in sports and tech..." she trailed off.

"And?" He prodded, raising a questioning brow.

"I just didn't have enough to sponsor myself."

"So, you had to take on the lowly job of an intern."

Olivia smoothed her hands over her suit and laughed nervously.

"I wouldn't call this job exactly 'lowly'."

"I suppose so," he said, getting up.

“Let me see your notes.” He demanded, and she handed them over to him.

Roman perused the notes looking over them and nodding approvingly.

“Send this to me in a document via my email and just outline the important stuff I will look over later. I need these in my office by 6 p.m., understand? I won’t tolerate any lateness.”

For the rest of the day, Olivia focused on learning the ropes of her job. She’d met with the team members and tried to familiarize herself with the company’s policies and procedures.

But no matter how hard she tried to focus, her mind wandered back to the man who filled out his shirt with those well-toned muscles.

As the day went on, Olivia found herself constantly glancing at the clock, waiting for the workday to end. She tried to assure herself that it was because she couldn’t wait to get home and not because she wanted to walk into his office again, alone with him.

Finally, the day was over—5:50 p.m., her watch read. Better get moving, she thought and gathered her things to leave. As she made her way to the elevator, she saw JB standing in a corner with his hands in his pockets.

“Hey, Olivia,” JB said, his smile widening as he saw her. “How was your second day?”

“It was good,” she said, feeling a bit shy and wondering what he was doing here.

“I’m still trying to get the hang of everything, but I think I’ll be okay.”

Olivia stepped in front of the elevator doors, stabbed a few buttons, and stepped in. She checked her time again and took a sharp intake of breath.

Talking to JB had eaten into her time. It was already 6:00 p.m., and her boss was a stickler for keeping to time.

He was sure to be pissed at her, and she was right because as soon as she turned the door handle to his office without knocking , he was already tapping his feet impatiently with a scowl on his face.

“You’re late,” he barked.

“I’m sorry, but Mr.-”

“That’s minus one point.”

“Mr. Knight, are you okay?”

“Oh yes, yes I am. Why’d you ask?”

After dismissing Olivia, Roman headed down to a restaurant to get some food and, of course, hold a short business meeting with one of his longtime clients, Mr. Mein.

The old man studied his face, and the lines stuck in his forehead as he dug into his steak.

Overhead, the restaurant lighting gave the place the mood of ambience.

But ambience, he was sure, was the last thing on this young man's mind as he tore into his steak quite brutally.

"Now, now, slow down on the meat, son. Before they think you have a vendetta against the meat," he said, laughing and taking a sip of his wine, observing Roman. "Can you tell me what's on your mind?"

Roman stopped chewing and looked up with a frown.

"You want to tell me what's on your mind?"

"It's nothing, just had a long day," he said and continued eating.

"Yeah right. It's been a while since I saw you troubled like this. Is it a woman?"

Roman just grunted and continued to slice into his steak.

"Slow down," Mr. Mein said as Roman began to cough.

Roman stopped and took a gulp of his wine and picked up his cutlery again.

Roman could not understand how within barely two weeks, this woman destabilized and affected him this much.

He had to be careful going forward, or she would turn out to be worse than his last personal assistant.

"Okay, I think I'll leave you to it, we've discussed what we needed to talk about anyway and I have to be best at getting home to my wife," he said,

looking at his watch.

“You didn’t finish your food,” Roman said, pointing at his untouched plate of food.

“The wife is cooking today so I don’t want to fill up,” he said, patting his potbelly and giving a hearty laugh.

He managed a smile and stood up to escort him.

“You don’t need to do that,” the man said, picking up his coat from behind his leather seat.

“I hope whatever it is you are worrying about gets resolved quickly so you can make me more money,” he said with his snarky grin.

And Roman, despite himself, had to chuckle.

“Get yourself home, you old codger.”

And then Roman began to cut into a steak again, feeling ravenous. But it was not for the food. No, it was not for the plate of steak in front of him he felt hungry for.

It was for a certain brown-eyed pixie. He would just walk home today to clear his head. The Hudson River skatepark was his favorite secret route.

Chapter 8

Olivia stepped on her skateboard, feeling a surge of excitement as she entered the park; it had been too long since she'd last done this.

The moon was out now and shone brightly overhead, casting a silver glow on the concrete ramps and rails. Skaters of all ages zoomed past, their boards whizzing and wheels clattering in motion.

With each push of her foot, Olivia gained speed, gracefully maneuvering through the park. Her skills had improved over time, and she loved the freedom and adrenaline that skateboarding provided.

Tonight, she'd chosen to ignore Avery's warnings of drinking and skating. She felt great, and what other way to relieve the tension of being around a man that wound her up so much? As she approached a steep incline, an idea sparked in her mind.

Olivia sped toward the edge of a deep bowl, heart pounding with anticipation. She leaned back, her body lowering as she prepared for a daring dip into the depths of the bowl. In that exhilarating moment, she pushed her limits, embracing the thrill of the dangerous move.

However, the dip proved to be a miscalculation. As she sped down, her balance wavered, and panic gripped her. It seemed as though she might lose control and tumble headfirst. But just as her world turned upside down, an impossibly strong pair of arms reached out and caught her, bringing her back to stability, but not before she briefly lost consciousness.

Everything had happened so fast. Roman was taking a walk around his favorite part of town when he spotted a familiar figure. Olivia. Skating. Briefly fascinated but more concerned as she looked like she was about to keel over, he leaped into action and caught her in his arms just in the nick of time. She groaned as she twitched.

A small crowd had gathered. “She’s okay,” Roman said as they dispersed.

Olivia’s eyes fluttered slowly, widening in surprise as she realized that it was Roman who had come to her rescue.

Surprise mixed with a tinge of embarrassment for the mishap.

Roman’s grip was firm yet gentle as he steadied her, his blue eyes narrowing with concern. Olivia’s heart raced not only from the adrenaline of the near-fall but also from the proximity and unexpected touch.

“Are you alright?” Roman asked. He sounded exhausted for some reason.

“Yeah, I’m okay,” Olivia replied, her voice slightly breathless. “Thank you for catching me,” then she laughed.

A smile played at the corners of Roman’s lips as he released his hold on her, his touch lingering a little too long. He watched as she regained her composure, her cheeks flushed, pulse slowing.

“Be careful out there,” Roman cautioned, his gaze lingering on her. “You’re quite the risk-taker.”

Olivia struggled to get up and stumbled again, but he caught her, this time, hands holding her by the waist delicately.

“Olivia, are you sure you’re alright?” he asked, his voice now laced with amusement and annoyance.

Olivia giggled, her words slurring together. “Romaan, I’m fine. More than fiiiine, actually. I’m having a blast!”

Wait, was she actually... drunk?

He rolled his eyes, an exasperated smile tugging at the corners of his lips. He couldn’t deny the allure of Olivia’s spontaneous and slightly tipsy state, but he also couldn’t help but be annoyed at the timing of it all.

“You’ve had a bit too much to drink, haven’t you?” Roman asked.

Olivia nodded vigorously, her curls bouncing with each movement. “Just a bit! But don’t worry. I can handle myself.”

Roman let out a sigh, his amusement warring with his annoyance. “Clearly, you’re not handling yourself very well. I can’t have you stumbling around the streets of New York in this state. I’ll call you a cab.”

Olivia pouted playfully, her cheeks flushed from the alcohol. “But Roman, I don’t want to go home just yet. I’m having so much fun!”

“Fun or not, it’s time for you to call it a night,” Roman asserted firmly, reaching for his phone to call an Uber.

As they waited for the cab to arrive, Olivia rambled on in incoherent bursts of laughter and jumbled words. Roman couldn’t help but find her adorable in her drunken state, even though he fought against his growing attraction to her.

The cab pulled up to the curb, and Roman opened the door, gently pushing Olivia inside. She flopped onto the seat with a dramatic flourish, a mischievous glint in her eyes.

“You’re no fun, Roman,” she mumbled, her words a little slurred. “But thanks.”

As Olivia settled into the backseat of the taxi, her drunken state seemed to amplify her boldness. With a mischievous grin, she reached out to touch Roman’s arm, his sleeves were rolled up, and her fingers traced the contours of his muscles. He tensed at her voluntary touch.

“Roman,” she slurred, her voice filled with awe, “your tattoos... they’re so intricate and beautiful. Where did you get them done?”

He tried to pull away slightly, but Olivia’s intoxicated grip held him firm.

“They’re just tattoos, Olivia,” he replied. “They don’t matter.”

Olivia, undeterred, continued to run her fingers over the inked designs, her touch feather-light.

“No, they do matter. They’re a part of you, a work of art. I want to know the stories behind them.”

Roman grunted. “There’s not much to tell. They’re just personal symbols and memories.”

“Come on, Roman, spill the details. I promise I won’t tell anyone. I’m a vault.”

A chuckle escaped him, despite his attempt to remain composed. “Maybe another time, Olivia. Right now, I think it’s best if you focus on getting some rest.”

Olivia pouted again. “Fine, fine. But I’m going to hold you to that promise. I want to know everything about those tattoos someday.”

Roman nodded, amusement and intrigue dancing in his eyes. “Someday, Olivia. When you’re sober and can appreciate the stories properly. Although, I doubt you’ll ask me sober, I look forward to seeing you, red in the face and

apologizing. Your ranking is quite low, but since you're out of work, it doesn't affect you."

"Aren't you generous?" Olivia said, bursting into hysterical laughter.

He shoved her gently, then quietly instructed the driver, a quiet man who nodded to Roman's instructions.

Then he slammed the door and watched as the cab rolled on through the city streets.

In the cab, Olivia's energy began to wane, and her eyelids grew heavy. Her rambling words gradually faded into soft snores; in a few minutes, the cab driver would be shaking her awake in front of her house.

Roman watched as the taxi left, leaving him alone with his thoughts. He couldn't help but smile at Olivia's unabashed curiosity, her drunken blabbering, which was both endearing and somewhat funny.

Resting his head against a window, Roman allowed himself a moment of quiet contemplation, wondering what other surprises Olivia had in store for him beyond her drunken ramblings and uninhibited curiosity.

But the moment was shattered quickly by a text message from Allen.

Everything's gone wrong with Fedrin's stock; please call me back ASAP. The text read.

And sure enough, the stocks Roman had taken a gamble with were crashing. Fast.

Chapter 9

Her alarm pinged, and she woke up with a start. Olivia groaned and rolled off the bed, cutting off her alarm.

Slowly, the events of the night before began to slip into her memory. Mortified, she groaned again, her palms against her forehead. Great, now she was having a damn hangover.

“Why did I ever think it was a good idea to drink in the first place?”

She thought going roller skating was the best thing to do after work.

After Avery said she couldn't join her for the night, she had gotten a bit depressed and spotted a bar not far away from the roller rink and decided that a few drinks wouldn't be 'too bad'.

Then she grabbed her skateboard after downing two cans of beer, telling herself it was not too bad at all, that she didn't even feel tipsy, and the next

thing she knew, she was falling, and who of all people happened to be passing there and catch her in a sorry state but her boss?

Olivia groaned again.

“Stupid! Stupid! Stupid!” Hitting her fist against the wall.

Her cat’s loud meow at the door interrupted her pity party.

“Hey, hey, Sandy.”

She bristled her tail and mewed angrily again.

“Don’t worry baby, I’ll get you something to eat soon. Let me just take a shower and get ready for work.”

Hopefully, he doesn’t remember or hopefully chooses to ignore what happened yesterday.

But that was just wishful thinking. Olivia thought as she stepped into the shower, allowing the hot water to wash away the smell of alcohol.

Roman was not having a good day.

First of all, his company was in a crisis.

The stock he’d bet on that seemed promising was crashing very badly.

For the past two hours, he’d been pressed to make a decision, and he’d been fielding calls from investors, trying to figure out the best way to handle the

situation.

A knock sounded on his door.

“Roman, we have a major problem with the Johnson account,” Thompson West said, opening the door and coming in a voice tinged with urgency. “The negotiations have hit a roadblock, and if we don’t act quickly, we could lose the deal and all the potential revenue it brings.”

Roman, with his brow, furrowed with concern, motioned for his friend to sit down. He leaned forward, fully attentive to the gravity of the situation.

“Tell me everything, Thomson,” he said, his voice calm but resolute.

He dove into the details, explaining the issues with the stock contract terms, the misunderstandings between the parties involved, and the mounting pressure from competitors eager to snatch the co-sponsorship deal away. He outlined their proposed strategy, emphasizing the need for direct intervention and a personal touch to salvage the situation.

For the next 30 minutes, Roman paced around his office.

They discussed and worked tirelessly, collaborating closely to develop a strategic plan. They analyzed the contract terms, identified areas of compromise, and crafted a persuasive pitch to reassure the stock representatives of the value and benefits of their partnership.

“I think that’ll work, phone someone there, I have an in.”

“You should take a seat, Roman; you’re making me feel on edge.”

Roman sighed and sat behind his desk, his brow furrowed, and a deep scowl etched across his face.

He was in a foul mood, frustrated by the events of the day and the mounting pressures of his responsibilities. The last thing he needed was another complication, but fate seemed to have a different plan.

“I think that could work if we traveled right now. How about you accompany me?”

Thomson scoffed.

“For two days? I can’t come,” he said, raising both hands.

“I have to hold down the fort here, okay?”

“Who then?”

“I understand but just give me time to think.”

“You know, Roman, all this wouldn’t have happened. You wouldn’t be in this situation if you had a personal assistant.”

“Just shut up, I’ll think of something,” Roman said, getting up again, feeling on edge.

He preferred his problems to come out in one orderly line.

He’d already loosened his tie because it felt wound too tight and undone his shirt two buttons down, but he still felt suffocated.

Thompson got up, not wanting to miss his meeting or be drawn into his friend's drama.

"I'll be seeing you later, just figure out something okay?"

"Give me a call as soon as you can," Roman waved dismissively, watching his friend turn on his heels and take his leave.

Deciding to stroll outside his office might not be so bad after all. Who could he call up on such short notice?

He walked out and stopped at the entrance, watching his employees from upstairs, and then he spotted his drunken intern.

That might just work. He picked up his phone and dialed her number and watched with amusement the look of mortification on her face.

"H-hello sir?"

"You don't have to look like the devil called you. My office. Now."

Feeling the weight of her embarrassing drunken encounter, Olivia entered Roman's office cautiously, her cheeks flushed with embarrassment. She'd hoped to sneak in unnoticed and retreat to her office and bury herself behind her desk in papers, but Roman had spotted her, and his piercing gaze had locked onto her the moment she stepped through the door.

As usual, he had his sleeves rolled up, painstakingly showcasing those mouthwatering muscles that Olivia always found herself transfixed by.

But today, he seemed on edge. More than usual. It also looked like he had little sleep.

Olivia wanted to ask if he was okay, but it was not her business; she couldn't pry.

“Olivia,” he said, “we need to talk.”

“I'm sorry about last night sir, I realize it was completely unprofessional of me,” she began. Roman sunk back in his seat, listening to her ramble with a blank look.

Please don't let him fire me.

Her heart sank, fearing the worst. She steeled herself for a reprimand or even the possibility of losing her position as an intern.

However, Roman surprised her with an unexpected proposition.

“I am sorry, Mr. Roman, and I'll try my best to make it up to you, just please don't fire—“

“I know. I don't care about that. I already told you. You were off work, so whatever you wanted to do, as long as it was not damaging our reputation directly, is your business, so forget about it. That's not what I called you here for.”

“Really?” Her bright eyes were hopeful.

“Just take a seat. I know your potential, Olivia,” he continued, his voice softening slightly. “And I think there may be a way for you to prove yourself and earn a higher rank within the company.”

Olivia’s eyes widened in surprise, a mix of uncertainty and curiosity. She cautiously nodded, inviting Roman to continue.

“I have an upcoming business trip,” he explained. “It’s an important project that requires utmost dedication and confidentiality. I need a temporary personal assistant to accompany me, handle logistics, and assist with various tasks. If you’re willing, this could be an opportunity for you to showcase your skills and potentially earn a promotion. How does that sound?”

Olivia’s mind raced with conflicting thoughts. On one hand, she felt a surge of excitement at the chance to prove herself and work closely with Roman, gaining invaluable experience. On the other hand, the prospect of traveling together and lodging together sounded... risky, blurring the lines between their professional and personal lives.

After a moment’s hesitation, Olivia nodded decisively.

“I’m not very...”

“Comfortable around me?”

Roman’s lips curled into a faint smile, a glimmer of something in his eyes.

“Very well, you have my solemn promise you’ll not get more than you can handle,” Roman said, his tone business-like. “We’ll need to make the necessary arrangements for the trip. I expect professionalism and discretion

throughout our time together. This is an opportunity for both of us, Olivia, and I trust you won't disappoint."

Olivia straightened her posture; this was exactly what she'd been looking for—a newfound sense of purpose fueling her determination. She would prove herself worthy of this opportunity, that she was not just some clumsy woman who couldn't do a job well, by working diligently and proving to Roman that she could excel in this.

"But one more thing, I need to be sure you understand what you're going to be doing. Not that I think you're scatterbrained; I mean, you think so in some instances. I'll explain what we'll be doing in detail; get ready; you're going to be traveling for two days with me; you'll have to book the hotel."

"I appreciate the trust, sir." She was trying to keep her tone even and not be insulted by him calling her a scatterbrained woman. "I have a few suggestions too."

"Let me hear them."

Roman listened intently, considering her recommendations. He appreciated Olivia's grasp of the complexities and her proactive approach to problem-solving.

"Alright, Olivia," Roman said. "We can't afford to lose this account. I trust your judgment. Linda and Thompson are working on assembling a team, including legal and marketing, to address the concerns and schedule an immediate meeting with the stock representatives. We're the face that needs

to be there. It's a tech company waiting for us, which is a little out of my depth, but I think we've got this."

Olivia's heart raced with a mix of excitement and nerves as she realized the magnitude of the responsibility placed on her. She was grateful for Roman's trust and the opportunity to work alongside him to save the deal. Also, a little miffed and flustered at the thought of spending time alone with her boss.

Chapter 10

“What do you mean we have to share a room?” Olivia exclaimed; Roman was staring at her fixedly, his eyes asking her to explain.

“You might want to explain this,” Roman said to Olivia.

Olivia zipped her mouth, looking embarrassed and apologetic.

The suite that she’d booked for their business trip turned out to be a mistake.

Instead of reserving two separate rooms, she accidentally booked a single king-sized room. The hotel staff looked equally apologetic, explaining that it was the last available room due to a conference in town.

“I’m so sorry, Mr. Roman,” Olivia stammered, her cheeks turning a shade of pink. “I didn’t realize the error until now, and it’s too late to find alternative accommodation for tonight.”

He sighed, running a hand through his hair. This was not how he had anticipated spending the evening. Their meeting for the day had already concluded, and they had been planning on relaxing in their respective rooms. But now, they were faced with the unexpected predicament of sharing a room.

The hotel staff stepped in, trying to ease the tension. “We apologize for the inconvenience, Mr. Knight. We can try to arrange an additional room for you, but it might not be possible until tomorrow morning.”

He shook his head, realizing that finding another room at such short notice would be futile. “No, that won’t be necessary. We’ll manage. Thank you.”

Olivia’s eyes met his, her expression a mix of uncertainty and discomfort.

“I understand if you’re not comfortable with this arrangement, Mr. Roman. We can find a way to make it work.”

He took a deep breath, trying to put her at ease. “It’s not ideal, but it’s not completely your fault, Olivia. We’ll have to make do with the situation. Let’s just set some ground rules to ensure that we both have our privacy and space.”

Olivia nodded, her eyes reflecting relief. “Agreed. We’ll respect each other’s boundaries and communicate openly if any issues arise.”

As they entered the room, an awkward silence settled between them. The suite was spacious, with a large king-sized bed dominating the center.

They exchanged glances, both realizing the absurdity of the situation.

Even in this uncomfortable moment and as tired as they both were, Olivia looked beautiful but miffed.

The tension between them seemed to hang in the air, but they were determined to handle it with maturity.

“It won’t be as bad as your expression suggests Olivia,” he said, trying to keep his voice gentle and reassuring. “Let’s focus on the reason we’re here and make the best of the circumstances. We’ll get through the night and sort things out in the morning.”

Olivia nodded, a small smile gracing her lips. “You’re right, Mr. Roman. This is just another thing we’ll handle professionally and ensure it doesn’t affect our... working relationship.”

They set about organizing their belongings and settling into their temporary shared space. The atmosphere remained a little tense. Roman stepped out of the shower and sat on the other side of the bed, going through his phone.

He got a text from a blocked number saying:

I’ll be seeing you soon.

But he chose to ignore it.

This was not the first time someone got a hold of his number and texted him.

He might have to change his number soon.

As the evening progressed, the two tried to keep it casual, engaging in stiff, polite conversation about the day's meetings and sharing light-hearted anecdotes. Gradually, the tension dissipated.

The night grew quieter, and fatigue set in. They bade each other goodnight and slipped into their respective sides of the partition.

Roman lay in bed, staring at the ceiling and acutely aware of the proximity between him and Olivia. She was awake, waiting for him to fall asleep.

But as time passed, exhaustion took its toll on Olivia, and soon her breathing became steady and rhythmic, indicating that she had fallen fast asleep.

In the dimly lit room, a sense of tension and unspoken desire hung in the air. At least for Roman. He'd seen her get into the shower and come out dressed in nothing but a cotton shirt and shorts. A shirt that did nothing to hide the outline of her nipples.

He glanced at her peaceful form, the steady rise and fall of her chest, her features softened by sleep.

In that instant, a myriad of emotions raced through his mind. She was attractive. No doubt she intrigued him too, there was an undeniable chemistry that had surfaced between them, but he wouldn't. Couldn't.

She was his intern, and his relationships with women always ended badly.

He turned to the other side, and before he knew it, he had also fallen asleep into a vivid dream.

But his dream wasn't as peaceful as Olivia's.

He tossed and turned. It was always the same dream; a vision of fire, gunshots, blood, and screaming.

Begging the attacker to stop.

In his dream, he was covered in blood and with cuts all over his body from the shattered window.

"No, no, please," he begged, but the gun pointed to his sister's forehead.

Roman leaped to wrest the gun from the attacker, and the weapon fired.

"No, no... Lily..." he sobbed, holding his sister close as red fluid pooled under her, turning the floor scarlet.

"Mr. Roman. Mr. Roman, please wake up."

Someone was shaking him awake; the frightened, gentle eyes above his and the reassuring hands on his shoulders shook ever so slightly.

Roman opened his eyes, now completely at attention, feeling hot. Sweat was running down his body in rivulets.

The delicate eyes of concern above him were Olivia's.

How did she get here?

"You were having a bad dream, are you okay?"

“What?”

“You were having a bad dream, are you okay?” She repeated herself.

He got up, feeling suddenly vulnerable at being seen like this.

“That’s none of your business,” he said roughly, which he regretted immediately.

“I’m sorry but I couldn’t just well leave you alone,” her voice now sounded plaintive and hurt.

“I didn’t ask you to.”

“What do you expect? Do I just see you and just leave you like that? Do you expect me to?” Olivia raised her voice, her frustration already at a fever pitch.

Roman was slightly taken aback before watching her with a fire in her eyes he had never seen before.

He couldn’t help but burst into laughter.

“How is that funny?”

“I’m sorry, I don’t mean to laugh. Thank you for your concern Olivia, but I assure you I’m fine,” he said, his voice taking a sober edge now. “I have this dream daily, usually by this time of the year, but it’s nothing.”

“I wouldn’t call that nothing; it has you shaken up for a man like you,” her voice was soft now.

“Will you please tell me what’s wrong?”

“Okay,” he said with a sigh, sweeping his feet off the bed.

“It’s just that, there was a bad incident and my sister got shot-” Olivia looked thoroughly appalled now.

“I’m so sorry for being so insensitive.”

“Why are you sorry? It’s not like you had a hand in it,” Roman said.

“I need to step into the bathroom for a moment.”

“Of course, take your time, I’ll excuse you,” she said, getting up from the bed.

“And where will you be going?”

“I’ll be in the tiny living room. I have some work to get on with anyway, I haven’t compiled the reports, and the investors will need them by 2 in the afternoon.”

“But you can’t be working by this time.”

But she wasn’t listening; Olivia grabbed the files by the bed stand and disappeared from the room, walking briskly.

“Suit yourself,” Roman shook his head and stepped into the shower, letting the cold water penetrate his pores.

The shower must have been 15 minutes long.

When he turned off the shower, he peeked out the door into the semi-dark room. No, Olivia, as far as he could tell.

He toweled his hair and was toweling himself dry as he stepped out of the bathroom.

Since she was not here, he guessed it was okay to pad around naked and find a fresh change of clothing.

“Where’s that damn light switch?” He muttered.

He heard a yelp and the sound of someone falling.

“Sonofabitch,” he found the switch and turned on the light quickly, and there Olivia was, standing mortified and the full view of her boss without a towel.

At first, there was nothing they could do but stare; then, the silence was punctuated by her mortified scream.

Olivia ran out of the room. Roman swore again and picked up his towel, tying it securely around his waist to follow his aghast employee.

Olivia was in the living room, and like a child playing hide and seek, she covered her face.

It was not hard to tell that her face was red.

Roman walked up to her and put a hand on her shoulder.

“Olivia, look at me,” he said authoritatively.

When she didn't, he grabbed her chair, spinning it around till she faced him and her hands still over her face.

He pried her fingers off her face, but she was focused on looking at every other place except him.

His muscled abs were a wall of intricate tattoos of flowers, dragons, and Chinese characters that covered the left half of his chest— his bare chest, still dripping with water, was in full view.

How could she look? Besides, she'd just seen him naked.

“Why are you acting all embarrassed?”

Who wouldn't be embarrassed after that?

“Okay, I'm sorry.”

“I didn't mean to spy on you, Mr. Roman, it's just that I forgot something, and I thought I could come here without disturbing you and... and....”

“Wait, do you think I'm mad at you? It's alright; nothing happened,” he said, gently cupping her face.

“Look at me, Olivia,”

She was forced to focus on him.

“Just breathe. Have you never seen a naked man?” He said, humor coloring his voice.

“It was just an accident, if you feel that bad about it, I could sleep here, and you could sleep in the room alone.”

“No, Mr. Roman, I don’t want you to inconvenience yourself for my sake.”

“Then, are you sure you’re going to be okay staying the rest of the night with me?”

“Yes, I am,” she said, getting up and prying her hands out of his steel grip.

“But I’ll be here for maybe an hour or two—”

“Don’t be ridiculous, it’s 2 a.m. and it’ll be costing you a good night’s sleep. I need you to be at full efficiency.”

“Then I’ll just stay here.”

“Oh, for goodness sake,” he said, and before Olivia could protest, he pulled her up and hoisted her on his shoulder to her renewed mortification.

Her chest made contact with his shoulder; she was pretty sure he could feel her already hard nipples beneath the light cotton.

He could too.

Heat spread between Roman’s legs faster than you could say ‘Jack’. His reaction to her was instantaneous, and he bit back a choice of words.

“Okay, just stay on your side of the bed and I’ll stay on mine. Try and get some sleep, we have a big day tomorrow.”

Yeah right. A voice at the back of Roman’s head scoffed.

Like you both are going to be getting any sleep.

Olivia made it a point to sleep as far away from the edge of the bed as possible, which Roman found a little bit amusing.

Did she think he was some wild animal with no self-control?

Maybe he was. The way his body reacted instantly to contact with hers was certainly a cause for concern.

Roman settled back into bed, but it was at least three long hours before he could catch a wink of sleep.

He was making sure they were getting two separate rooms tomorrow.

Chapter 11

Olivia blinked her eyes open, expecting to find her boss lying next to her in the plush comfort of their shared suite. To her surprise, the space next to her was empty, the sheets barely disturbed. Confusion flickered in her mind, wondering where her boss could have gone so early in the morning.

The events of last night flashed briefly in her memory, and a faint tinge of pink stained her cheeks.

Where did he go so early anyway?

Just as she began to wonder, an insistent knock sounded on the door. Olivia hurriedly composed herself, expecting room service or maybe her boss returning. However, the door swung open, revealing a polite attendant.

“Good morning, Ms. Olivia. My apologies once again for the room mix-up yesterday. We’ve arranged two separate rooms for you and your boss now,

conveniently located next to each other.”

Olivia’s eyebrows lifted at the unexpected change, but she simply nodded.

“Good morning. Thank you for resolving the issue. That sounds fine. I appreciate your assistance.”

“It’s my pleasure, Ms. Olivia. Allow me to show you to your new room. I’m confident you’ll find it to your liking.”

He apologized for the mix-up with the rooms again and led her through a short corridor and opened the door to her new room.

The sight that unfolded before her eyes left her momentarily breathless. So, this was what the St. Regis was about!

The room was a haven of elegance, bathed in warm tones and adorned with tasteful artwork. Sunlight poured through the floor-to-ceiling windows, illuminating the space, and revealing a sweeping view of the city skyline.

The luxurious king-sized bed was draped in the finest linens, inviting her to sink into its comfort. A writing desk stood against the wall, offering a dedicated space for work. The marble bathroom boasted a deep soaking tub, a separate rainfall shower, and an array of luxurious toiletries.

“Oh, wow. This room is absolutely beautiful. The décor, the view—it’s all so impressive, so impossible.”

“I’m glad you’re pleased, Ms. Olivia. This room offers a serene ambiance and stunning city views. The king-sized bed, specifically requested by your

boss, is designed for maximum comfort, and the marble bathroom features luxurious amenities for your indulgence.”

“My goodness, it’s more than I could have imagined. Thank you for your attention to detail. I can already tell I’ll have a relaxing stay here.”

Memories of her naked boss flashed through her memory again.

“I’m delighted to hear that. Is there anything else I can assist you with? Perhaps your breakfast preferences?”

“I’ll keep it simple. Just a bowl of fresh fruit and a cup of coffee, please.”

The attendant’s face twitched momentarily at her request.

“Certainly, Ms. Olivia. Your order will be delivered promptly. If you have any additional requests during your stay, don’t hesitate to let us know.”

“Thank you for your understanding. I appreciate your assistance.”

“Oh, one more thing, your boss, Mr. Roman, asked you to meet him downstairs by 9 a.m. Is there anything else I can assist you with at the moment?”

“That’s all for now, thank you. I’ll make my way downstairs as requested. I’m grateful for your help.”

“Enjoy your stay and have a successful meeting.”

She would. At least, she’d try to; her eyes went longingly to the tub. This is a good way to start her day, at least before her boss tensed her up again.

Since seeing her at the party, the first thing he wondered was how her lips would feel against his, and Roman was dangerously close to satisfying his curiosity yesterday when he pulled her up and carried his errant intern to bed, and now there was only growing, aching need.

He knew beneath that shaky exterior was a strong, sweet woman inside, and he was determined to unmask her for some reason.

He'd been more distracted than he wanted to admit.

The executives were already seated in the conference room, waiting for them.

Mr. Bennet, a balding paunch of a man, was an executive who walked up to Roman and shook his hands enthusiastically.

“We’ve been waiting for you, Mr. Knight.”

“Am I late?”

“Goodness, no. Not at all sir,” he said, wheezing a little.

“Please sit. Here are two seats for you and your assistant,” he said, nodding to Olivia, who’d just joined the meeting and kept a straight face and took a seat beside her boss but not before giving a tight smile and sitting stiffly beside him.

He observed her taking a pad out of her purse, pen at the ready, waiting for the meeting to begin in earnest.

A young man in dreadlocks dressed like a hipster walked in, motioning to the projector in front of them and turning off the lights.

So that was the supposed app developer for the company.

Their meeting today was to round up talks about their prospective partnership on capital funding.

“How do you propose we begin promotion?” He began.

Olivia had begun scribbling away furiously. Her hair was pulled in a bun as usual but let little curls escape. Roman glanced over her shoulders, but she seemed to pay him no mind.

He began, “let’s discuss, of course, we’re a sports company, you understand that this is what we do for a living, and social media is a big part of our incorporation, however, traditional styles also work, and this will be bringing in a fresh perspective to help you up from the ground.”

“We’ve already sunk 1.4 billion into this project,” Mr. Bennet said, and Olivia’s pen hovered momentarily in the air. If she was surprised, she was doing her best to hide it. Roman gave a small smile.

“This is our upcoming product launch and marketing strategy. I believe this project has the potential to propel us to new heights in the market.”

The executives nodded their expressions with a mix of focus and excitement.

Mr. Bennet turned to Roman.

“Mr. Knight, what are your initial thoughts on our product launch strategy?”

“I believe it’s crucial to leverage the power of digital marketing and social media platforms. Our target audience is highly active online, and we need to reach them where they are. I suggest creating engaging content, including interactive campaigns and influencer partnerships to generate buzz and increase brand visibility...”

His phone buzzed. He looked at the caller ID and frowned. He’d forgotten to switch off his phone. It was the same caller again.

“Excuse me, gentlemen, this seems urgent.”

“No problem, we’ll just continue. Your assistant will update you.”

“So, Olivia, what do you think?” Roman heard an executive ask before he excused himself from the room. He paused at the door and listened to her speak.

She seemed to know what she was talking about, so he left her to it.

But at the moment, the ID of the caller was more worrying. He picked it up.

“Hello? Who is this?”

“It’s me.” Hearing the familiar voice over the phone, anger began to build up in him.

It was his ex-girlfriend, Scarlett.

Without waiting for a response, he pocketed his phone and walked back slowly into the conference room. He wasn’t interested in hearing from her.

“...and that is why I think that will be the best cause of action,” Olivia said as she took her seat.

Roman saw the executives exchange intrigued glances; they looked impressed by Olivia.

He took a seat and tried to put the call past his mind.

“Okay then, I think that’s settled. This meeting is almost over. You’ve got a mighty fine assistant and if you would like Olivia, I would love to have you work here when you finish your internship. I hear she’s only serving as a temporary assistant.”

“There’s no chance in hell for that,” Roman shot back before he could stop himself.

“Oh really? Why is that?” Mr. Bennet asked, looking intrigued.

The lights were back on now.

“Because she’s going to be working with me full-time after her internship.”

“Well, Olivia, if you want to run away from this wet towel, don’t forget to come here.”

The board shared scattered laughter.

In a few minutes, the meeting rounded up, and he noticed that Olivia had fallen completely silent again.

“Okay, I think that will be all. I’ll get the budget ready and send it over for you, Mr. Knight, to review by next week and then we can commence,” an executive said, getting up to shake his hand.

“Thank you very much, Olivia,” Olivia smiled and replied, “Oh, it’s nothing.”

Mr. Faye, a second executive who’d been silent the whole time, pulled her close for a hug which made Roman uncomfortable for a moment.

As they walked out of the meeting room, she was still silent.

“Good job today,” he began.

“Would you like to fill me in on what I missed?”

She handed him her pad; her writing was clear, concise, and straight to the point.

He looked over it, impressed.

“That’s some nice work there.”

“Thanks,” she said, and before she could escape, Roman grabbed her hand, and the contact made her freeze momentarily.

His strength was overwhelming, she tried to pry free, but his grip was steel.

“What do you think you are doing?” Roman was bending down to a whisper.

“Mr. Knight let go of me; people are watching.”

“I don’t care. Why are you acting so stiff? Is this about last night? You’re not a virgin, are you?”

Olivia scoffed at his question, refusing to meet his eyes.

“Even if I was, it’s none of your business.”

He released her slowly.

She pointed an accusing finger at him, “you wanna know why? Because whenever I’m around you, I get stiff. You have that kind of effect on me and many other women, I’m sure, I don’t trust myself to make good judgments around you.”

People were already beginning to stare.

“There, that wasn’t so hard to get out, was it?”

Roman felt warmth spread through his stomach at her admission. However, he’d never say it.

“Meet me in my room by evening. We need to go over some paperwork from today and I need to make some calls. Enjoy yourself till then Olivia.”

Chapter 12

O livia had crawled into bed after her embarrassing admission, trying to catch some sleep. She'd tossed and turned in bed till her alarm sounded.

She got up and decided to brush her hair and leave it down after a quick debate in the mirror.

She swiped her card, locked her door, and took a deep breath before knocking on his.

“Come in.”

He was sitting, reading a magazine, and puffing a cigar.

“What?”

“Are you allowed to smoke here?”

“Yes, of course.”

He was dressed casually in shorts and a sleeveless shirt.

“You still seem uncomfortable with me.”

“Because you’re half naked.”

He laughed, setting the cigar down in the ashtray.

“Have a seat, Olivia. You might as well sit on the bed.”

She sat carefully like the bed was going to swallow her up.

He sighed, facing her.

“I wanted to explain something to you... about the dream, I realize I owe you an explanation.”

“You don’t have to”

He raised a hand to silence her.

“I only realized today that was one of the reasons I kept having nightmares...”

He got up from his seat to sit beside her.

“Yesterday when I went back to sleep, I thought for sure I was going to have another nightmare, but I didn’t, it’s because I unburdened myself a bit.”

“You want to... tell me about yourself?”

Roman gave a wry smile and shifted closer to her.

“You can tell by my tattoos that I used to be in a gang.”

She bit her lip. “I think they’re beautiful.”

“When I was younger, I did a lot of stupid stuff and the past still comes back to haunt me once in a while. There was a shootout and it happened on the eve of my sister’s 16th birthday. My sister got shot because of me.”

When he saw her expression change into shock, he laughed a bit.

“No, no, Olivia, she’s not dead but it was a hard time for me, coming back to the family to apologize to my sister. She kind of reminds me of you—she has this big forgiving heart.”

Olivia leaned in closer, “thank you for sharing it with me now. I think I understand a little of who you are now,” she said with a small, shy smile.

The tension between them heightened.

There was complete silence except for the ticking of the clock. They stared into each other’s eyes, and like unstoppable magnetism, like the force of the absence of gravity, Olivia found her body moving closer to his until her face was inches away from his.

Roman held his breath, also acknowledging the attraction he had for her.

“You look beautiful Olivia.”

He raised a hand to pull back the curls that framed her face. She licked her moistened lip. He ran a hand down her waist slowly, and then, Olivia did something unexpected.

“I’ve always wanted to do this,” she said, moving in closer in the dim light.

“Do what?”

She cupped her soft hands around his face, pulled him in, and kissed him. He was surprised at first, but now, with her acknowledgement, he could not deny his attraction to her any longer.

The kiss lasted longer than a minute, and when he pulled back, in her eyes, there was pure, unbridled lust.

“Are you sure of this?”

She nodded, and he pulled her in for a scalding kiss.

His tongue parted hers and intertwined, her breath became hitched and fast, and he brought his mouth down on hers again with hungry enthusiasm.

Her pretty skin gave an erotic flush, and he felt the extra blood pounding into his extremities.

Roman couldn’t remember when he’d ever fancied a woman like Olivia, but then, there was no woman like her.

But he knew, under the wide-eyed, shaky woman with a bright temper, was a strong, decisive woman.

Olivia squirmed beneath him, and his hands found her breasts, just as he wanted them in the first place.

He captured her hands in both of his and kissed each finger.

Then, he turned his attention to the inside of her arm, kissing his way up to the sensitive skin at the elbow and taking a quick nip.

She sucked in a breath and jerked. What he wanted—needed was right here, begging him to give and take.

“Make love to me, Roman.” Her voice was soft and erotic and deep-throated with a seductive edge, and her whisper seemed to hang in the air like heavy perfume.

The sound she made deep in her throat fed his desperation. He tangled his tongue with hers and sucked at her bottom lip.

Roman’s lips moved to her jawline as he began kissing his way down her vulnerable neck.

Then he discovered his talented fingers had already unbuttoned her blouse and unsnapped her bra.

When was the last time he’d used those moves on a woman? He couldn’t remember. Too long ago.

But all of a sudden, he was truly grateful for his body’s automatic response.

He urged her arms out of the shirt sleeves as he kissed his way across her shoulders, yanking down her blouse. There was a tattoo of an eagle on her shoulder that he never noticed before.

“Wow, you have a tattoo.”

“Drunken mistake,” she breathed heavily, her hands finding the buttons of his shirt when he suddenly decided that they were both too well dressed for the occasion. Besides, the heat had become too intense for clothes.

He kissed her again, and she moaned, struggled, and urged him back up with her body. He obliged her, blazing kisses over her belly and across the valleys and curves of her body.

Then she reached down and gripped him with both hands, using a gentle touch that drove him wild.

He jerked and went rigid as her touch ruled his moves. But Roman didn't want gentleness from her. He grabbed her hands over her head, extending the sweet torture.

Looking into her face, he found her glazed eyes fixed on him.

“Now Roman. Please. I want this.”

She lifted her hips, inviting him inside. With the last bit of clarity, I reached into my pants pockets for my wallet. I found the silver-wrapped condom and had it freed and installed within seconds.

Moving over her again, he let the tip of his erection nudge her swollen flesh. She kneaded and whimpered. He leaned his hips forward, brushing his length against her for a second time while she cried out in pleasure.

She pleaded for him as she rubbed herself against my length and called out his name.

Every inch of her wept with wanting, and she begged him to hurry.

With amazing self-control, he gently pressed his length inside her. This needed to be good for her. Her internal opening surrounded him with tiny tremors, like welcome-home hugs.

Hearing her make explicit noises of pleasure, he pressed a little deeper into the shock waves. But he wanted her to move in pace with him, which he regretted as he made a slow withdrawal, only seconds later to inch forward again. Then he slipped in. Her body was like a warm, welcoming paradise, tight and wet. The greatest gift that had ever been offered.

He pushed deeper, trying not to rush. Feeling her body start to contract around him, he pushed himself towards ecstasy. So hot. Slick. Tight.

Just before he succumbed to the madness, it hit him. Too tight. There might not be any barrier, but no one had ever come this way before.

He almost knew for certain that he was the first. He had to be sure.

Her first? Was it possible? I used the last bit of my resolve to lean up on my elbows and look down at her. Her face was the picture of abandonment. Her hair, a wild carpet, spread out across the pillow.

“Are you..a virgin?”

She shook her head.

“Are you?”

“Not technically. Just that, it’s been a long time since....”

It was a hell of a time for an attack of conscience, but I was already up to my ears in guilt.

“Are you sure? Sure, it’s me you want? You don’t even know me.”

She looked up at him with heavy-lidded eyes, her lips slightly parted and her chest heaving. His mouth went dry as she bit on the bottom lip and tried to smile.

“Time doesn’t matter. I feel like I know you well enough,” she managed with a hoarse laugh.

“I choose you because deep down, you’re a good person.”

He started to shake his head to deny what she said that I was far removed from anyone who resembled such a description.

“Olivia, dammit. I can’t do this.”

“Shush. No, please. I’m so close to something and I know it’s going to be spectacular. Please.”

She didn't have to complete her plea because he was giving in to the temptation melting through him.

She closed her eyes and arched her neck. Pushing her breasts up invitingly. I tried not to look. To forget their sweetness.

“Olivia, listen to me.”

Desperation colored my efforts.

“Roman, I'm choosing to do this. With you.”

She undulated her hips and threw her legs over his thighs, bringing him close to the edge.

“Look at me. Olivia, look at me.” She swung her head back and forth, and her arms went around his back, trying to urge him down into her.

“Please, don't say no. Don't reject me.”

That was all he needed to hear.

Dripping with sweat, Roman thrust hard into her and embedded himself at the hilt. He couldn't think. Could only let go. Could only sigh when he felt the contractions take her, and she screamed his name in pleasure.

He pumped hard into her, feeling rolling earthquakes. Faster and faster. High and higher. Until they reached a screaming explosion as one.

They shared hot, urgent euphoria till he fell over the edge, together in mind and body.

They collapsed on each other, panting, and in a few minutes, they were fast asleep.

Chapter 13

Marcus sat across from his prospective client, Gimmel, in a popular and upscale New York restaurant. The low hum of conversations and clinking of glasses provided a backdrop for their meeting. Marcus' posture exuded confidence, his sharp eyes focused intently on him.

“I'm thrilled we could meet today. Thank you for considering our agency. I've always admired your talent on the court, and I firmly believe we can take your career to new heights.”

Gimmel was a young and promising basketball player, and Marcus finally got in with him.

He nodded appreciatively, his eyes reflecting a mix of curiosity and cautious interest. He took a sip of his frappe before relaxing into his seat.

“Thanks, Marcus. I've heard great things about your agency, but I have to say, Roman has been my agent for a while now, and he's been solid. Why

should I consider switching?”

Marcus leaned forward.

“Gimmel, I understand your loyalty to Roman, but it’s important to assess your long-term goals and the opportunities that lie ahead. Our agency has a track record of securing highly lucrative deals for our clients, pushing boundaries, and ensuring their success off the court as well.”

Gimmel’s interest was piqued now as he listened intently.

“The world of sports has been slow this season and I can’t deny the allure of bigger and better opportunities. But I need to know I’m working with someone who understands me, someone I can trust. That’s what I have with Roman.”

Marcus leaned back, a confident smile playing on his lips.

“Have you read the proposed contract? Gimmel, trust is the foundation of any successful partnership. My journey from an assistant to the top of the sports management world has been built on trust and delivering results. I’m here to champion your aspirations, to strategically position you for endorsement deals, media exposure, and the opportunities that will elevate your career. Trust me, you’re in perfect hands here.”

Gimmel pondered over Marcus’ words, a glimmer of excitement igniting in his eyes.

“Okay, Marcus. I’m willing to give this a shot. But I need to see your commitment, your vision for my future.”

Bingo. Marcus reached into his briefcase and placed a meticulously prepared folder on the table; it was chock full with strategic plans, market analysis, and success stories of his clients.

Gimmel picked it up, flipping over some silently and taking sips of his drink.

“Gimmel, this is just a glimpse of the personalized roadmap we would create for your career. We leave no stone unturned in our pursuit of excellence. From brand partnerships to community engagement, we will position you as a global icon, on and off the court. Got it?”

“Tell me more.”

As they delved deeper into the details, the conversation flowed effortlessly, guided by Marcus’ persuasive charm and strategic insights. He answered every one of Gimmel’s questions with clarity and conviction. He was ready.

When the dessert plates were cleared away, Gimm extended his hand, a smile gracing his face.

“I’m impressed by your vision and dedication. Let’s make this happen. I’m ready to join your team and take my career to the next level.”

Marcus shook Gimmel’s hand firmly, a triumphant glint in his eyes.

“Michael, welcome to the family. Together, we will achieve greatness and make waves in the industry. I promise you won’t regret this decision.”

As they toasted to their partnership, the clinking of glasses resonated with the echoes of a successful wooing.

“To solidify a bond that would shape both our futures.”

“I have to go now; I’ll send over the files to my lawyer. I look forward to joining you next season.”

Marcus grinned and reveled in the satisfaction of another conquest.

“Hey, baby. Did you miss me?”

Marcus looked up from his seat, his eyes immediately drawn to the stunning figure that had just walked into the restaurant. Scarlett, radiant as ever, made her way towards him, her long blonde hair cascading over her shoulders.

She sat across from him, one leg on top of the other and draped her fur coat over her chair.

Every time he saw her, Marcus couldn’t help but be captivated by her beauty, despite being aware of her shallow tendencies. He stood up, a smirk playing on his lips.

“Scarlett honey, you know I always miss you. You look breathtaking tonight.”

Scarlett got up and leaned in, planting a soft kiss on Marcus’ cheek before taking her seat across from him.

“Flattery will get you everywhere, Marcus darling. So, tell me, what have you been up to? “

Marcus leaned back in his chair.

“Just closing a deal with Michael, an up-and-coming basketball star. He’s got incredible potential, and I’m excited to see where our partnership takes him.”

Scarlett’s eyes sparkled with interest as she sipped her champagne.

“Ah, always the ambitious one, aren’t you? Speaking of ambition, I have a plan, Marcus. A plan to make Roman pay for what he did to me.”

Marcus arched an eyebrow. She always found a way to bring him into their conversation.

“Tell me more, Scarlett. What’s your game?”

Scarlett leaned in closer, her voice dropping to a whisper.

“Roman may think he can walk away from me unscathed, but he has no idea what I’m capable of. I’ll show him just how much he lost. And with your business savvy, Marcus, we’ll make him regret ever letting me go.”

“You know I’m always up for a little competition.”

“That’s why I love you.”

Their eyes locked, and the air around them thickened with anticipation. Marcus reached across the table, his hand gently cupping Scarlett's cheek. Their lips met in a passionate, fiery kiss.

As they pulled apart, breathless yet exhilarated, Marcus felt a surge of adrenaline. With Scarlett by his side, he was ready to take on any challenge, including winning her heart fully and completely while showing Roman just what he had lost.

Despite Scarlett's lingering feelings for Roman and Marcus' awareness of her shallow tendencies, there was undeniable chemistry between the two.

"I love you, Scarlett."

"I love you too, Marcus."

Chapter 14

“Come again?”

Olivia’s voice shook a little as she repeated herself, “I slept with him.” Avery’s eyes widened in disbelief, her face a mixture of shock and concern. They were seated in their favorite restaurant, sipping their respective drinks – Olivia with her coffee and Avery with her sweet tea.

Immediately after waking up in the arms of her boss, she caught the first flight and called her friend.

Avery leaned back in her chair; her brows furrowed in worry as she struggled to process the revelation. Olivia had crossed a dangerous line by getting intimately involved with her boss, Roman.

“You slept with Roman? How did that happen?” Avery’s voice was terse, her eyes searching for answers.

Olivia let out a shaky breath, her mind still reeling from the unexpected turn of events. She tried to find the right words to explain herself.

“It was late, and we were working together. The tension between us was undeniable, and one thing led to another. I never planned for it to happen,” Olivia confessed.

“But you know what? I’m not even sorry, I don’t regret it.”

Avery’s concern deepened as she leaned forward.

“This is a complicated situation, Olivia. Getting involved with your boss can be risky, both personally and professionally. How do you feel about Roman now?” Avery asked, her tone gentle yet probing.

Olivia’s voice trembled as she confessed, “I’m horrified to admit it, but I think I’m falling for him. It’s confusing, and I never expected to develop such feelings.”

Avery nodded, understanding the complexity of the situation. She reached across the table, clasping her hand.

“You need to take a step back and evaluate your emotions, Olivia. Sleeping with your boss adds an extra layer of complication. And Roman’s behavior? How has he been acting since then?” Avery asked, her gaze unwavering.

Olivia sighed, her eyes searching for answers she couldn’t seem to find.

“I messaged him, and we caught up on work but he’s been distant, cold even. I can’t decipher his true intentions or what he’s feeling. It’s unsettling,

but I'll admit it's my fault since I left without a word in the first place, I didn't just want to make it complicated," Olivia admitted.

"Well...he might be struggling with his own emotions and the professional implications. Give him some space and observe how he behaves. Actions often speak louder than words," Avery advised, hoping to provide some clarity.

As they sat in the familiar ambiance of their cherished restaurant, Olivia went over Avery's words, her thoughts swirling with uncertainty and longing. The weight of her emotions and the potential consequences weighed heavily on her.

"What if things become awkward at work? What if I lose my job or our friendship suffers? He opened up to me, you know?"

Avery's expression softened.

"Olivia, life is full of risks, and sometimes we stumble into unexpected situations. But true friendships weather storms, no matter what. If things become complicated, we'll face them together," Avery reassured her.

"Now let me drink my tea you so disapprove of."

Olivia sniffled and laughed.

"Sorry for being so self-centered. I've been caught up in my drama and haven't even asked about your auditions. How did they go?"

“Don’t worry about it, Liv. I know you’ve had a lot on your plate lately. As for the auditions, well, they were just the usual mix of nerves and excitement.”

“Oh yeah? How about the intriguing man you met at your waitressing job? You just went silent on that.”

Avery’s expression brightened as she leaned in, eager to share the story. She’d texted her friend about a rich man she met during her shift.

She recounted how a sophisticated and affluent-looking man had come to the restaurant, engaging her in an unexpected conversation, and she admitted she was in limbo.

To her surprise, he had handed Avery a card, offering her the chance to become his assistant.

“Wow, Avery! That’s incredible! Are you serious? This could be your chance to step into a new adventure, to get a foot in the industry,” she exclaimed, genuinely excited for her friend.

Avery nodded; her face lit up.

She understood the depth of Avery’s aspirations and the dedication she poured into her auditions and a temporary waitressing job.

“Avery. It’s a fantastic opportunity, and you deserve it. Go ahead and give him a call. Who knows where it might lead? I believe in you, and I’m confident that this could be a stepping stone toward your dreams,” Olivia said.

“I’m excited; you know I can’t help but imagine the possibilities that lay ahead. The thought of breaking free from my current circumstances and venturing into a world aligned with my true passion. I can stop getting hung up on bills that take away most of my salary at the end of the month.”

“And no more carpooling,” Olivia added, laughing, and Avery joined her.

“You’re right, Liv. This could be my ticket to pursuing my dreams and leaving the temporary waitressing job behind. I’m going to seize this opportunity and make the most of it, thank you for making it clear.”

As their conversation shifted toward dreams and aspirations, their laughter echoed through the air, creating a buoyant atmosphere of support and encouragement. They reminisce about their shared journey, both the ups and downs, finding solace in the unwavering bond they shared.

Finally, the time came for them to part ways, but their connection remained strong. Olivia embraced Avery tightly, her voice filled with warmth and appreciation.

“Avery, you inspire me with your hard work and dedication. I’m grateful to have you as my friend, and I do not doubt that you’ll achieve great things. Remember, I’ll always be here to cheer you on,” Olivia said, her words reflecting a deep-rooted friendship.

Avery smiled, her eyes shining with gratitude.

“Thank you, Liv. Your support means everything to me.”

“Now, how about Tim?”

She scoffed, taking another sip from her tea.

“None of your business.”

Olivia burst into a peal of laughter, her troubles with her boss temporarily forgotten.

“What do you mean Michael is going to Marcus?”

A deep line was forming between his brows as he swiveled in his seat.

“I mean, Michael is quitting because he said Marcus offered him a better deal, and he’s going to be signing a contract with him by the end of next week when his contract with us ends.”

Roman gritted his teeth.

Over the years, he had indeed stolen many prospective and committed clients from Marcus, who was his biggest industry rival.

Roman respected the man for his business savvy and grit but couldn’t afford to have any other prospective clients yanked away from under him now.

This was adding to his headache, and he needed a break.

He got up and decided that today would be an early day.

He looked at the time; it was noon.

Perfect.

“I’ll make an announcement,” he said, facing Allen, who was waiting for a response.

“What? To whom?”

“My employees, they’ll be rounding up in the next hour. Everyone deserves a break. This has been a rough week for all of us.”

“And the Michael situation?”

“We’ll just let it go. We need to find a big score.”

“I’ll inform Thomson, I’ll be taking my leave. See you in a bit.”

As soon as he left, he dialed Scott.

“I’ll need you to set up a meeting at the usual place.”

“Will that be all?”

Scott was a reliable and brisk assistant who could read and respond to any situation accordingly and always did his job efficiently.

“Yes, that’ll be all.”

Roman ended the call. He got up from his seat, shook his Armani jacket, and put it on.

He picked up his phone again to call Linda.

He asked her to inform every one of their early dismissal.

In a few minutes, he could already hear their whoops of joy downstairs. He smiled a little and shook his head.

There was also something else niggling at the back of his mind; throughout his life, all the challenges that came his way, he always had a solution to it, provided he had a little rest and a little peace of mind. Still, this particular problem is proving hard to solve.

It had been over four days now since he had last spoken directly to Olivia.

They'd spent an incredible night, and he was having his second night of peaceful sleep. Then he'd woken up to an empty bed.

She had gotten out of bed and decided to take a different flight from him, and he had taken it as her simply not wanting to talk about it, but the way she carried herself and the foreign look in her eyes told him a different story. He thought giving her space was the right thing, but he needed to find her and just let this be over with but where was she?

He needed clarity.

He hoped she was not yet gone from the building as he had already dismissed everyone because it would be very awkward showing up at her house, but with the way he was feeling, he'd do it if need be.

He pressed the elevator button from his own private office downstairs. Everyone burst into cheers as he came down.

“If only you’re all this enthusiastic during rush week,” he said with a small grin.

To his left was Olivia’s office with her name ‘Olivia W’ in bold letters tacked to the front.

He knocked, and without waiting for a response, he turned the handle.

There was the other intern, Jane, bending over and reviewing a file with her.

“Yes, that goes here, and as for Linda, I don’t think it’s time—“

She stopped midway in her sentence, standing straight in surprise that their boss was coming into Olivia’s office.

“I need to talk to you, Olivia,” he began, and Jane hurriedly showed herself out while Olivia tensed up again.

He hated having this effect on her, making him feel like he was some dangerous, wild creature. Sure, he’d had his share of wild experiences, but at least he tried to be a gentleman, a changed man.

“Good afternoon Mr. Roman.”

“I think it’s too late for the ‘Mr.,’” he said, pulling a seat and crossing his legs.

“And will you please look me in the eye when I’m talking to you?”

“I’m sorry sir,” she said, sitting up, her back stiff.

Today she was wearing a black suit and pants, but it was a shame that her hair was swept up in a professional bun.

How he’d love to have a recap of the night they were together.

But that was not what I came here for, he reminded himself.

“We have a lot of things to discuss.”

“I mean, it means nothing to me if it means nothing to you, so I hope it does not change anything in our working relationship.” Her tone was guarded.

“Is that really how you feel?”

Olivia forced herself to meet his eyes and raised her chin, and tried to sound as confident as she could.

“Yes, that’s what I want,” but deep down, she felt this growing pain.

It hurt her heart not to profess her feelings.

It was just a fling; it’ll hurt to try to read more or expect more from it, she said to herself.

Yeah, right. Another voice at the back of her said.

“Okay then, if you’re sure about it, we have no problem. But I also came here for something else. To announce that I’m bumping you up a rank.”

He saw the look in her eyes and the lift of her brow.

“I’m bumping you up a rank, two ranks actually because you did such a great job. We got the deal and it’s looking promising because of your contribution.”

He saw the look in her eyes.

“Oh goodness no, I know how to separate emotions and sentimentalism from my profession. I mean it. You did a great job back there, so you deserve it. I wanted to tell you in the morning, but I found out you were gone, and you’ve been avoiding me.”

She sighed at his prodding look.

“Well, I just thought you would feel off about it.”

“I don’t. Since you say you don’t either, well I guess that’s settled then.”

“I guess it’s okay.”

“Then I’ll be seeing you tomorrow, have a great day off.”

After he disappeared, Olivia rested her head against the table.

Despite herself, she felt the tears sting at the back of her eyes.

Chapter 15

In the heart of bustling New York City, tucked away in an unassuming corner was The Velvet Lounge.

This was why it was his favorite place.

The exclusive venue had an aura of mystique and sophistication he liked, offering a haven for those looking for solace from the chaotic outside world, and he needed as much of that as he could now. As Roman stepped into the dimly lit space, the familiar sense of tranquility washed over him.

“Yeah Scott, keep close, I’ll be out of here soon. Remember to reschedule my meeting with the Wangs.”

He turned off his phone and pocketed it, searching for Thompson and Allen.

The ambient lighting cast a soft, warm glow, painting the room in shades of deep burgundy and amber. The flickering candlelight danced upon the tables, casting gentle shadows that added to the intimate atmosphere. Plush velvet curtains carpeted the walls, creating a cocoon of privacy.

“Hey Roman, over here.”

Allen and Thompson were settled into a secluded booth nestled in the corner of the lounge. The booth was closed partially in a curtain of heavy velvet drapes, shielding their conversation from prying eyes. Soft jazz melodies played in the background.

“There you guys are.”

“This place is pretty sweet; how come you’ve never told me about this before?” Allen asked.

The booth itself was a study in comfort and luxury, with plush velvet upholstery in rich hues of midnight blue; Roman sighed as he sank in, the seats embracing him.

“Yes, this place is beautiful. I don’t blame you for keeping this place to yourself,” Thomson said. He was on his phone as he nodded to Roman.

The table was decorated with a simple yet elegant arrangement of fresh flowers, the delicate fragrance mingling with the warm aroma of hot chocolate Allen had ordered.

“How about we get some real food?” Thomson asked, turning his nose up at Allen’s choice of beverage.

“Yeah, I’m starving,” Roman confessed, signaling the waiter.

The waitstaff, dressed in impeccable black suits, walked silently and discreetly toward them.

“What will you fine gentlemen be having?”

Roman’s mind flashed back to his conversation with Olivia as Thompson covered their order.

His thoughts were interrupted by the waiter, gracefully carrying a tray laden with drinks. With a warm smile, he set the drinks before them.

He’d best not dwell too much on it.

“Cheers.”

“Cheers.”

Glasses clinked softly as they sipped exquisite cocktails and fine wines selected by Thompson.

In a few minutes, Thompson, Allen, and Roman engaged in light banter, the air alive with playful camaraderie.

Thompson, known for his flirtatious nature, teased Allen about his latest romantic endeavors, much to the amusement of Roman.

“Come on, Allen, you can’t deny your way with the ladies,” Thompson chuckled, nudging him playfully. “You’ve got a charm oozing out of every

pore!”

Allen grinned and shrugged. “Well, what can I say? I guess I’ve got a knack for making hearts flutter.”

“Too bad your wife left you,” they both burst into hearty laughter.

“No, that one had no heart, I just didn’t see it soon enough.”

Roman, distracted by his thoughts, only half-heartedly joined the conversation. His mind kept wandering to Scarlett, his ex-girlfriend.

She’d recently announced her engagement to Marcus, his biggest rival. The news had hit him hard, reopening old wounds and stirring up unresolved emotions.

Thompson noticed Roman’s distracted state and teased, “Roman buddy, you’re a million miles away.”

Roman sighed, attempting to brush off the question. “Oh... just, you know, the news,” he replied.

Thompson nodded.

“I understand, Scarlett, right?”

He understood the depth of Roman’s past love for Scarlett and how it had ended in heartbreak.

“You mean Scarlett’s engagement? That’s your ex-girlfriend, right?”

Allen asked, oblivious.

Roman's eyes flashed with a mix of irritation and pain. "Why bring that up? I thought we were here to have a good time, not delve into the past."

"Jeez. I'm sorry."

The tension in the air thickened, and a heated exchange began, emotions running high.

Roman slammed his fist against the table. "Alright enough! We didn't come here to discuss this."

Allen conferred, attempting to diffuse the mounting tension.

"You all are no fun."

Thompson, always the peacemaker, seized the opportunity to steer the conversation away from the sensitive topic. "Alright, alright, enough of that," he said, "this isn't what we came to discuss anyway."

The trio settled into a more comfortable rhythm, allowing the initial tension to dissipate.

"Would you like anything else, gentlemen?"

"No, thank you."

The waiter winked at Thompson before leaving.

They shifted their focus as the waiter discreetly vanished, leaving the trio to pick up where they left off.

Thompson couldn't resist a playful quip as the waiter made his exit. Leaning back in his seat, a mischievous grin played on his lips. "I gotta say, these folks know how to treat us. Top-notch service, wouldn't you say, gentlemen?" His tone dripped with amusement.

"You think I didn't see you slip the waiter a note?" Roman asked, chuckling gruffly, wishing he had a smoke.

"I think he's into you," Allen added, chuckling a little.

"So, you say you found an in?" Allen asked.

Thompson leaned in; his eyes gleaming with excitement. "Alright, fellas, listen up. I've got a plan," he declared.

"Mr. Winston? You know how long I've been trying to land him?" Roman said, leaning in, heart pounding.

Thompson proceeded to lay out the details of the prized client they'd been pursuing tirelessly—the elusive 'mega whale.'

One of the top three exclusive families in New York who ran a fashion and sports empire. A big score with one of the mega whales meant a secure, permanent partnership and steady business. Plus, it didn't hurt the company's stock prices. Mr. Winston was only known by his first name. They were a family company whose net worth ran into trillions.

“I met him, and he agreed to a meeting. But, as luck would have it, the mega whale had three conditions that posed quite the challenge.”

“And those are?” Allen asked.

“First,” Thompson began, raising a finger to emphasize his point, “our target believes only married dudes or those planning to tie the knot are serious business partners. Tricky situation, but we gotta find a way around it.”

“Wait what?” Roman asked.

“Let him finish. Roman.”

“And here’s the kicker,” Thompson continued with a spark of mischief in his eyes, “our friendly rival, Marcus, is gunning for the same client. It’s a showdown, my friends, and we gotta outshine him.”

“And you know he’s got your girl?” Allen quipped, sipping his drink.

“Ex-girlfriend,” Thompson corrected.

“Please stop bringing her up.”

Thompson ignored them and continued, “gents, we’ve got an opportunity to snag this mega whale and show Marcus who’s boss. But we gotta act fast, and we need the perfect partner in crime.”

Roman’s eyes narrowed, fully aware of the gravity of the situation. Time was running out, and finding the right candidate felt like an uphill battle. The

fate of this potential deal rested on his shoulders, what he'd wanted for years, but now that his goal was within sight, the pressure mounted with each passing moment.

He respected Marcus, but he wouldn't allow him to have this one.

“So, what'd you say? Which crazy woman will agree to this? Your plan and be fake engaged to you in three days?”

“What'd you say, Roman?” Allen asked.

Roman set his drink down. He didn't even need to be asked; there was one woman on his mind, one he was sure absolutely of.

“Absolutely not!”

Her mortified eyes told him everything he needed to know.

He'd found her address quite easily and, choosing to surprise her, decided not to call ahead.

Her arms were folded as she waited for a longer explanation than 'be my pretend girlfriend.'

He couldn't blame her; the last person anyone should expect on a Saturday after a long week of work was your boss.

He looked around her living room appreciatively; it had its unique charm.

Olivia's humble home was a warm and inviting ambiance. Middle-class but lovely.

Her upbringing and her love for sports were obvious at a glance. As Roman stepped inside, he was greeted with the walls adorned with photographs and memorabilia serving as a testament to her athletic achievements and fond memories. The shelves were filled with sports knick-knacks, trophies from her childhood, and medals proudly displayed for all to see.

The small living room, cozy yet well-kept, welcomed him with its comfortable furniture and a well-worn coffee table, her home welcomed him, but she did not.

He took a step forward, picking up pictures.

Framed posters of famous athletes adorned the walls, a testament to Olivia's admiration for the sports world.

"Mr. Roman, I'm waiting."

The room echoed with the faint hum of her television, often broadcasting a game.

Olivia's mortification lingered as Roman's curiosity seemed insatiable, his hands lingering on each trophy and photograph. She let out an exasperated sigh, unable to contain her annoyance any longer, "please stop touching my things."

"Now, is that any way to speak to your boss?"

“You’re not my boss on Saturday and in my house.”

He set down the picture of an adorable 5-year-old Olivia, missing a front tooth, baseball in hand. This was going to be more awkward than he realized.

Chapter 16

Roman, seriously, can you please keep your hands off my things?“
Olivia pleaded, crossing her arms defensively.

Roman looked up from a particularly old photograph, a mischievous glint in his eyes. “But these are fascinating! Each one tells a story. I’m genuinely impressed, Olivia, I am, I knew you loved sports, I just didn’t know it was this much.”

She softened slightly at his words, realizing that his intent wasn’t to demean her but to understand her better. Reluctantly, Olivia gave in.

“Fine, but don’t break anything,” she warned, stepping closer to Roman as he continued to examine her trophies.

He grinned; his eyes fixed on a particularly large trophy. “So, tell me about this one. What did it take to win it?”

As she discussed her achievements, the initial tension between them began to dissipate.

Roman's genuine interest and enthusiasm melted her reservation.

At first, she couldn't hide being flustered at the thought of him in her house, so virile, so male.

Thank goodness she thought to clean.

"And this photograph... It seems like a significant moment in high school," Roman remarked, his finger gently tracing the image of a young Olivia holding a basketball trophy.

Olivia's smile softened, a touch of vulnerability creeping into her eyes. "That was my first big win. It was a turning point for me, a realization that I could achieve something great if I put my mind to it, and also when my dad died. I dedicate this trophy to him. I have three younger sisters, you know? Of course, my sisters never loved sports and Bella was barely a toddler when my dad passed away. But I shared as many stories of him as I could remember. He was an awesome man. My mum's health took a turn for the worse when he passed away."

Roman nodded, his expression contemplative. "I'm sorry about your dad, you've accomplished a lot, Olivia. It's admirable."

Her cheeks flushed with a mix of pride and self-consciousness. "Thanks, Roman. I guess my trophies and photographs aren't as impressive as your world, but they mean a lot to me."

He reached out and gently squeezed her hand, his touch unexpected but comforting. “They may not be as extravagant, but they represent your passion and determination. That’s something I truly admire in people.”

“You’re trying to manipulate me, aren’t you?”

“Of course, I am, and I can see it working,” he said, flashing a wicked gleam, brushing her hair gently from her face and running his hands down her long, soft curls.

Electrified by his touch, Olivia took a little step back, knocking over her bookshelf.

She groaned, picking them up.

“Don’t think because you’re somewhat hot, every woman is going to fall on their knees and do whatever you ask of them. I mean, that’s a big and equally ridiculous thing you’re asking.”

“You think I’m hot?” He asked, taking another step closer.

Olivia ignored the heat in her cheeks from her outburst and his cocky smile.

“Whatever.”

“Your cat seems to like me,” he said, bending down to scoop up Sandy.

“Traitor,” Olivia said to her cat, curling up and purring in the arms of her boss. Sandy hissed at her, and Roman laughed.

“She seems to like you more than she likes me. Okay , you can take my stupid cat with you.”

“Come on Olivia, you know you want to be my pretend girlfriend. I can see it in your eyes, wouldn’t it be better than working some silly internship job?”

“My internship job is not silly,” she snapped.

“Okay sorry, sorry, I didn’t mean it that way but to be honest, it’s a hell of a boring job. You don’t want to turn out like Jane, you know? Bless her heart.”

Olivia thought of Jane, in her reasonable shoes and sensible clothes in Coke glasses and shivered.

She loved Jane, but she didn’t want to look like that eventually.

“Okay, I agree.”

Roman took a seat, crossing his legs under him as Sandy scampered away; he tapped the carpet with his palm, “sit down.”

She sat beside him gingerly, trying to breathe in the scent of him. He was so close.

“But we have to know a bit about each other, we’re going to announce this and my parents are going to meet. You can tell anyone you trust.”

Olivia nodded and took a deep breath, her curiosity piqued. She looked at Roman, sunlight streaking his hair through her window blinds.

“Roman, can I ask you something personal?” she inquired, her voice soft.

Roman nodded, “sure, girlfriend. Ask away.”

She hesitated for a moment before proceeding. “I’ve heard rumors about your past. You were really in a gang?”

A shadow crossed Roman’s face as the complicated memories resurfaced. “Yes, it’s true,” he admitted. “I was involved in some dangerous things, but that life is behind me now.”

Olivia’s eyes widened. “I’m sorry to hear that. What made you leave?”

His expression grew more somber. “It was my sister, Lily. She was caught in the crossfire of a gang shootout and was shot in the shoulder. That was a wake-up call for me. I realized I needed to change my path and create a better life for both of us.”

Olivia nodded, “I’m glad your sister is okay. That’s incredibly brave, Roman. And now you’ve built this successful sports agency. How did you make it happen?”

Roman’s face brightened with a spark of pride. “Hard work, determination, and a bit of luck, I suppose. I poured everything I had into creating something meaningful. It wasn’t easy, but it was worth it.”

“You know, I’ve always loved sports since I was little,” she shared. “I participated in various sports and won many trophies. It’s a big part of who I am.”

Roman leaned forward, taking in her wide-eyed stare. “That’s impressive, Olivia. What drives your passion for sports?”

A warm smile graced her lips. “Sports have always been my escape, my way of channeling my energy. They taught me discipline, teamwork, and resilience. Plus, they bring people together.”

“Hmm. I can see why sports mean so much to you. They have the power to unite and inspire, girlfriend.”

“Don’t call me girlfriend; it feels so fake. Do it for the cameras.”

“Are you sure you don’t want me to call you that? I see your breath catch in your throat when I do, girlfriend.”

He leaned in closer and cupped her cheeks. The atmosphere crackled with anticipation as their lips met in a breathtaking kiss. Time seemed to stand still as they lost themselves in the magic of the moment. The world around them faded away, leaving only the electrifying connection.

Their hearts pounded in sync, echoing the intensity of their desire.

He pulled her lower lip and bit gently; she moaned. In that single, stolen moment, nothing else mattered. They were consumed by the intoxicating rush of emotions, their bodies and souls entwined. Raw, unspoken passion.

As their lips parted, a breathless silence hung in the air.

No words were needed to convey the depth of their connection. They simply existed in the afterglow of the kiss, basking in the enchantment and

uncertainty of what the future held. It was a moment of pure magic, a fragment of time suspended in the realm of possibilities.

Olivia's heart raced, her breath shallow. She bit her lower lip, and Roman swore something and pulled her in for another kiss. Till, after an eternity, Roman pulled away.

Olivia's heart raced as she nervously fidgeted with the hem of her shirt, her mind swirling with a mix of excitement and apprehension. Roman watched her, a hint of amusement and lust playing in his eyes.

“So, Olivia, are you ready to play the part of my girlfriend?” He asked, a teasing smile tugging at his lips.

Olivia blushed, her cheeks turning a shade of pink. “I... I guess so,” she stammered, trying to gather her thoughts. “It's just... it's a bit overwhelming, you know?”

Roman chuckled softly. “I can imagine,” he replied. “But don't worry, Olivia. It's just a little charade. We'll make it through.”

Her flustered state, juxtaposed with his calm demeanor, only added to his amusement. A fondness twinkled in his eyes as he watched her, appreciating her genuine nature.

“Relax, Olivia,” he reassured her, his voice warm. “We'll have some fun with this. It's all just a game, after all.”

Olivia's nerves began to ease as his words sank in, a small smile tugging at the corners of her lips. She realized that, with Roman by her side, even this

make-believe situation could be an adventure worth embracing.

“So, do we go on dates and everything?”

“Sure, why not?”

“What about work?”

“Come and go whenever you like, you’re my woman now.”

The way he said it made her feel giddy with desire.

He pulled her close, allowing her to rest her head against his chest. His heart thudded slowly. The strong, reassuring beat made her relax into him.

Chapter 17

The warm sun hung high in the sky, casting its golden rays on the secluded private beach. The powdery white sand stretched out like a welcoming carpet, meeting the gently lapping waves of the crystal-clear turquoise sea. A light breeze whispered through the swaying palm trees, carrying the intoxicating scent of the ocean.

Scarlett reclined on a plush beach chair, her slender figure framed by the vibrant hues of her oversized sun hat and flowing sarong. Her boyfriend sat beside her, his eyes shielded by a pair of sleek sunglasses, soaking in the tranquility of the moment.

The rhythm of the waves provided a soothing backdrop, lulling them into a state of complete relaxation while Luisa, her long-suffering maid, stood nearby.

With a dismissive tone, Scarlett called out to Luisa, who stood a few feet away.

“Luisa, bring me some snacks. I’m feeling peckish.”

“But you told me you wanted none, ma’am.”

“I want some now.”

Luisa sighed softly, accustomed to Scarlett’s demanding nature. “Yes, ma’am. What would you like?” she asked, trying to hide her annoyance.

Scarlett rolled her eyes. “Just bring me whatever you can find. Something quick and easy,” she replied.

Luisa nodded, turned, and walked towards the beachside snack bar to fulfill Scarlett’s request.

“Remember why you chose this job. One more month, Luisa,” she said to herself.

It was part of her job to cater to her employer’s whims.

As Luisa disappeared from view, Scarlett settled back on her beach towel. She reached for her phone, scrolling through social media, completely absorbed in her world.

Marcus adjusted his glasses as Luisa passed by him. “I apologize for Scarlett’s behavior, Luisa. She can be quite demanding at times.”

Overhearing the conversation, Scarlett snapped defensively, “Marcus, it’s none of your business. And by the way, were you trying to snatch my fiance?”

Marcus chuckled, shaking his head. “Oh, Scarlett, don’t be ridiculous. Luisa and I were simply having a friendly conversation. No need to jump to such conclusions,” he replied.

Scarlett sat up and crossed her arms. “Well, it seemed like you were getting a bit too cozy. Just watch yourself, Luisa,” she retorted.

Marcus raised an eyebrow; his amusement was evident. “Cozy? Scarlett? Luisa and I were merely exchanging pleasantries. I assure you, there’s nothing more to it, Luisa, please get her snacks, if she’s hungry, she becomes unbearable,” he explained, his tone tinged with sarcasm.

Luisa, caught in the middle of their banter, couldn’t help but chuckle softly, appreciating Marcus’s light-hearted response.

“Fine, believe what you want,” she muttered, turning away in a huff, and dismissing them with a wave of her hand.

Marcus shook his head, still smiling. “You always have a way of making things interesting, Scarlett,” he commented.

A few minutes later, Scarlett applied a layer of sunscreen and felt sleepy. The fragrance of the lotion mingled with the salty sea air, giving her a subtle tropical allure. Her eyelids fluttered closed as she succumbed to the embrace of a midday nap.

Occasional laughter and the distant sound of splashing water drifted from the nearby shore, indicating the presence of other beachgoers. She wished it was a private island instead of this place, but they offered great massages;

how could she resist coming here? She drifted into sleep till she heard her name being called from afar.

“Scarlett, Scarlett?”

Irritated at her interrupted nap. “Yes?”

“Remember that huge deal I told you about?”

“Mr. Winston, right?”

Marcus knew she was shallow and pigheaded, but she knew her way around the business. Her parents were rich lawyers but also investors and taught her the tricks of the trade. He met her closing a business deal on behalf of her father’s company at a party; he was a VIP guest and had just had the chance to witness her speak spectacularly; he’d been impressed by her with her long legs and scheming eyes. Sure, she was unbearable now and then, but that also appealed to him, and the love life was a fiery, selfish romance.

“We have to be at dinner with mister Winston some days from now, how about everything we’ve discussed? And—”

“Hey, hey,” Scarlet interrupted, sitting up immediately.

“I told you this already, don’t bother checking in with me; all I need to do is to be happy and be perfect, right? Does The old man bag just need a happy couple? I’m the perfect actress.

I think I’m the best out there, I dare say,” she said with a smile and put on her beach glasses.

“You wanna leave the sun now, dear?”

“I wanna tan some more.”

Marcus was under an umbrella, reading the Times magazine, but he had folded it, regarding her with a pretty serious look.

“Scarlett honey, listen. This is something that could make or break my career, my biggest rival, your ex-boyfriend,” he said with emphasis on an ex-boyfriend, causing Scarlett to frown.

“He’s going to be there and as far as I know, he’s also bringing someone.”

“What?”

Scarlett frowned; she couldn’t think or picture Roman with anyone, and the thought of him having someone to date sent a familiar steak of anger up her chest, reminding her that she wasn’t still over him.

“I can’t picture him with a woman. It probably has to be set up.”

“How sure are you about that?”

“Don’t do that. I’m only saying that because I know him. He’s practically a loner. It took him so long to open up to me, he never spoke of him getting some girlfriend I’ve never heard of in just three days.”

She huffed and rested against the chair. Roman always had a way of riling her up.

Marcus studied her for a moment.

“I don’t know about that,” Marcus began, “I hear this woman works with him; maybe it’s an office romance kind of thing. And what’s more? She’s pretty too.”

“What?”

“Yeah, I’ve checked them out. Her name is Olivia or something. Now that I think of it, you’ve met her at dinner. Remember? The one Roman’s company hosted.”

“What?” Scarlett asked, getting up and picking up her beach bag.

Marcus laughed. “Don’t play dumb Scarlett, we both know you went to his company dinner to check him out.”

“I know you’re still hung up on him,” he said, giving a small smile.

“Marcus...”

“But that’s okay, and I have all the patience in the world, I’ll wait.”

Scarlett scoffed, “Marcus honey, I don’t want it to seem like I’m some jealous ex. I love you.”

Scarlett meant it, but she also still loved Roman. That was not something she was going to admit, even if it was obvious.

“So,” she began, changing the subject, “you said I met that woman? Who is she?”

“Come here, I’ll show you her picture instead,” he said, bringing out his phone from his pocket.

It was impossible. It had to be a setup, Scarlett thought as her boyfriend flipped through his gallery, showing her the picture.

Scarlett took a step backward.

“What is it?”

Now she remembered who that was.

It was the same girl who was ogling Roman from afar.

“She’s pretty, isn’t she?” Marcus asked, smiling.

“I gotta say, he’s got good taste.”

Scarlett bit back a choice reply.

“Yes, of course, she is, and so am I,” she said with a smile.

Scarlett’s confident declaration hung in the air, and Marcus raised an eyebrow, a smirk tugging at his lips. He leaned closer to her, his eyes gleaming with mischief.

“You think you can be the perfect girlfriend, huh?” he teased, his voice laced with amusement.

Scarlett’s lips curled into a playful smile as she leaned in even closer, her voice low. “Oh, Marcus, I can be whatever you need me to be,” she replied,

her tone dripping with confidence.

Marcus's gaze intensified, his hand gently tracing a line along Scarlett's jawline. "Is that so?" he murmured, his voice husky.

Scarlett nodded, a glimmer in her eyes. "Absolutely. I can play the part flawlessly, make everyone believe we're the real deal."

Marcus chuckled softly, a mix of intrigue and desire dancing in his eyes. "Well, then, I suppose we have a deal," he said, his tone laden with anticipation.

Their faces drew closer, their breaths mingling in the charged space between them. The world around them faded into oblivion as their lips met in a passionate, electrifying kiss.

The kiss was a fiery blend of desire and intensity, a mutual exploration of their hidden desires. It was a meeting of two souls yearning for connection, entwined in a dance of tangled emotions.

As they pulled away, a spark of anticipation glimmered in Scarlett's eyes. "So, Marcus, shall we give Mr Winston a performance they'll never forget?" she asked.

Marcus grinned, his eyes sparkling with mischief. "Oh, Scarlett, I do not doubt that we'll leave them all breathless," he replied, a newfound excitement coloring his words.

"And let us make sure they have no chance of getting through to Mr. Winston."

“How do you intend to do that?” Marcus said, looking up, a gleam in his eye.

If there was one thing he loved about Scarlett the most, it was her scheming brain.

Chapter 18

“Are you ready?” Olivia’s voice trembled slightly as she clutched Roman’s hand tightly on his insistence. She hoped her palms weren’t clammy.

She was a jumbled mix of excitement and nervousness. She was dressed in a semi-formal outfit, and Roman stole another glance at her, his piercing blue eyes studying her intently.

“Well played, I see your commitment to the part.”

Despite himself and his gruff demeanor, he couldn’t deny the undeniable beauty that clutched his hand a little too tightly.

Her presence had a way of melting his defenses, making him feel more vulnerable than he cared to admit. Time seemed to slow.

Her curly brown hair cascaded down her shoulders, framing her face like a halo. Her eyes sparkled with intelligence and warmth, drawing him in with their captivating emerald hue. Her delicate features were accentuated by a subtle touch of lip gloss.

“Thanks, I always do my best whenever I set my mind to it,” she gestured at her dress. She was in an elegant gown, and the fabric clung to her curves, accentuating her grace and poise.

Roman shook his head, freeing himself of thoughts that threatened to drag him into the deep, dangerous waters.

“Yeah, I’m ready,” Roman replied in his usual rough tone, though a hint of tenderness slipped through. He squeezed Olivia’s hand reassuringly, silently conveying his support.

As they stepped out of the sleek black car, the grandeur of the mansion before them was awe-inspiring. It was a symbol of wealth and privilege, an imposing structure that hinted at opulence.

“This house is huge,” Olivia gaped.

“So I’ve been told, come on.”

Roman led Olivia toward the massive entrance.

Again, Olivia’s gaze settled on Roman, and her heart skipped a beat. His broad shoulders were accentuated by casual dressing. His muscles stretched against the fabric. The way he carried himself, with confidence and a hint of mystery and mouthwatering danger, added to his undeniable appeal.

She fought her overwhelming urge to run a hand down those arms, tracing his tattoo.

Olivia chuckled at the thought of how yesterday she'd received a call from Roman asking her to prepare to meet his parents.

She'd spent hours nervously consulting her friend, Avery, for outfit choices, wanting to make a good impression on Roman's family.

Her nervousness had been palpable, the anticipation of meeting his loved one's weighing heavily on her mind.

But as she looked at him now, the nerves seemed to fade away, replaced by the attraction that simmered beneath the surface, even as she fought against it.

The gravel crunching beneath their feet echoed in the stillness of the well-manicured front yard.

"I'm... nervous, Roman. What if they don't like me?"

"It's obvious and I wish you'd just relax, they're gonna love you."

Olivia's heart raced, her nerves getting the best of her.

They approached the door, where a servant dressed in a crisp uniform stood waiting. The servant's eyes landed on Roman and Olivia.

"The family is waiting for you," the servant informed them, their tone respectful and welcoming.

Roman nodded, his gaze flickering towards Olivia. With a reassuring squeeze of her hand, he led her through the ornate double doors.

Roman walked into the elegant foyer of his family home, accompanied by Olivia. Marabella, a stern-looking woman with graying hair, stood at the entrance, her expression softening when she saw Roman.

“Roman, it’s been quite a while since I saw you grace these halls,” Marabella greeted him, her tone a mix of fondness and authority. “And who is this young lady you’ve brought with you?”

Roman smiled proudly, his arm wrapped around Olivia’s waist. “Marabella, meet Olivia. She’s my girlfriend,” he introduced, warmth in his voice.

Marabella’s eyes widened with surprise, but she quickly recovered, her lips forming a small smile. “Well, it’s a pleasure to meet you, Olivia,” she said, extending a hand in greeting. “I’ve known this troublemaker since he was knee-high, so I hope you’re prepared for his antics.”

Olivia laughed, shaking Marabella’s hand warmly. “It’s lovely to meet you too, Marabella. And don’t worry, I can handle him,” she replied playfully, earning a chuckle from Marabella.

Roman looked at Marabella with a glimmer of nostalgia in his eyes. “Marabella practically raised me,” he explained to Olivia. “She’s been with our family for years. She’s practically family herself.”

Marabella nodded, her expression softening as she looked at Roman. “I’ve watched this young man grow up, seen him through his best and worst days,”

she admitted. “He may not always show it, but he’s a good soul.”

“Oh, you.”

Marabella waved off his gratitude, her strict demeanor softening for a moment. “No need for thanks, Roman. You know I’ll always look out for you, this way, the family’s seated already,” she replied.

They entered the dining room, which was adorned with elegant chandeliers and exquisite artwork, where his father, mother, and sister sat.

“Olivia, this is my father, Richard,” Roman introduced, gesturing toward a tall, stern-looking man with a neatly trimmed mustache. His stern gaze seemed to hold a certain level of authority, and Olivia couldn’t help but feel a pang of apprehension. Roman clutched her hand tighter.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Richard,” Olivia greeted, extending her hand with a soft smile.

His demeanor softened slightly as he shook her hand. “Likewise, Olivia. Roman has spoken highly of you.”

Roman then turned to his mother, who was all smiles. Her expression was soft and cheerful as she pulled Olivia in for a hug, surprising her.

“Please let her go, don’t scare off Olivia. Olivia, this is my mother Sloane. As you can see, she’s a hugger.” Roman introduced, beaming in a way Olivia had never seen before.

“It’s wonderful to finally meet you, Olivia,” Sloane said, embracing Olivia yet again in a gentle hug, making her feel instantly welcome.

“Okay, now you,” as Roman protested, she pulled him in for a hug, ignoring his discomfort.

“And here’s the castle imp, Lily.”

This was the Lily she heard about and was exactly as Olivia imagined her.

Roman’s younger sister had a contagious enthusiasm; Lily had an undeniable tomboyish charm.

“Hey, Olivia!” Lily exclaimed, her voice bubbling with excitement. “I’ve heard so much about you. Roman can’t stop talking about you. I’ll show you around whenever you want. You’re the only girl he’s brought around in a long time, you know?”

Olivia’s nerves began to dissipate as she found herself drawn to Lily’s infectious energy.

“Maybe we can talk about marriage.”

“Mom.” Roman scolded, and Lily laughed.

“What? Can’t blame a mother for dreaming.

Olivia found her voice to introduce herself, but Roman suddenly interjected, gripping her hand tightly. “Everyone, I have an important announcement to make,” he declared. Olivia’s heart skipped a beat, not

expecting this sudden turn of events. She thought they were going to ease into dinner first, at least.

“I want to make it clear that Olivia is not just a date to me,” Roman continued, his eyes locked with Olivia’s. “She is my girlfriend. One I’m serious about. Who knows? I may propose to her and make her my wife.”

Gasps of surprise and excitement filled the room, except for Richard, Roman’s father, whose stoic expression remained unchanged.

Olivia’s mind raced, and she shut her gaping mouth, trying to process the weight of Roman’s words and the sudden intensity of the situation.

Sloane couldn’t contain her joy, clasping her hands together. “Oh, that’s wonderful news! Congratulations, both of you!” she exclaimed, her eyes sparkling with delight.

Lily squealed in excitement and enveloped Olivia in a hug. “I knew it! You guys are perfect together!”

Olivia, despite her internal nerves, managed to maintain her composure, a small smile gracing her lips. She glanced at Roman, swearing under her breath.

Richard, however, remained impassive, his gaze fixed on Roman and Olivia. Finally, he spoke, his tone stern and authoritative. “Let’s not get ahead of ourselves. Actions speak louder than words.”

The room fell silent, the weight of Roman’s father’s disapproval hanging in the air. Olivia’s nerves resurfaced, but she quickly masked them with a

composed expression, determined not to let it show.

Roman, undeterred by his father's response, squeezed Olivia's hand reassuringly. "Fair enough, Dad. Let's eat," he said, breaking the tension in the room, his tone casual.

The family settled around the opulent dining table adorned with fine china and crystal glasses; the air was filled with a mix of anticipation and the tantalizing aromas of the lavish feast that awaited them.

"Fine dining, is it not?" Roman asked, leaning close to whisper to her.

Despite her irritation at his sudden wedding announcement, she couldn't help but agree this was the most lavish dining she'd ever been to.

The first course arrived; an exquisite seafood medley beautifully arranged on delicate plates.

"Roman, I'd like to talk to you about finances. How are you doing?" Richard asked, turning his attention to Roman and launching into a conversation about the latest business ventures and strategies.

Olivia watched them interact, impressed by Roman's confidence yet again as he navigated the intricate details of their family's business empire. She wanted to join in the conversation, but it felt rude, and besides, his mother and sister's attention was turned to her now.

Sloane leaned in closer to Olivia, her eyes sparkling with a childish curiosity. "So, how did you and Roman meet?"

Olivia smiled, feeling a blush spread across her face. “It’s quite a whirlwind romance,” she confessed. “We met less than a month ago at work, and it’s been an incredible journey ever since.”

Lily, eager to know more, chimed in, her face lit up with excitement. “Did you know he had feelings for you from the start?”

Olivia chuckled, her cheeks flushing slightly. “Honestly, it took me by surprise. But once we started spending more time together, it became clear that there was something special between us.”

Sloane’s expression turned slightly stern as she playfully scolded Roman. “You made her work under you as an intern? Roman, that’s not fair!”

Roman chuckled, his attention straying from his father, and focused on Olivia. “She loves her job, Mom. And besides, she’s more than just an intern now. She’s my right-hand assistant.”

The conversation continued to flow as the sumptuous meal progressed, each course as delightful as the last. Olivia felt a small sense of belonging, despite the nerves that still lingered within her. She was captivated by the lively exchanges and the genuine interest Sloane and Lily showed in getting to know her.

Amidst the clinking of silverware and bursts of laughter, she finally relaxed.

Lily, her eyes gleaming mischievously, whipped out her phone and asked Olivia and Roman to scooch closer together. “Come on, you guys look so

cute! Let's capture this moment!"

"Is this okay?" Olivia whispered, and Roman nodded. They leaned in, posing for the impromptu snapshot; Lily quickly snapped the picture and grinned. "Perfect! Now, let me share this with the world!"

Roman chuckled, his voice a soft murmur in Olivia's ear. "Say goodbye to your privacy, love. But hey, we need it public for tomorrow night."

Chapter 19

“**S**top fidgeting, this is only, so you get used to it,” Roman whispered, forcing a smile for the crowd. The cameras flashed in their faces, capturing their every move as they mingled at the glamorous party.

A voice broke through the buzz of the crowd. “Hey, lovebirds! How about a kiss for the cameras?”

Roman’s eyes danced with mischief as he turned to Olivia. “What do you say, nun? Ready to prove them wrong?”

Annoyance flickered across Olivia’s features, her cheeks flushed with a mix of embarrassment and determination.

Who did he think he was? Teasing and leading her on like that? For the longest time, she’d been fighting her attraction to him, and he was aware and chose to tease her all the way through.

Yesterday was a beginning of sorts for Roman and her. She'd eventually relaxed at the family dinner, except for his father, who didn't seem to warm up to her.

"I had a great time, Roman," she'd said after he dropped her in front of her house and closed the gap between them and kissed her. Without waiting for any response, he'd left and later sent her a text, telling her he had a great time, and she should prepare for their outing.

Today, he'd picked her up, calling her beautiful, and asked what she felt about kissing him. Her face was on fire as she stormed into the car, and he'd laughed, calling her a nun.

Now, with a sudden surge of confidence, she grabbed his hand and pulled him closer, her voice low. "I'll show you who's the nun."

Their lips met in a passionate embrace, the world around them fading into a blur as they lost themselves in the electrifying moment. The cameras clicked furiously, capturing the latest couple in town.

Moments later, they pulled away, breathless and slightly disheveled, their eyes locked in a fiery gaze. Roman's voice was husky as he broke the silence. "So, this may be a little too soon but my place or yours?"

The past few days had been a whirl of outrageous decisions; what was one more?

A mischievous smile tugged at Olivia's lips as she leaned in, her voice smoky.

“Mine.”

Cameras flashed as Roman hoisted her up and away from the party.

“There’s our publicity,” Roman whispered, nuzzling her.

“This is unhinged, what we’re doing,” she was already out of breath even as she reached to run her fingers through his hair and pull him close for another ravenous kiss.

They were in her living room, the door barely shut.

She felt lightheaded, like she was swooning. Every feel of his strong body and hungry fingers against warm flesh sent tremors and quivers out of her—she was hyper-aware of him.

“I didn’t plan for this.”

“The best things in life are unplanned,” he dragged his lips to hers.

“I woke up with this ridiculous thought of resisting you. I even planned my standoffish face,” her words were coming in quick, helpless gasps now.

With one swift, practiced motion, Roman pulled the gown down to her waist.

His blood went from hot to boiling at her sharp intake of breath at the sudden intimacy.

Those huge brown eyes watching him, waiting for his command, sent more heat around his body. Had he ever reacted to a woman so instantaneously?

“Don’t overthink this.”

He trailed kisses from her neck, dipping to the curve on her shoulders as she moaned and muttered something unintelligible.

He found the zip and undid the rest of the gown, his fingers fumbling hurriedly now.

He was going to rip it off if he couldn’t get it off quick enough. This woman was driving him mad.

He pulled her even closer, inhaling her scent; Roman pulled back and watched her eyes glaze over with a ragged moan as he called her name.

He traced his thumbs appreciatively over her navel, molding her body as he went along, forcing himself to slow down, to breathe.

Her hands found his hips, struggling to undo his pants even as she tilted her head backward, offering him whatever he wanted.

She was covered in a sheen of sweat; Olivia never felt as exhilarated as she did in her life, like right now.

“You’re like a drug I can’t get enough of.”

“I want you, so much that I feel myself slipping into insanity,” he scooped her up and kicked the door open with his foot, laying her gently on the bed.

He paused to drink in the sight of her; filigree lace molded her curves delicately; she shuddered under his intense gaze.

Roman swore again and dragged down the rest of the gown, freeing her; he ran possessive hands down her smooth legs.

“Roman....”

Her plea for him was unheeded as he trailed his fingers over her belly, settling above the lace; goosebumps spread over her skin in awareness, the cold air in the room heightening her awareness of him.

He wanted her—ruthlessly and quickly.

Acting now would offset this mad lust that seethed inside him, this raging storm. But he needed to be slow, for both their sakes.

“I want to see you writhing naked beneath me.”

He palmed her back, lifting her gently to unclasp her lace bra.

Pink, button-hard nipples greeted him.

Warning himself not to rush, the pad of his thumbs squeezed her gently in slow, circling motions.

“Exquisite.”

“I know,” she felt exquisite.

Quickly, he nudged his pants away.

“I want to do a million things to you, Olivia.”

His hands cupped, squeezed, molded gently, and Olivia felt each one and convulsed under his touch.

She tugged at his shirt as his teeth nipped into her skin, electrifying her just short of pain.

Frantically, she clawed, finally getting his shirt off, and found his undershirt. She swore at the barrier, tugging it off.

“I need you. On me. Inside me. Now.”

He laughed a little, a growl that untangled her inside.

She pressed him close; his muscles strained and clenched against her, and his lips trailed over her body.

“Olivia....”

Her curious hands found his weak spot; she tugged and fondled.

His oath was sharp.

“My socks,” he gasped, prying them off.

Even still, she held onto him, unwilling to let go.

He watched her eyes go from raging calm to pure, unbridled lust. He wanted more, her screaming his name like nothing else mattered.

He yanked her lace panties; the sound of ripping material filled the room, and her gasp was of alarm and pleasure.

He pulled her legs up and used his mouth.

Rolling waves of pleasure tumbled over her; she cried his name and dug her nails into his back, unwilling to let go.

There was only her. The taste of her, the scent of her, the feel of her.

In one wild motion, he pulled her legs down, his fingers digging into her, breathless.

“Now please, Roman.”

He cupped her bare bottom, pressing into her gently.

“Protection,” he managed, and she nodded, wondering how she even forgot.

He grabbed his discarded pants at the edge of her poster bed and found his wallet and the foil package.

He unwrapped it and hastily rolled it over his twitching shaft.

Needing no further invitation, he thrust into her slowly and began to move in an erratic rhythm. Fast and slow, sensually.

“Hell...” he breathed.

His breath was ragged; air escaped from his lungs, and he felt himself slipping over the abyss.

He groaned at the pleasure of filling her while she called out his name over and over, lost in him.

Finally, he collapsed against her, spent. They gasped together, breathing heavily.

Everything was silent except for their pounding hearts.

“That was....” Olivia said. She’d never felt like this before; she didn’t want this moment to end. She cleared her throat, feeling suddenly parched.

“I agree. Now it feels like I’m in the middle of the desert. Want a drink?”

“Yes, please,” Olivia laughed, coughing a little.

Roman pulled her close again and kissed her deeply, and she felt heat begin to stir in her blood again.

“Roman...”

He chuckled a little and put on his briefs, padding out of the room to the fridge for a jug of water.

Olivia stretched on the bed and giggled. She couldn’t have asked for a better end of her day.

Scarlett sat in her living room, legs splayed out in the soft glow of the evening light streaming through the floor-to-ceiling windows. With a flick of her finger, she scrolled through her social media feed, her eyes scanning the

latest news and updates. She yawned, utterly bored. Marcus could not make it tonight; .he had urgent business to attend to.

And there it was, a headline that struck her like a bolt of lightning. “Roman Knight, CEO of gigantic Sports corporation, announces relationship with Intern Olivia Walker.”

Her heart skipped a beat, a surge of anger coursing through her veins. The image of Roman and Olivia together, locked in a kiss, mocked her from the screen.

In a fit of frustration, Scarlett clenched her fist and threw her phone across the room. It landed with a sharp thud against the wall.

She had always believed she was destined to stand by Roman’s side, share in his triumphs, and build a future together. But now, it seemed like her dreams had been shattered, replaced by the image of another woman in his arms.

“He’ll pay, he’ll so pay for this,” she hissed.

Chapter 20

“Are you serious? Roman Knight?” Sylvia shrieked as she danced, waving a ladle over her head.

Olivia threw back her head and laughed.

It was 9 pm, and she was finally back home after a long but fun day at work where her sisters were waiting for her, curious about how her internship was going.

“Hey guys, did you hear that? Sylvia yelled through the kitchen door at her sisters, Bella and Meredith.

“Roman Knight asked her out!”

“Who is that?” Bella called.

“Seriously? No fair!” Meredith yelled, leaping over the couch to join in the conversation.

“First you have a hot boss and now he is asking you out?”

“Oh please, we’re not dating, it’s all a ploy for this deal he’s working on. Remember, it’s a secret. I may lose my job if you tell anyone.”

“It looks pretty real to me,” Meredith said.

“Yeah, you should see the way he looked at you in this picture when this guy was talking to you.” She added, scrolling through her Instagram and checking their pictures together.

“Oh, did you think he was jealous?” Sylvia asked.

“I couldn’t even get a read on him. I don’t think that he is capable of feeling emotions like that,” Olivia said, laughing again, even as her stomach filled with butterflies at the thought of him getting jealous.

Bella came to join them in the kitchen.

“As long as you get the money for Mama,” she said, and the group sobered immediately.

She felt lucky that she had gotten this job. Her passion aside, it was because of their mum, who was in the hospital.

Olivia looked round at her sisters; she was the oldest of them and, therefore, the one who had to step up the most for them following their father’s death since they were little.

Their mum had barely held down jobs as long as they could remember because of her frail health, and now she was diagnosed with a heart condition and was kept in the hospital.

The bills were piling up, and on a whim or desperate move, she took a shot in the dark and applied for this job and was surprised when she got a call for an interview.

It turned out that she was lucky when his company was looking for paid interns; her profile was exactly what they were looking for.

To her luck, Roman had just fired his former assistant for some reason she did not want to care or think about, and he spoke of employing her.

The salary that attracted her and the health benefits. Not to talk of the boss himself, she thought.

“I hope you stay longer in it. It seems you like the job well enough,” Sylvia said thoughtfully.

“I don’t know about that. Being a personal assistant is a whole new, different thing from being an intern,” she said, waving her hands dismissively.

“Who wants extra popcorn?” Bella asked, trying to lighten the mood.

Sylvia smacked her head with a spoon. “We don’t eat popcorn when it’s dinnertime!”

“Hey!”

The rest of them laughed.

“Hey,” Meredith said, holding up Olivia’s phone, her expression panicked.

“It’s the hospital, the doctor is on the line, it’s about mom.”

Olivia sat on the couch in her living room, her heart sinking at Meredith’s words. Worry etched on her sisters’ faces as they gathered around, Bella biting her lip and clutching her favorite stuffed animal tightly.

Sylvia’s voice trembled as she started, “We have to go to the hospital right away. Mom needs us.” Her words hung in the air, thick with the weight of their shared concern.

Olivia reached out and squeezed Sylvia’s hand, her voice steady but filled with underlying anxiety. “We’ll go together, just like we always do. We’ll support each other through this.”

Bella’s voice quivered as she spoke, her eyes welling up with tears. “Is Mom going to be okay?” she asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

Olivia gathered her youngest sister into a comforting embrace, her voice soothing. “We don’t know for sure, but we’re going to be there for her, Bella. We’ll stay strong together.”

Meredith, ever the practical one, stood up and grabbed her coat. “Let’s go, we can’t waste any more time. Mom needs us by her side.”

Olivia reached for her phone as they dressed up hastily, dialing Avery's number.

"Hey, Avery," Olivia spoke, her voice trembling slightly. "Something happened to Mom, and we're rushing to the hospital. Can you meet us there?"

Avery's voice filled with concern on the other end of the line. "Of course, Liv. I'll be there as soon as I can. Stay strong."

The thought of calling Roman crossed Olivia's mind; his presence had become a significant part of her life. But amidst the chaos and uncertainty, she hesitated, debating whether it was the right time to involve him in such a personal matter. Ultimately, she decided against it, knowing her focus needed to be on her family.

She took a deep breath, her resolve firming. "No, I won't call him now. This is something we have to face as a family," she whispered to herself.

Olivia turned her attention back to her sisters, guiding them out of the door and towards the waiting taxi. The drive was silent; the bustling city streets seemed to blur as they rushed towards the hospital, their worries and prayers filling the confined space.

Olivia clutched her phone tightly, her fingers trembling with the weight of the unknown.

They all jumped out of the taxi without waiting for it to come to a full stop.

"I'm so scared," Bella said.

Olivia's heart sank as she entered the hospital room and saw her mother lying there, attached to various machines. The sterile scent of antiseptic hung in the air, adding to the heaviness of the moment. Her sisters stood beside her, their expressions mirroring the mixture of fear and sadness that consumed her.

The doctor approached his face, a mask of concern. "Olivia, I'm afraid your mother's condition has worsened. She needs a heart transplant urgently to have any chance of recovery."

Tears welled up in Olivia's eyes, her voice trembling as she choked out her response. "But... but I can't afford a heart transplant. It's too expensive. What are we going to do?"

The doctor's tone was empathetic. "I understand the financial burden this places on your family. We can explore options, such as financial assistance programs or potential donors. But time is of the essence. We need to act quickly."

Olivia's shoulders shook as she sobbed; her sisters clung to her, their tears mingling with hers. As the hospital room enveloped them in a somber silence, Olivia's mind raced, desperately seeking a solution. She thought of asking for an advance on her salary. But her sisters came first.

With a trembling voice, Olivia finally spoke, trying to comfort them. "We'll find a way. We won't give up on Mom. We'll explore every avenue, every possibility. We'll fight for her."

After a few minutes more with the doctor, they went home; Olivia was the last to leave as Avery came to pick her up and drop her at home.

Olivia lay in bed, her thoughts consumed with worry and her eyes swollen from tears. In her restless thoughts, her phone rang, startling her from her reverie.

She picked up the call. It was the doctor; her heart skipped a beat.

Her voice quivered with anticipation as she listened to the doctor's words. "Hello?"

"Olivia, this is Dr. Anderson," the doctor's voice came through the phone, a mix of professional detachment and empathy.

"I wanted to inform you that we have arranged for your mother to be transferred to a private hospital. A donor has become available for her heart transplant."

Olivia's heart skipped a beat. "Oh my God," she whispered, her voice choked with emotion.

"How...? Are you serious? This is incredible news!"

"Yes, Olivia," Dr. Anderson replied, his tone conveying reassurance. "We need you to come in to sign the necessary paperwork. The transplant procedure will take place as soon as possible."

Tears welled up in Olivia's eyes once again, this time out of relief and gratitude. "Thank you, Doctor. I can't express how grateful I am. Who did this? How did this happen?"

"We don't know either, but I'm told the person will contact you. Listen, we're doing everything we can for your mother, Olivia," he assured her. "Please be prepared to come to the hospital first thing tomorrow morning."

As she hung up the phone, Olivia's mind buzzed with a mix of emotions. She felt a surge of hope, knowing that her mother had a chance at a new lease on life. Yet, at the same time, a wave of anxiety washed over her, thinking of the anonymous helper.

She took a deep breath and dialed Avery's number. Her friend's voice on the other end of the line was a soothing balm to her weary soul.

They discussed the news, and Olivia couldn't help but feel a glimmer of strength return to her. "Thank you for being here for me, Avery," she said.

"Of course, Liv," Avery replied softly. "You don't have to face this alone. We'll get through it together. Please get some sleep."

Olivia sighed; her phone's light glowed softly back at her. It was 2:34 am already.

Her phone buzzed. It was a text. She sat up immediately.

I'm outside your door.

It was from Roman.

What was he doing here? At this time.

She looked through the peephole and, catching a glimpse of his familiar silhouette ; she opened the door.

His expression was harsh. He took one look at her reddened eyes and tear-stained cheeks, and Roman's heart clenched with concern and anger.

“Your sister, Sylvia, reached out to me. Do you know how panicked I was?”

He was more panicked than he wanted to admit. He'd left his home straightaway, phoning all the doctors he knew while racing all the way from across town to her house. Did she not think he was reliable?

He ran his fingers through his hair, frustrated, before he softly swore under his breath. Without a word, he closed the door behind him and swiftly crossed the distance to Olivia, pulling her into a tight, comforting hug.

Olivia melted into his embrace, her body trembling with exhaustion and emotional turmoil. Her sobs escaped in uncontrollable waves as Roman held her close.

After what felt like an eternity, her tears began to subside, and Roman gently pulled away.

“Olivia, why didn't you think you could rely on me?”

Sniffling, Olivia met his gaze, her voice shaky with vulnerability. “I... I didn't want to burden you or take advantage of your kindness,” she admitted,

her voice barely above a whisper.

Roman's brows furrowed. "Olivia, if our situations were reversed, if you were in my shoes, would you hesitate to help me?" he asked, his voice firm. She felt like she was back in preschool, being scolded by her teacher.

Olivia shook her head, fresh tears welling up in her eyes. "No, I wouldn't," she replied.

"Exactly," Roman said. "We're in this together, Olivia. You don't have to face it alone."

With gentle strength, Roman lifted Olivia into his arms and carried Olivia to her bedroom. He carefully laid her down on the bed, tucking her in. Sitting beside her, he gently stroked her hair, his touch soothing and comforting.

"You're safe with me, Olivia," he murmured. "I'll be here with you through the night. Rest now and know that I won't leave your side."

Olivia's exhaustion overcame her, and as Roman continued to stroke her hair, she gradually drifted into a peaceful sleep.

Chapter 21

Roman watched Olivia sleep for a moment, his gaze lingering on her peaceful expression. Her hair spilled over her pillows, and the shoots of light highlighted her hair to a golden brown.

He couldn't help but appreciate her beauty, even in the early morning light. With a soft sigh, she turned, facing him.

Slightly parted lips, pert nose, and rosebud cheeks. He could watch her forever, but he had work to do.

He gently shook her awake.

"Olivia, wake up. I have an urgent meeting to attend. I'm sorry, but I can't accompany you to the hospital today," Roman explained.

Startled from her slumber, Olivia blinked her eyes open, trying to process Roman's words. She sat up, her mind still clouded with sleep, but a sense of

understanding slowly washed over her.

“It’s okay, Roman. I can go to the hospital on my own,” she replied.

“You have important matters to attend to. I’ll handle this. Besides, you coming through for me was more than enough. And I can never thank you enough,” she pulled him in for a hug, her soft fabric squished warm, soft flesh against him.

Roman embraced her back, pulled out of the hug, and nodded.

“Thank you, Olivia. I appreciate your understanding. I’ll be back as soon as I can. Just focus on your mother and take care of yourself.”

A few minutes later, Olivia called the doctor to inform him she was on her way and checked on her mother before she stepped into the shower.

As Olivia prepared herself for the doctor’s visit, she couldn’t help but feel a twinge of disappointment at Roman’s absence. She knew that her mother’s condition was paramount, and she needed to be there to support her through this critical phase.

She hailed a cab, and the drive to the hospital seemed like an eternity.

Olivia’s mind was a mix of worry and hope as she stepped into the hospital corridors.

She took a deep breath and reminded herself that she was strong and capable, ready to face whatever challenges lay ahead.

Olivia stepped into the doctor's office; her heart pounded with trepidation. The doctor, a seasoned professional, greeted her with a warm smile and reviewed her mother's case file. After a thorough examination, he delivered the news she had been desperately waiting for.

"Alright, Olivia," the doctor said with a smile. "Your mother's condition has stabilized, and we have found a suitable donor. Surgery is the next crucial step. Please sign these papers to commence the procedure of flying her out."

Relief washed over Olivia. The weight of the past night seemed to lift momentarily as she clutched the pen. How funny was this? With one scribble of her pen, a simple movement of the wrist, practiced, nonsensical black lines on a piece of paper, it would set her mother on the path to recovery.

With a steady hand, Olivia scrawled her signature. She felt a renewed sense of relief as she handed the papers back to the doctor. But the battle was not over yet, but this was a significant step forward—a glimmer of light amid the darkness, thanks to Roman.

"Thank you, doctor," Olivia said. "Please take good care of my mother. I trust in your expertise."

The doctor nodded. "Rest assured, Olivia. Although I'll no longer be in charge of her, I know a mate of mine who works at the private hospital, you're in good hands. They'll do everything in their power to ensure a successful surgery. Your mother is in capable hands."

"How can I ever repay you, Dr. Brown?"

He chuckled, "I'm just doing my job. Whenever a patient does better, it means I'm doing my job."

With a final exchange of reassurances, Olivia left the office, her heart still filled with a mix of relief. She found a quiet corner in the hospital's bustling waiting area and dialed Avery's number. After a few rings, her friend finally picked up, sounding apologetic and slightly breathless.

"Hey, Liv, I'm so sorry I couldn't answer earlier," Avery's voice came through the line. "Things have been crazy busy. How's your mom? Any news?"

Olivia took a deep breath. "The doctor just told me that my mom's condition has stabilized, and they've found a donor. Surgery is imminent, Avery. I can hardly believe it."

Avery's voice turned softer, laced with genuine concern. "Liv, that's amazing news. I'm so happy for you and your family. Please keep me updated, okay?"

"I will, Avery," Olivia assured her. "And how about you? How are things on your end?"

Avery let out a small sigh. "Well, you know how it is in the entertainment industry. It's been a whirlwind. But guess what? I've landed a gig! It's just a minor role in a new series, but hey, it's a foot in the door!"

Olivia's face lit up. "Avery, that's fantastic! I'm so proud of you. You're going to shine. I just know it."

Avery chuckled, her excitement palpable even over the phone. “Thanks, Liv. I couldn’t have done it without your unwavering support. We’ve been through so much together, and now we’re both chasing our dreams. It’s incredible.”

“You’re right, Avery. We’ve been there for each other through thick and thin. And now, as I navigate through these challenging times with my mom, knowing that you’re pursuing your dreams gives me a sort of renewed sense of hope.”

“Roman huh? He better not break your heart after all this,” Avery chuckled softly.

“I hope not.”

There was a brief silence as the weight of their shared journey settled between them.

“I wish I could be there with you, Liv,” Avery confessed, her voice tinged with regret. “But this opportunity, it’s something I can’t let slip away. I hope you understand.”

Olivia nodded, even though Avery couldn’t see her. “I do, Avery. I truly do. Pursue your dreams and know that I’ll always be cheering you on from here. Who knows? I’ll surprise you on set soon.

“Alright I’ll see you soon, are you going to work today?”

“Roman said I didn’t have to. So, I’ll just find my way to our restaurant.”

“Wouldn’t that be lonely?”

“No, maybe. I just need some time alone now.”

“You do you.”

Olivia sat alone at the familiar table in their favorite restaurant, savoring the warmth of the hot chocolate as it slowly eased away the remnants of the day’s worries.

She took another sip and sighed, deeply relishing the taste.

As she took another sip, her attention was drawn to a woman who had just entered the restaurant. The few patrons focused attention on her, murmuring.

She was undeniably stunning, exuding an air of confidence that demanded attention. But something about her demeanor, a snide look on her face, piqued Olivia’s curiosity. She realized she recognized her; it was the same woman from the party on the first week of her internship.

The woman approached Olivia’s table, a mocking smile playing on her lips. “Well, well, look who we have here. The middle-class girl who thinks she’s fit for someone like Roman.”

Startled by the unexpected confrontation, Olivia blinked, trying to comprehend the situation. “I’m sorry, do I know you? We’ve met before, haven’t we?”

“I’m Scarlett.”

Scarlett's eyes narrowed, her tone dripping with disdain. "Oh, no, my dear. We have met. I'm just here to remind you of your place. You're nothing more than a temporary distraction for Roman."

Confusion mixed with rising anger coursed through Olivia's veins. She couldn't understand why this Scarlett woman seemed intent on attacking her. "I don't know who you think you are, even though we have met, but Roman and I have a genuine connection. Your assumptions are misplaced."

Scarlett laughed mockingly, her voice cutting through the air. "Connection? Please. He's just using you to fill a void until he gets bored, and then he'll discard you like the middle-class girl you are."

Attempting to mediate the situation, Olivia's voice remained surprisingly calm, though anger simmered just beneath the surface. "Look, I don't know what your problem is, but it's clear you have some issue with Roman. Whatever it is, it doesn't give you the right to harass me."

Scarlett's eyes gleamed with a mix of contempt and amusement as she reached out and tipped over Olivia's hot chocolate, causing the warm liquid to spill onto Olivia's sweater.

Olivia gasped, and before she could confront her, Scarlett slinked away.

"Are you alright, ma'am?" A concerned waiter hurriedly approached Olivia's table, armed with napkins to clean up the spilled hot chocolate. Olivia nodded, forcing a faint smile despite her quickened heartbeat.

"Thank you, I'm fine. Just a little surprised."

A woman seated at a nearby table, who had been silently observing the entire confrontation, chimed in. “You don’t recognize her? She’s Scarlett Devie, his hung-up ex. She’s been causing trouble for Roman ever since they broke up.”

Olivia’s eyes widened in realization, connecting the dots. The pieces of the puzzle fell into place.

The hints of bitterness in Scarlett’s words and the venomous jealousy behind her actions. It suddenly made sense; even the snide conversation she had when they first met, she understood now.

Taking a moment to gather herself, Olivia turned to the woman. “So, she’s Roman’s ex? I had no idea. But why is she doing this? What does she hope to achieve?”

The woman shrugged sympathetically, offering her a napkin. “Some people find it hard to let go, especially when they’ve had a deep history. Scarlett most likely still harbors feelings for Roman and seeing him move on with someone else threatens her ego. She wants to create chaos, to make him question his choices. He’s the kind of man you should stay away from till the crazy woman in his life leaves him completely.”

Olivia sighed, a mixture of frustration and determination settling within her. She wondered what Roman felt for her now.

“Well, I...I’m not dating him .”

The woman nodded approvingly. “Good for you. Just remember to stay strong and focus on protecting yourself. She’s high profile, so I doubt she’ll bother you much. Don’t let the actions of a spoiled girl affect you.”

She was still very affected by Scarlett, and all she’d known so far about Roman’s relationships was that he never stayed long enough in this one. Scarlett was his last serious relationship, and despite herself, Olivia felt a small seed of jealousy and frustration begin to take root and grow.

Chapter 22

Perched high above the bustling streets of New York City, Elysium exuded an air of elegance and sophistication. Its sleek, modern design seamlessly blends with classic touches, creating a timeless ambiance. The dining area boasted floor-to-ceiling windows, offering breathtaking panoramic views of the city skyline. The tables were adorned with crisp white linens, sparkling crystal glassware, and delicate candles that cast a warm, intimate glow. The attentive waitstaff moved gracefully.

As Roman watched Olivia walk up to him in that dinner dress, only one word came to mind.

Stunning.

He was glad he proposed a date. He claimed it was for publicity, but deep down, he knew it was more than that.

The gold threads in her black dress caught in the soft, warm light above them, shimmering over her, accentuating the way the material clung to every delicious inch of her body.

She was taller than he first thought. Her hair was piled up on her head with a flash of black silk, and she finished off with a pair of glittery black heels.

Whether or not she had a sense of dirty humor, Olivia certainly had a sense of style.

As she took her seat, he found his eyes drifting down against the cleavage where the pale flesh of her breasts strained heavily against the fabric.

“Mr Roman Knight,” she began with that naughty husky voice that made him think of warm flesh and soft sheets.

“My eyes are up here.”

“Just call me, Roman. Say it again. I like the way my name sounds in that voice of yours,” he said.

Olivia was certainly playing it cool tonight; there was a guardedness in her eyes he’d noticed earlier.

She picked up her glass and twirled it again, the black liquid sloshing back and forth slowly.

The way she held it had a certain hypnotic effect on him.

“The truth is, I’m resisting the urge to bury my face against your neck and just breathe it in. Truly you are worth the wait,” he said, leaning against an elbow towards her and smiling.

“Thank you,” she said. Her voice had changed.

“You look great,” he said again.

“Better than the PJs you woke me up in this morning, right?”

“Better than anything I’ve seen you in.”

Damn, if he was not going to have fun tonight.

“Oh, but I can think of a few things,” she said.

“Depends if you’re going to show me what’s under it,” he said.

Regrets, Roman decided, are for wimpy people.

“Want to order another round of wine?”

“I’m sorry. What did you say?”

The way she lifted a brow in surprise and took a sip of wine told me she was nervous and ticked as hell.

She took another sip, and a muscle in her jaw tensed.

“You seem to have something on your mind.”

The color stained her cheeks and clouded over.

Olivia, deciding she was just in her head, decided then and there that Scarlett didn't matter. Not to this man who watched her with such earnestness.

She licked her lips and smiled, baring sweet fangs at Roman, who was sipping wine.

He chuckled at the sudden change in expression and cleared his throat, adjusting his tie. He'd never gotten so hot so quickly in his life.

Hell, when she had put her lips on the wine glass, his blood had gone south so fast that he got a little light-headed.

Two can play that game; he wasn't going to back down now; he played better than her.

She opened the menu, feigning indifference, but the whiteness from gripping the page from her hands as she studied the menu on the tab and the way her hands shook in slight tremor told him she was affected.

Then, after some seconds, she dropped it down and lifted her head with a smile on her lips.

“Shall we order dessert? I'm really hungry for some chocolate cake.”

Roman was hungry, too. Hungrier than he'd ever been in a long time, and he was not thinking about food.

But he nodded and picked up his tab.

“Sounds good to me.”

He allowed the conversation to drift to harmless small talk.

He decided to spice things up a little by adding how much he loved her dress and how good she would look without it in his bed.

It became awkward very fast for Olivia, and it was fun trying to see her struggle with the conversation like he didn't just say something completely lewd.

The craving for her was like a red stop sign, and as much as he knew he shouldn't, he'd drive through it and risk the crash.

He found out as a young man that patience was more than a virtue—It was a pleasure.

It got you what you wanted but allowed you to savor it first. But not tonight.

He had a feeling that with her smart mouth, sexy body, and her prim sense of humor, she would be worth savoring.

The dessert was exquisite.

Olivia appeared to be starving more than she let on because by the time the delicate slice of chocolate cake was placed in front of her, she had barely managed to swallow it.

Olivia began to talk, and she couldn't seem to stop babbling all of a sudden. Maybe it was the intense way she absorbed everything he said or all the questions he asked.

It was marketing 101: learning how to talk to people and leaning towards their interests with them, and they'll see you as someone they can relate to, and before the end of the conversation, any deal you wanted to strike was more than likely to be successful with this kind of approach.

He knew that well enough; he'd been through more than a normal share of life lessons, sweat, and violence.

He'd also lived in New York for several years in his teens before moving away for business school. So did she, but for a major in sports.

Olivia had been in New York for high school but returned to practice here. For the rest of the meal, they chatted about his hometown.

It should have been a relaxing, innocuous conversation, but every time she caught his eyes flicking down to her lips, every time she noticed the way his mouth curved when she said something sharp or funny, her words became slowed, like she was being distracted and didn't want any part of it.

Roman could not deny the bulge in his pants, but he focused on the woman in front of him.

Time for test two. He reached out and scooped his dessert, placing the rich chocolate dessert onto his tongue.

“Hmmm. Dark, sensual, and delicious. How's your cake?”

She cleared her throat a little too insistently at the intrusion and licked her lips.

“Fabulous,” she said.

The way she licked her lips and followed his eyes made Roman smile more.

Going in for the kill, he said, “Chocolate should be one of the seven deadly sins, don’t you think?”

“Yeah, yeah, I think so,” she added, her eyes darting towards everywhere but on him.

He spooned up another mouth full of chocolate.

“Would you like a taste of mine?”

Hers was chocolate cake, and mine was pecan torte chocolate.

“I thought you’d never ask,” he said, but the intensity in his gaze told her he wasn’t talking about dessert.

“Do you fancy a taste of mine, too?”

Lifting her spoon and wrapping up his fingers around her hands, Roman guided it to his lips.

As she watched the thick, velvety chocolate being devoured, he looked down to attest her nipples tightening against the smooth silk of her dress.

He slid a hand under the table, discreetly running his hands through the soft fabric and then sliding one hand up her thigh even as he tasted the chocolate, chewing slowly and not breaking eye contact with her, watching for her reaction.

Once his hand had found her thigh, she tensed up immediately, frozen in place and refusing to move or acknowledge his hand.

He smirked and pushed his hands deeper. She shuddered and shifted her legs back, dropping the spoon on the table. It clattered loudly against the table, and she cleared her throat.

“Easy, girl,” he drawled, leaning back against the leather booth, forearm resting casually on the table.

“You are beautiful, you intrigue me, and I’m very attracted to you. I’d like to make love to you tonight. How do you feel about the idea?”

“Watch yourself,” she said through gritted teeth.

His lips twitched as she glared at him. She looked exactly as he wanted her to, with her hair blowing around her head in sultry wisps, her full lips puckered in, and her sexy eyes bright with temper.

She looked cute, mad, and sexy as hell, kind of like a pixie or a fairy with an anger management problem.

His lips curved before he could stop them.

“Now you wanna tell me what’s wrong?”

“Nothing that concerns you, Roman.”

They exchanged glances filled with unspoken emotions. The air between them crackled with anticipation, the weight of their unspoken feelings hanging palpably in the air.

Finally, Roman broke the silence, his voice low and serious. “Olivia, I need to be honest with you. I’m incredibly attracted to you,” he admitted, his gaze unwavering.

Olivia’s heart skipped a beat at his confession, and her cheeks flushed with a mix of surprise and delight. She reached out, gently placing her hand on top of his, her touch warm and grateful. “Roman, you make me go through extreme emotions so fast, I usually have a lid on these things. You’re not healthy for me.. but I can’t begin to express how grateful I am for your help,” she replied, her voice filled with sincerity. “And... I have feelings for you, too.”

A smile tugged at the corners of his lips, relief at the weight of confessing his feelings finally off his chest.

“I’m glad to hear that,” he said softly.

He got up and pulled her out of her seat, wrapping his arms around her hips and kissing her. Slow and fast, time sped and slowed.

Finally, he pulled away.

“I hope you tell me about it soon, whatever it is. Meanwhile, I hope you know my feelings for you are genuine, even with the pretend girlfriend thing. I’m attracted to you physically and emotionally.”

He pulled a lock of hair away from her face, and Olivia hugged him. Hoping everything would work out just fine, even down this slippery slope.

Then she did something surprising; she leaned over to whisper, “Wanna make love?”

Chapter 23

Roman needed no convincing. He'd driven like hell was on his heels towards his mansion, with Olivia clutching his hand tightly, heart pounding.

Roman could only hear the sound of thundering in his ears as he slid the passkey into the lift panel. He slipped it back into his pockets and turned to her.

"Time to get down to business," he said, emphasizing each word.

She pressed against the lift wall as he walked towards her.

"Okay, woman, you asked for this. Don't pass out. Not till I'm satisfied."

He rested one hand against the paneling above her head and leaned over Olivia, searching her eyes.

Desire, lust, and confusion spoke back to him.

He was so close he could see the slight bump marrying the perfect line of her nose; the musky scent of her filled his nostrils.

Her scent of soap, perfume, and that sweet smell Roman had quickly become familiar with clung to her.

“What business do you have in mind?”

The question came out in a breathless sigh.

Her big eyes blinked back at him. Good god. She had practically melted into a puddle of lust already, and he hadn't even touched her.

Roman cocked his head to one side, his eyes sweeping over her face. The fabric rustled as he took his other hand out of his trouser pockets.

He reached now to brush his fingertips against her bare legs, making her quiver, and in an intimate voice, he whispered, “It's my business to find out what you have on under that dress, it's been killing me all evening to rip it off.”

Olivia gasped just as his fingers stroked under the hem of her gown, bunching the silk and trailing it upwards.

“Do you think that's wise?” She whispered in a breathy rush.

“What if someone in the mansion gets into the lift?”

He laughed at her petty concerns.

“Honey, this is a private lift. This is my private elevator,” he said, nuzzling his lips against her neck.

“No one is getting in here but me,” he said, biting into a lobe; the cream purse she clutched so tightly fell out of her hands.

Raising her arms, she stretched against him, pressing those soft breasts into his chest and threading her fingers through his spiky hair.

She turned her head, and his lips were hot against hers.

Firm and wet, his tongue thrust deep, and she shuddered.

He tasted chocolate, wine, and also unadulterated lust.

His questioning fingers found her bare buttocks; Roman grabbed her gown and, without a care, tugged it and ripped it apart.

Olivia gasped loudly, but he stepped back to enjoy the view, nodding in acknowledgment. His mouth went bone dry with admiration.

“Damn, you’re wearing a thong?”

Olivia’s face was flushed, and she refused to meet his eyes as he broke contact.

“Of course I am. I don’t want a visible panty line,” she said.

“You’re sending me over the abyss,” he groaned.

Roman grabbed her to stroke her naked flesh, slipping his finger under the satin string and pushing her against a wall, enveloping her.

He hoisted her up, pinning his knee against her and fondling her boobs that now spilled out of the gown.

His palms were hot against her skin, and he slid them down against her backside.

“Put your legs around my waist,” he commanded.

She did her best, she was told. Her middle was rubbing against the growing pressure straining against his trousers, and Olivia clung to Roman as he walked out of the lift.

Oh my god, this is happening, Olivia thought as they walked out of the lift.

Her heart was pounding so fast she could only hope he couldn't hear her rapid heartbeats as she clung to him for life.

The lift buzzed softly and opened.

The first thing that struck her was the esoteric luxury that surrounded them. Even though she could barely see through his arms and only caught glimpses yet was obvious.

Most of her thoughts and feelings were concentrated on the heat and his hardness until she caught her reflection in the mirror.

She looked flush, her lips red and swollen.

Olivia didn't recognize the girl that stared back at her; she looked hungry and in serious need.

Her gown was hiked up to her waist, or what was left of it anyway, and his large hands were dark against the pale skin of her bum.

She watched her skin flush red as he carried her into his bedroom.

It was a huge bed that dominated the sparsely furnished space; long purple drapes on the far end of the bed were drawn back, revealing the romantic view of New York at night.

Roman's breathing was harsh against her hair, and her body was so hot she could barely breathe even when she was sure the air conditioners were turned on to the fullest. Holy hell.

He let Olivia down slowly; the soft swish of her gown, as their bodies brushed, sounded like a loud radio station. Her feet sank into the impossibly soft rug; she lost her heels somewhere.

Roman put firm hands on her shoulder and turned her away from him, standing behind her.

She heard the grudging zip of her gown, his teeth nipping the bare skin of her shoulder, sending shivers down her spine.

Roman swore something imperceptible and pulled the dress off her with impatient hands and unclipped her bra, Olivia's breasts swelling as he

released them from their lacy confinement.

She looked up and pulled in a shaky breath; the sight of both of them reflecting against the night was unbearably erotic.

She was naked and trembling except for the red satin underwear, and he stood, tall and overwhelming, behind her, still fully dressed.

His hands cupped her breasts, the rough skin of his thumbs stroking against the stiff, sensitive peaks of her nipples that were getting harder by the minute.

He captured them in his fingers, tugged and squeezed.

Olivia moaned, her legs shaking as the bolt of heat rocketed down to her core. Their eyes met in the glass again.

“You are stunning,” he said.

She nodded and swallowed. She felt stunning, she realized, for the first time in her life.

Olivia turned, desperate to see him and fill him in as soon as possible. She pushed and tugged away at his suit, her hands clumsy in haste.

“Hold on, I’ll get it,” he said, stepping back and laughing a little and then shrugged off his jacket and pulled his shirt over his head, the buttons popping.

Good lord, even Olivia had to stop for a moment, and her eyes ran over his form and muscled chest; a sprinkling of dark hair spread over muscled packs,

an arrow dove of hair drove down to his growing bulge, hinting of more promises beneath.

“You’re not bad yourself,” she whispered. His trousers did nothing to hide his stiffness.

“I want you inside me,” she said before she could control herself.

Olivia’s hands flew over her mouth in horror.

Good lord, did she just say that out loud?

She could feel her ears starting to burn in embarrassment.

Roman pulled her against him, fingers plowing through her hair, making the black silk flutter to the floor, and her hair bounced down.

“I intend to be,” he said, “and soon, darling.”

His mouth covered hers in another gut-wrenching kiss.

Chest hair tickled her nipples while his tongue fought possessively in her mouth to claim and devour.

He was kissing her breathless and senseless, unlike any man she had ever been with.

She moaned against the overwhelming sensations and trailed unsteady fingers down the smooth hair on his abdomen to the heat and length of his stiffness, feeling it against her palm through the soft fabric of his shorts.

He grabbed her hands, shifting away,

“Let’s get into bed before I do something embarrassing,” he said, stepping out of his Armani boxer shorts.

Olivia’s gaze lingered on his magnificent erection; the sight of him standing ready made my breath hitch in my throat.

“I hope your condoms are extra large,” she said, only half-joking.

“Don’t worry,” he said, laughing and tumbling into bed, pulling her along.

The material was so soft that she sank inside with him. With his legs, he pivoted, powerfully pinning her to the bed.

“I’m always prepared.”

He caught her lips again, his tongue insistently tangling with hers deliciously as his hands slowly explored every curve and crevice of her body, making her beg for more.

Roman’s hands caressed her breasts, kneading her hips; he moved his hips away for a moment to pull the thong down her legs, and as his lips came back to hers, insistent fingers in the middle of her heat.

His fingers found her clitoris, and he pushed back and forth in erratic patterns, feeling out places she’d never felt before, causing her to shake.

She jerked and pooled into his fingers, which prodded the ecstasy out of her.

It wouldn't be until much later before Olivia realized how she'd writhed and groaned against him, her body craving more yet feeling overwhelmed; the minutes seemed like seconds when she flooded into his hands.

"That was amazing," he said, his voice thick with desire.

"You are amazing," he leaned over and fumbled in the bedside drawer, holding up a foil package.

"You want to do the honors?"

With a trembling hand covered in a sheen of sweat, Olivia took the condom from him.

"It will be my pleasure," she said, her voice weak, and she rolled the latex on him, his shaft twitching to her touch.

The intimacy of the gesture and the feel of his hot member, of his warmth, were so strong that it made her fall back into the pool of lust again.

She'd never felt so aroused, so desirable, or so bold in her life.

He lifted her face, his smile as devastating and sensual as the devil himself.

She thought he was going to thrust in immediately, but Roman leaned over, took her breast, and began to fondle one while sucking the other.

Need and urgency hitched her breath. "Please, I'm begging you, I want you in me now."

"That's the beauty of it," he said.

Like her, his voice was heavy with want.

“I want us both tortured before I give in. The sweetest prey runs the fastest,”

he said, his fingers finding her again.

The sensation she felt minutes ago began to rev back to life like a dying ember that had just been stoked.

Olivia cried and begged for release, and just when she thought there was no other place to discover, he found more to tease out of her, and when she was breathless, he stopped.

Her legs shook, buckling under her.

“You’re welcome,” he said. And he grabbed her hips, forcing her thighs open. He probed gently at first, and with one long slow thrust, he pushed himself inside her; he pushed himself inside Olivia.

At first, she wouldn’t give, and then he pushed a little more forcefully and shuddered gently.

She groaned and moaned, the fullness bringing her a surge of pleasure so overwhelming it was almost painful.

He began to move, his solid thrusts taking her even deeper and deeper; she was riding waves of ecstasy before she realized he was letting out a long groan and calling her name.

She clenched and gasped, unable to control the pearls of pleasure crashing over her.

Olivia cried his name as he dove deeper, touching her in places she never knew existed.

Chapter 24

The morning sunlight filtered through the curtains, casting a warm glow on the room as Olivia stirred awake.

As she blinked her eyes open, she found herself wrapped in Roman's embrace, his arms enveloping her in a protective cocoon. She felt the gentle brush of his breath against her neck, his nuzzling sending tingles down her spine. At that moment, she smiled a little; she couldn't help but feel a sense of comfort and security as if the world outside their intimate haven didn't matter.

He ran his hand through her hair and mumbled something. It was a simple gesture, and Olivia giggled.

In a few minutes, he stirred fully awake.

“Good morning, Roman.”

“Yesterday was crazy, wasn’t it?”

He pulled her closer, breathing in her scent.

“Yes, you know...” Roman leaned in closer to Olivia, his voice low and husky. “You smell so good,” he whispered, a hint of desire in his voice.

Olivia chuckled, gently freeing herself from his grasp. “Well, I guess I can’t deny the power of a good perfume,” she replied, a playful glint in her eyes. “But honestly, Roman, I have no idea what got into me last night, agreeing to come to your place.”

“Chemistry, my dear Olivia. Pure chemistry.”

Olivia remembered the events with Scarlett. “Speaking of chemistry, I was pretty angry with you at that moment,” she confessed, her tone slightly serious. “I mean, Scarlett pouring hot chocolate on me in my favorite restaurant after confronting me about our relationship... It was quite the scene.”

Roman’s face tensed at the mention of Scarlett.

“Really? That happened yesterday?”

“I was pretty angry with you at that moment,” she repeated.

Roman’s jaw clenched; he wanted to shield Olivia from the fallout of his past, to protect her from any harm.

Sensing his unease, Olivia shifted in his embrace, her fingers tracing gentle circles on his chest. “It’s okay, Roman,” she said reassuringly.

“I knew what I was getting into, and I’ve made my peace with it. I understand where I stand in your life now.”

Roman buried his face in her hair again.

“Hey, don’t beat yourself up over it,” she said softly, turning to face him, her hand tenderly cupping his cheek. “We’re here now. Let’s focus on the present, okay?”

“What do you want to do today?”

“I feel up for anything, in fact—“ Olivia’s words trailed off as Roman’s phone buzzed loudly, interrupting their conversation.

He leaned over and grabbed his phone beside the bed stand.

“Go for Roman,”

His eyebrows furrowed in concern as he glanced at the screen, his expression quickly shifting from anticipation to disbelief.

“She did what?!” Roman hastily sat up in bed.

Olivia, still lying beside him, watched as his face contorted with a range of emotions.

“What happened, Roman? Is everything alright?” Olivia asked.

Roman's jaw tightened, his fingers gripping the phone tightly. "It's Scarlett," he muttered, putting his hands over his face. "She's gone to the media telling them our relationship is a fake one. This will most likely hurt my chances with Mr. Winston and boost Marcus's and I'm sure she's not done yet. I know her. She's trying to tarnish my name, ruin my company."

Olivia's eyes widened in disbelief, her heart sinking at the magnitude of the situation. She felt this was all her fault.

She knew Scarlett was trouble; she didn't figure she was this much trouble.

Taking a deep breath, Olivia reached out to Roman, her voice steady.

"You'll get through this, Roman."

He nodded, but his jaw was twitching—a sign that he was furious.

"You need to go, Olivia, this is not your problem to solve. Things will probably not.. remain the same like that. You should leave."

Olivia's heart sank as Roman's words hung in the air. She couldn't believe what she was hearing, the sudden request for her to leave, as if they didn't spend a great night together and started with such a perfect morning. The harsh look on his face could not be the same as the one who woke up to her.

Hurt and confused, she fought back tears, struggling to find the right words to respond.

"But Roman, I thought we were in this together," she managed to say, her voice wavering with emotion.

Roman's face was expressionless. He reached out to touch her arm, his voice hard. "It's not because I don't want you here, Olivia. It's because I'm afraid. Afraid that I might say something in the heat of the moment that I'll regret. I don't want to hurt you."

"You're hurting me already."

Tears welled up in Olivia's eyes as she tried to comprehend his reasoning. She had always believed in her ability to communicate openly and face challenges head-on. Now, it felt as if the ground beneath her had crumbled, leaving her in a state of confusion and vulnerability.

"I understand that you're upset, Roman," she replied. "But shutting me out won't protect me. It will only make me feel more alone."

Roman's eyes softened. "I never wanted to make you feel alone, Olivia. I just think it would be better this way."

Taking a deep breath, Olivia gathered her strength, picked up her discarded gown, and searched for her shoes; they were under the bed.

Without a word, she saw herself out of the room as Roman watched her leave.

Olivia stepped on the set, taking in the bustling activity around her.

Avery had texted her the location of her shoot this morning.

She spotted Avery, dressed in her set clothes, playing the role of a maid.

Seeing her immediately lightened her mood because she knew in real life, Avery would never dress this way; she was in a simple yet elegant black dress, complete with a white apron and a small cap perched atop her head. Avery looked every bit the part. Her eyes lit up with excitement as she caught sight of Olivia waving enthusiastically.

“Hey, Liv! Look at me, all dressed up as a maid,” Avery exclaimed, turning and bowing.

Olivia smiled, admiring her friend’s dedication to her craft. “Just to think you wouldn’t be caught dead in this, but I have to say, you look fantastic, Avery.”

They found a quiet corner on the set; Avery couldn’t help but notice the somber expression on Olivia’s face.

Concern etched her face as she reached out and gently touched Olivia’s arm. “What’s wrong, Liv? You don’t seem like yourself today. Something is bothering you?”

Olivia sighed, her shoulders sagging with the weight of her worries. “It’s just... things with Roman have gotten complicated. I thought we were getting closer, but then he pushed me away this morning. I’m hurt and confused.”

She narrated the Scarlett story from the restaurant incident to the call this morning while Avery listened and nodded.

“I’m sorry to hear that, Liv. Relationships can be tricky. Will you find and talk to him about how you feel?”

Olivia shook her head. “Not yet. I didn’t want to push him further away. But it’s been frustrating. I just hate this. Why am I even fussing over this? This was not a real relationship in the first place.”

Avery reached out and squeezed her hand gently. “It doesn’t matter. At least it’s over now and you deserve clarity, Liv. Maybe it’s time to have an open and honest conversation with Roman. You both need to understand each other’s feelings and expectations before this gets too complicated.”

Olivia nodded, “You’re right, Avery. I can’t avoid the conversation forever. I need to know where we stand. But I’ll wait for him to contact me. That will mean he wants to talk things out too.”

Avery smiled reassuringly. “I’m here for you, Liv. Whatever you decide, I’ll support you.”

Olivia pulled in Avery for a hug, feeling everything was going to be alright. But three days passed, and she heard nothing from him, and he never came to work.

Chapter 25

Mr. Winston, or the “mega whale,” a prominent figure in the business world, sat at a corner table in the elegant and exclusive Per se restaurant in New York City.

The restaurant was an embodiment of sophistication, perfectly suited to his tastes, with its tastefully decorated interior, soft ambient lighting, and panoramic views of Central Park. The murmurs of conversations and the clinking of fine crystal glasses created a refined and luxurious atmosphere.

His distinguished presence commanded attention. His white hair, neatly groomed, contrasted with his perfectly tailored charcoal gray suit. He was an air of authority and elegance, his posture impeccable despite the slight limp that accompanied his every step. A silver-handled cane leaned against his chair.

“Roman Knight, how nice of you to appear, and right on time, too.”

Roman approached Mr. Winston's table, extending his hand and offering a warm smile. "Thank you for meeting with me, Mr. Winston. I appreciate your willingness to hear me out."

Despite his conservative nature, Mr. Winston possessed an undeniable allure. His deep-set blue eyes conveyed wisdom and shrewdness, while his well-groomed salt-and-pepper beard accentuated his distinguished features.

Roman took a seat opposite him, and the attentive wait staff approached their table.

The restaurant's reputation for impeccable service was well-deserved, and Mr. Winston nodded in appreciation; if there was one thing he loved above all, it was efficiency and attention to detail.

"So, tell me about you, Roman Knight."

"I'm afraid nothing is interesting about my story for you, sir," Roman said, laughing a little.

"Being part of a trillionaire family has its privileges, but it also comes with a certain level of responsibility and expectation. I carry myself with quiet dignity, never flaunting my wealth, but rather commanding respect through presence and achievements. From a young age, I've been instilled with the importance of family. That's why I always look forward to hearing from young, passionate men like you. So please, tell me something."

As the evening progressed, Mr. Winston's reserved demeanor and thoughtful expression hinted at a shrewd mind constantly at work, analyzing

the intricate details of the business world he inhabited. He was a man of few words.

Their conversation was going well, or so Roman thought, until Mr. Winston interrupted Roman. “ Although I must admit, I was surprised by your audacity to deceive me, Roman. Explain yourself.”

Roman took a deep breath, gathering his thoughts. “I understand how it may seem, Mr. Winston, but please allow me to explain.”

“You don’t need to.”

The older man studied Roman for a moment, his expression stern. “And what does this say about your integrity and character? How can I trust someone who starts a business relationship with deceit?”

Roman nodded. “I realize now that it was a mistake, and I deeply regret it. But I assure you, my intentions were never malicious. My goal was to show you the potential we had, the value we could bring to your business.”

Mr. Winston leaned back in his chair, his face still unreadable. “Strength and determination can be admirable traits, Roman. But without honesty and trust, they are hollow. I expect better from those I choose to work with.”

Roman felt the weight of his words. He knew this meeting had only had a slim, miraculous chance at landing him. In fact, he didn’t even want to come, but the only option was to be in his office, and he didn’t want to risk running into Olivia by mistake. This was the third day of avoiding her, and even now, he didn’t know what to say.

He cleared his throat and sat up straighter.

“I understand the importance of trust, Mr. Winston. I have learned from this experience, and I assure you that I will not make the same mistake again. I value your time and consideration, and I apologize for any disappointment I have caused.”

The older man observed Roman for a moment, his gaze thoughtful. “You have potential, Roman, and it is evident that you possess ambition and skill. However, trust is the foundation upon which successful partnerships are built. I must reconsider our collaboration.”

Roman’s heart sank, but he respected Mr. Winston’s decision. “I appreciate your honesty, Mr. Winston.”

Mr. Winston nodded, his tone softening slightly. “Take this as a learning experience, Roman. Integrity and trust are not qualities to be taken lightly. Prove yourself in the future, and perhaps we may revisit the possibility of working together.”

He glanced at his watch. “Your time is up and I’ll be meeting the second person.”

“Thank you for taking your time.”

With those final words, Roman excused himself from the table, acknowledging Mr Winston with a nod of respect. As he made his way toward the exit, he spotted Marcus and Scarlett, hand in hand, walking into

the restaurant. They didn't matter. Not right now, he had other things to do, like apologies to Olivia.

A few hours ago, Roman sat at his desk, staring at his phone after Olivia abruptly hung up. Taking a deep breath, he dialed Olivia's number again.

The phone rang for what felt like an eternity before Olivia finally answered. Her voice sounded distant and guarded. "Hello?"

"Olivia, it's me. Don't hang up again," he began. "I'm so sorry for everything. I know I messed up, and I understand if you don't want to talk to me right now. But please, let me make it right."

There was a pause on the other end of the line, and then Olivia spoke, her tone still distant. "I appreciate your apology, Roman, but I need some time to process everything. I don't think I'm ready to talk yet."

Roman's heart sank, but he respected her decision. "I understand, Olivia. Take all the time you need."

Before he could say anything more, Olivia abruptly ended the call, leaving Roman with a sense of emptiness. He knew he had hurt her, and it would take more than a simple apology to mend their relationship. This was one of the few times he'd found himself apologizing to a woman; they did the chasing most of the time.

Just as Roman set his phone down, there was a knock on his office door. He looked up, his eyes widening in surprise as Scarlett entered.

The skimpy gown she wore was not what he saw her in a few hours ago.

“What are you doing here?”

She sauntered toward Roman’s desk. “Well, well, Roman. I heard you’ve been quite busy lately. I thought I’d pay you a little visit.”

Roman’s face hardened, anger simmering beneath the surface. “What do you want, Scarlett? I thought I made it clear that I want nothing to do with you.”

Scarlett leaned against the edge of his desk, a sly smile playing on her lips. “Oh, come on, Roman. Don’t be so cold. We used to have something special. I’m here to remind you of that.”

Roman scoffed, his eyes narrowing. “What we had is long gone, Scarlett. I’m with someone else now, and I have no interest in revisiting the past.”

Scarlett’s smile faltered slightly, but she quickly regained her composure. “Is that so? Well, we’ll see about that. I’ve heard all about your little fake relationship. How’s that working out for you?”

“You got what you wanted. Are you happy now? Are you satisfied that you’ve managed to ruin what we had?”

Scarlett ignored his words, a sly smile playing on her lips. “Oh, Roman, it wasn’t just about us. I wanted to teach you a lesson. And it seems like I’ve succeeded.”

Roman clenched his fists, his anger boiling over. He'd never wanted to hit someone so much.

Scarlett shrugged nonchalantly. "Well, that's the price you pay for crossing me. I told you I wouldn't go down without a fight."

"Mr. Winston refused to partner with us because of your scandal. It's not just me you've hurt; you've jeopardized the future of my company."

A glimmer of satisfaction danced in Scarlett's eyes. "Well, that was my intention, and maybe Marcus will save the day. Oh wait, I forgot to mention, he's furious with me, too. He's blaming me for losing the partnership with his company. Looks like I've burned a few bridges, haven't I?"

"Of course, a man like Winston would be foolish if he got into a partnership with a scheming woman like you. Why are you doing this, Scarlett? What do you hope to achieve?"

Scarlett's smile turned icy as she leaned closer to Roman, her voice venomous. "I hope to destroy everything you hold dear Roman. I hope to tear you apart, piece by piece."

"Have at it, but you won't succeed. I won't let you destroy everything I've built. I'll find a way to salvage the company, with or without Mr. Winston's partnership."

Scarlett's laughter echoed in the room, a chilling sound.

"We'll see about that, Roman. This is far from over. I'm not done with you yet."

Roman's jaw tightened, his anger boiling over. "You have no right to interfere in my personal life. What I have with Olivia is real, unlike anything we ever had."

Scarlett's eyes glinted. "We'll see, Roman. I won't let you forget about me so easily. You'll come crawling back to me. Just wait and see."

With those words, Scarlett turned on her heels, leaving Roman's office in a cloud of tension.

Roman slumped back in his chair, his mind swirling with a mix of emotions. He knew he had a long road ahead, and maybe Olivia wasn't in it.

Chapter 26

Roman swore and sank back to his seat; he knew her well enough to be sure she'd make do with her threats.

True, she was with him, his ride or die when he was on the dangerous side of the law, but he'd changed, and she didn't fit into his life; she'd not taken too kindly to that.

This was not the first time she'd tried to sabotage his relationship.

He bowed his head, feeling suddenly vulnerable, and drifted asleep, his dreams transporting him back to the vivid memories of his tumultuous past with Scarlett.

He reminisced about the time they first met, the adrenaline-fueled bike race in Italy that sparked their connection.

They met in the streets of Italy during one of his numerous illegal bike races.

He was 23 and going through a dark phase; Roman remembered that day vividly; the air was charged with excitement as the sound of revving engines filled the atmosphere.

He stood tall and confident in his leather jacket while Scarlett, a fellow problem child, caught his eye—a dazzling figure in the middle of a racing crowd.

Their eyes locked, and Roman, forever the Playboy, approached her.

“So, ready to eat my dust?” he teased, a mischievous grin playing on his lips.

Scarlett, never one to back down from a challenge, met him with a defiant smirk. “Don’t get too comfortable in that first-place spot. I plan on giving you a run for your money,” she retorted.

The race commenced with a gunshot, and cheers from the starting line, and Roman and Scarlett took off and weaved through the twisting streets with expert precision. Their bikes danced in synchrony as they navigated sharp turns and accelerated with controlled fury.

The thrill of the chase intensified, and amidst the exhilarating rush, Roman stole glances at Scarlett, his heart pounding with adrenaline and admiration. “You’re pretty fast for a girl,” he remarked.

Scarlett smirked. “Oh, don’t be fooled by appearances, darling. I’m not just

fast; I'm faster than you," she replied, her voice dripping with playful arrogance.

"Oh yeah? we'll see."

And he turned up his speed, leaving her behind. The crowd erupted in applause and cheers.

Breathless, Roman found Scarlett in the middle of the crowd, a triumphant smile on his face. "Looks like I beat you fair and square."

Very few women he'd met were daredevils. She excited him.

"For now, Mr., but don't think this is the end of our rivalry. I'll be back to claim my victory," she replied, and Roman walked up to her, took off his helmet, and kissed her. Then and there, they began dating; it was a whirlwind romance fueled by adventure and shared passion.

Their last argument was when she crashed his car two years ago.

"You used to be fun!" she yelled.

"One of us has to grow up," he'd respond and ended his relationship by walking out. She tailed him for weeks, refusing to believe it was over, and harassed the woman he went on a date with. Bouquets of expensive flowers and a second date with the woman fixed the problem. But over the years, Scarlett appeared in his life, sometimes quite suddenly, craving his attention which he never gave her.

Roman woke up with a jolt and a deep sigh. Barely 15 minutes had passed; he must be really tired; he couldn't remember the last time he fell asleep in his office.

His mind returned to Olivia, a woman who captivated him in ways he never thought possible.

His phone pinged with a text; he already knew who it was from without checking.

I WANT TO MEET. ASAP.

Taking a deep breath, he composed himself and replied to her text, his fingers tapping on the screen. "Where should we meet?"

He knew that meeting with Scarlett could complicate things further, but he also knew avoiding her could have repercussions.

After, he responded, asking where. Moments pass, stretching time until her reply arrives. A location—an upscale café—glows on his screen.

Half an hour later, Roman was seated opposite Scarlett.

"That's all you have to do. I'll give you time to consider it. What'd you think?" She took a long drag of her smoke.

Roman's eyes narrowed as he leaned forward. "You can't just waltz back into my life and threaten me. You need to have something to blackmail me with. That's how this usually works."

“Oh, Roman, you always had such a flair for the dramatic. But you forget, I have the power to expose your dirty little secrets. Your illegal races, the shootout in your house... It’s all just a phone call away from being front-page news.”

Of course, she had to go there. He unclenched his fists and took a deep breath, his voice now tinged with steely resolve. “You won’t win, Scarlett. I won’t let you destroy everything I’ve worked so hard for. And I promise you, if you go after Olivia, there will be consequences.”

Scarlett laughed, a harsh, mocking sound. “Consequences? Oh, Roman, I’ve faced worse than you. You can’t protect her forever.”

His gaze hardened.

Scarlett produced a large yellow envelope from her designer bag, tossing it to the table.

In one swift motion, Roman snatched up the stack of photographs, his grip tightening around them. “Consider this a warning, Scarlett. I’ll deal with you in my own time. But mark my words, this fight isn’t over.”

“Honey, let me know when you’re ready to start a relationship with me. You don’t have much time though.”

The weight of the photographs pressed against his chest, a reminder of the dangerous game he was now entangled in.

As Roman left the room, his mind raced, plotting his next move. He knew he couldn't let Scarlett's threats go unanswered, but he also couldn't allow her to harm Olivia.

Deep down, he knew this confrontation was just the beginning of a treacherous battle.

Where did Olivia fit in all this? A tiny, niggling voice at the back of his head asked again.

He had no answer.

Chapter 27

Jane knocked lightly on Olivia's office door, peeping in with a concerned expression. "Hey Olivia, are you okay? I haven't seen you around much lately."

Olivia glanced up from the files scattered across her desk, a tired smile forming on her lips. "Hey, Jane. Yeah, I've just been dealing with some personal stuff. It's been a rough few weeks, to say the least."

Jane stepped into the office and pulled up a chair. "Oh no, what's been going on? You know you can always talk to me, right?"

With a sigh, Olivia began piling up the files absentmindedly. "Well, where do I start? My mother's health took a turn for the worse, and she needed a heart transplant. The cost was exorbitant, and I had no way to afford it."

Jane's eyes widened, her voice filled with concern. "Oh my goodness, Olivia, I had no idea. Is she going to be okay?"

Resignation colored Olivia's voice as she continued, "It's all good now, thankfully. We managed to get help, but it was a rollercoaster of emotions. And on top of that, I've been dealing with a complicated relationship situation."

Jane leaned forward. "Relationship trouble? What happened?"

Olivia let out a rueful laugh, running a hand through her hair. "You must have heard about it already, me and Roman? We ended up getting involved romantically, or at least I was.

It was a mistake, Jane. I let my feelings cloud my judgment, and now it's caused nothing but trouble."

Jane reached out to comfort her friend. "Oh Olivia, I'm so sorry to hear that. We were wondering what was going on with all the pictures of you guys on a date. The Scarlett woman's explanation cleared this up for us. We figured we shouldn't ask, but I should have. But mistakes happen, and you can't blame yourself forever. What went wrong?"

Olivia's voice wavered. "It's complicated. Roman has a past with someone, Scarlett, and she's been causing all sorts of trouble. She threatened to expose our sham relationship to the press, and she did, ever since then. It's been a nightmare, Jane, and I can't help but feel like I've put my career at risk."

Jane squeezed Olivia's hand gently, her voice reassuring. "Listen, Olivia, we all make mistakes, especially when it comes to matters of the heart. But you're strong, and you'll find a way to navigate through this. Remember, your worth isn't defined by your mistakes or your relationships. Besides, Mr

Roman seems like a reliable boss. He wouldn't just leave you with this mess, I'm sure."

Olivia sunk her shoulders and began sobbing.

"Oh, honey."

"He called to apologize, but I'm still hurt."

Jane patted her hand.

"It's okay, you have time to be angry. Talk to him when you feel like it."

Olivia sighed as she scrolled through the comments on her phone, her face turning grim. "Listen to this," she said, taking her phone out of her bag. "'Olivia and Roman are just faking it for publicity.' 'She's just a gold digger trying to boost her career.' 'Their relationship is a total sham.'"

Jane frowned and leaned closer, peering at the screen. "Seriously? People can be so cruel," she exclaimed, her voice laced with empathy.

"Yeah, it's ridiculous," Olivia replied, exhausted. "I mean, just because Roman and I work together doesn't mean our relationship is fake. It's hurtful to see how quick people are to judge without knowing the truth. I've been sending off spiteful people all morning. You wouldn't believe how absurdly bitter people are."

Jane nodded, her expression sympathetic. "Unfortunately, that's the downside of being in the public eye," she said. "People love to speculate and spread negativity without considering the impact it has on others."

Olivia clenched her jaw, her frustration simmering beneath the surface. “I know, but it still gets to me,” she admitted.

Jane reached out and placed a comforting hand on Olivia’s shoulder. “Don’t let those comments get to you.”

Olivia nodded. “You’re right, I won’t let their negativity bring me down. I know what we have is real, and that’s all that matters. Thank you, Jane. I needed to hear that. I just need to find a way to focus on work and get my life back on track.”

Jane nodded. “That’s the spirit, Olivia. You’re resilient, and I know you’ll come out of this stronger than ever. Just remember, you have a whole team here rooting for you. You could also always delete your social media or take a hiatus for a while. I did it and it’s been great for me.”

Jane quietly closed the door and disappeared, and again, Olivia found herself lost in her thoughts.

She envied Jane’s seemingly drama-free life, wishing she could have the same peace and stability.

Resolute in her decision to avoid Roman for now, she concentrated on organizing the growing stack of files on her desk.

No calls and no messages from Roman today.

Maybe he finally understood and decided to give her the space she needed to process everything that had transpired between them. A part of her longed

to hear his voice, to find solace in his familiar presence, but she knew deep down that it was best to keep her distance for now. At least he made up his mind on how to deal with Scarlett.

Her office fell into contemplative silence as Olivia continued to pile up the files, only the ticking of the clock as her companion, her mind wandering to the tangled web of emotions and uncertainties that had enveloped her life. She wondered if Roman was also grappling with the fallout of their relationship, if he, too, was questioning the choices they had made.

“What am I doing?” She put her hands to her face and sighed.

She was so excited that the promising path of her career had finally opened, and now it had become entangled with personal complications, leaving her with a sense of loss. She didn’t enjoy work anymore.

“I will focus on my work,” she whispered to herself.

She took in three deep breaths, just as her yoga teacher had instructed.

Taking a deep breath, Olivia pushed aside the thoughts of Roman, watching the sun cast its warm glow through the office window.

She thought of Jane’s advice again. Maybe she was right; this wasn’t worth it.

Olivia picked up her phone again and, one by one, tapped on the uninstall button of each social media app.

With each app deletion, Olivia felt a sense of liberation and relief. She was reclaiming her peace of mind, her thoughts, and her focus.

As the last app vanished, she took a deep breath, feeling lighter and freer than she had in a long time. Better to focus on those important in her life.

Olivia dialed her mother's number, her heart, as the phone rang.

"Hello?" Her mother's voice, though weak, brought a wave of comfort to Olivia's soul.

"Hi, Mom. How are you feeling today?"

There was a pause, and then her mother replied, "Oh, you know, taking it one day at a time. But I'm getting better, my dear. Did you thank the angel that helped with my surgery yet?"

"I'm so glad to hear that you're okay, Mom. You've been on my mind constantly, and yes, I've thanked my boss properly."

"Thank you, sweetheart. I'll also thank him as soon as I get better," her mother replied, her voice weak.

"And you don't need to worry too much. I have the best care here, and I'm surrounded by wonderful doctors and nurses."

Olivia's eyes welled up with tears of gratitude. "I'm grateful for that, Mom. I can't wait to see you. I'll be stopping by the hospital on my way home, and I'm bringing your favorite snack." After mom's successful surgery, the

physician cleared her to return to the hospital closer to home to allow me to still be able to care for her.

“Oh, how lovely! You always know how to make me smile, my dear. I can’t wait to see you and have our little treat together like we always do.”

“It’s the least I can do, Mom. You deserve all the love and care in the world.”

They chatted a little longer before Olivia had to bid her mother farewell.

She ended the call, wiped away her tears, and breathed deeply.

She looked around the office and figured she had nothing else to do. She picked up her bag to head to the nearest supermarket for her mother’s favorite snack, then to the hospital.

Chapter 28

Roman paced back and forth in his office, his frustration palpable. Seated across from him was his lawyer, Michael, a stern and composed middle-aged man who had seen their fair share of legal battles. The tension in the room could be cut with a knife.

Immediately after he met with Scarlett, Roman called his lawyer, asking to meet right away.

“Roman, I understand the gravity of the situation,” Michael began, his voice calm and authoritative. “But we need to weigh our options carefully. The evidence she has could cause significant damage to the company’s reputation if it were to come out.”

Roman’s jaw tightened as he stopped in his tracks, staring at his lawyer. “I can’t believe she would stoop this low,” he muttered through gritted teeth. “Those pictures and the video. They could ruin everything I’ve worked so hard for.”

The lawyer nodded; his expression serious. “I understand your anger, Roman. But at this point, we need to consider the potential consequences. It may be prudent to temporarily accept her terms until we can devise a more strategic plan to address this situation.”

Roman’s frustration bubbled within him, but he knew his lawyer was right. He needed to think beyond his own emotions and protect the company. “So, you’re suggesting I give in to her blackmail?”

His lawyer leaned forward; his tone serious.

“For now, it might be the best course of action. We can work on gathering more evidence to expose her actions in the future, but for the time being, preserving the company’s reputation is of utmost importance.”

A conflicted expression crossed Roman’s face as he wrestled with the decision. He had always prided himself on integrity and strength, but the weight of the situation pressed heavily upon him. “I can’t believe it’s come to this,” he muttered, frustrated.

The lawyer’s voice softened. “Sometimes, in the face of adversity, we have to make difficult choices for the greater good. Remember, this is just a temporary measure to protect what you’ve built. We’ll find a way to fight back.”

With a heavy sigh, Roman nodded. “Alright, I’ll go along with her demands, but rest assured, I won’t let her get away with this.”

His lawyer nodded in agreement. “We’ll strategize and find a way to turn the tables, Roman.”

Roman’s lawyer leaned back in his chair, a heavy sigh escaping his lips. He studied Roman’s frustrated face, concern etched across his features.

“Roman, I know this is a difficult pill to swallow, but we have to consider Olivia’s safety in all of this. “Playing along with Scarlett’s demands and ending things with Olivia might be the best course of action for now.”

This was exactly what he was dreading and expecting; he furrowed his brows, frustration mounting as he absorbed Michael’s words.

The thought of hurting Olivia, the one person who had brought light into his life amidst the darkness, was infuriating. But he couldn’t deny the ticking bomb Scarlett was.

“I understand the rationale behind it; I think I just needed to hear it from someone else. “But do I let her go without any explanation? She deserves to know the truth.”

The lawyer nodded, acknowledging Roman’s concerns. “I hope you’ll find the opportunity to explain things to her, Roman. She must understand the gravity of the situation and the risks involved. But for now, it’s essential to prioritize her safety above all else.”

“I can’t believe it’s come to this,” he murmured; his tone was one of anger and sadness. “To cut ties with Olivia, to make her believe that everything between us was a lie.”

“Sometimes, circumstances force us to make sacrifices, Roman. It’s a painful choice, but it’s in Olivia’s best interest. We have to protect her from the potential fallout of Scarlett’s actions.”

A heavy silence hung in the air as Roman wrestled with his emotions.

“I’ll do what needs to be done,” Roman finally said. “I’ll play along with Scarlett’s game for now.”

Michael nodded, “Stay strong, Roman.”

He watched his lawyer gather his belongings and prepare to leave; all that consumed his thoughts was how he’d tell her and what to do with this terrible sense of loss he felt.

“Alright, thank you, Mary.”

“I’ll see you real soon. I’m sorry to see your mom leave. She’s been a model patient and top comedian around her,” the pudgy nurse said, waving cheerfully as Olivia walked out of the hospital.

She was relieved to see her mother on the road to recovery; her day had not been a waste after all. Exhausted, she contemplated a quiet evening, treating herself to some pizza and much-needed rest. Just as she was about to hail a cab, her phone chimed with a text notification. It was Roman.

“Meet me where it all truly began. The skate park. I need to talk to you,” the message read.

Her heart skipped a beat as memories of their first encounter flooded her mind. She hesitated for a moment, debating whether to respond.

Finally, she typed a quick reply: “Okay, I’ll meet you there.”

Arriving at the skatepark, Olivia found it deserted, which was usually occupied when night fell.

Olivia spotted Roman standing near the edge of the rink; his hands stuffed in his pockets. Their eyes met, and a mix of emotions washed over her—confusion, apprehension, and a flicker of hope.

Her footsteps echoed in the quiet skate park as she approached him.

He turned to face her, a mixture of relief and sadness in his eyes.

“You’re here,” he began softly. “You look so beautiful, Olivia.”

Her heart skipped a beat at his words, but the somber expression on his face gave her pause. She took a seat beside him, her stomach knotting with anticipation and worry.

“What’s wrong, Roman?” she asked, her voice barely above a whisper. “You look troubled.”

“I’m sorry,” he began. “I shouldn’t have let things get so complicated. I never wanted to hurt you.”

Olivia crossed her arms, her eyes searching his face for answers. “What’s going on, Roman? Why did you ask me to meet you here?”

He took a deep breath, his words laced with vulnerability. “Scarlett, she’s been blackmailing me with old pictures and videos. She wants me to end things with you.”

Olivia’s brows furrowed in disbelief. “Why would she do that?”

He took a deep breath, his eyes never leaving hers. “Scarlett... She’s determined to ruin me if I don’t get into a relationship with her.

She’s threatened to go to the press. I only have a few more days to consider this, or my company’s finished for good.”

Olivia’s eyes widened, her mind racing to comprehend the gravity of the situation.

“What about me?”

“I’m...I’m afraid we’ll have to call this off. It was never a real relationship, anyway.”

Chapter 29

Olivia stared at Roman, her heart sinking at his words. The pain in his eyes mirrored her own, but the coldness in his tone sent shivers down her spine. She couldn't believe what she was hearing.

“End our relationship?” she repeated, her voice trembling. “You want us to break up?”

Roman nodded, his gaze fixed on the ground. “It's for the best, Olivia. With the scandal surrounding us, it's only a matter of time before it affects the company. We need to protect each other, even if it means being apart.”

The ground became blurry; her emotions were a whirlwind of anger, confusion, and sadness. She wanted to understand since they weren't in a real relationship, anyway.

“You can't be serious; you don't have to protect me like this,” she whispered, her voice trembling. Roman refused to meet her eyes, choosing to

wander over the rinks instead.

But only images of him catching her as she fell came to him. How did this get out of hand? He'd been in numerous short relationships that ended without any lingering feelings, at least for him.

“I don't want to, Olivia. But I can't bear to see you suffer because of me. I know Scarlett won't stop until she destroys me completely and everyone standing in her way.”

Tears welled up in Olivia's eyes; her voice shook with anger and heartbreak. “So, what? We're just supposed to pretend like none of this ever happened? Avoid each other at work like strangers?”

Roman's voice grew colder, his walls going up. “It's the only way to protect ourselves, Olivia. It's the only way to salvage what's left.”

She felt her heart shatter into a million pieces. The man she cared for was slipping away right before her eyes. She wiped away her tears, her voice resigned.

“Is that all?”

A few meters away from them, a dove flew into the empty skatepark and cooed at the two estranged lovers. Roman looked away and at the bird, granite in his eyes.

After a while, Olivia said, “Do whatever you want, Roman. If this is what you think is best, then go ahead.”

“I think that’s for the best.... goodbye Olivia, you don’t have to speak to me at work, I’ll make sure we’re as removed from each other as much as possible until you’re comfortable enough.”

As she watched Roman walk away and vanish from sight, Olivia felt her legs give way under her, and she sank to the ground, consumed by heart-wrenching sobs.

The weight of the situation crashed down on her, threatening to suffocate her with its intensity. She reached for her phone, shaking her fingers and dialing Avery’s number.

“Avery,” she choked out between sobs when her friend answered the call. “Please, I need you. Can you come and get me?”

Avery’s voice was instant concern and urgency. “Olivia, what happened? Where are you?”

Olivia struggled to steady her voice; her words interspersed with heavy breaths. “I’m at the skate park... please, just come as soon as you can. I don’t know what to do.”

“I’ll be there in a few minutes. Hold on, Olivia.”

As Olivia hung up the phone, she clutched it tightly against her chest. The dove cooed and flapped its wings, taking off and leaving Olivia in the empty park.

Minutes felt like an eternity as Olivia sat on the cold ground, her tears staining her cheeks. She felt a mix of emotions coursing through her - anger,

heartbreak, confusion - all merging into an overwhelming sense of loss. Her world had been turned upside down in an instant. Why did she sleep with him? Why did she ever accept to be an intern? Where was Avery?

Finally, Avery's car pulled up, and Olivia stumbled to her feet, her phone clattering to the floor.

Avery rushed out of the car and gathered Olivia in a tight, comforting embrace.

"I'm here, Liv," Avery whispered. "You don't have to go through this alone. We'll get through it together."

"It's just, this wasn't meant to happen," she sobbed into Avery's shirt, fresh tears staining her friend's blouse.

"I know honey, I know," Avery shushed her, running a hand through her hair.

"It was just supposed to be a little fun. I got into my feelings for a billionaire. Who was I kidding? He has thousands of women lined up for him at the snap of his fingers, yet I fell for him. I'm so stupid."

"That doesn't mean you are stupid. It only means you're human. I mean, take a look at the man. He's a total package."

Olivia laughed a little and sniffed.

"You don't have to tell me that."

“Come on, let’s get in my car and stop for some cheeseburgers on the way. You can cry about it in the car, I’ll put on your favorite band and we can get shitty wine and you can rant all about it in my place. You can even sleep over.”

Olivia straightened, grateful. “You’re sure this isn’t a problem? It sounds like you left something.”

“Only an after-party I didn’t want to attend. I’m grateful you gave me a legitimate reason to leave.”

Olivia chuckled, “Thank you, I’m grateful.”

Avery helped her up, and she turned on the music in her car.

As they drove away from the skate park, Olivia glanced back at where she had fallen into Roman’s arms. Her favorite place to be is now associated with painful memories.

The atmosphere at the Velvet Lounge was heavy with tension as Roman sat at a table with his friends, Allen and Thompson. The usually lively conversations and laughter were replaced by an awkward silence. Roman’s foul mood was palpable, and it seemed to seep into every corner of the room.

The waiter approached the table, ready to take their orders.

“Hello fine gentlemen, it is great to see you aga—”

“Just bring me a drink, anything strong,” Roman snapped at him impatiently, his tone irritated.

Allen and Thompson exchanged glances as the waiter scurried away.

It was Thompson who cleared his throat and broke the uneasy silence. “Roman, I’ve known you for years, and I’ve never seen you this worked up before. What’s going on?”

Roman sighed, running a hand through his disheveled hair. “It’s Scarlett,” he confessed. “She’s threatening to expose some things from my past unless I break up with Olivia.”

Allen’s eyes widened in disbelief. “You’re kidding, right? Why would she do something like that?”

Roman shook his head, frustration etched across his face. “I wish I knew. Scarlett has always been unpredictable, but this is a new low, even for her. She wants to destroy everything I’ve built.”

Thompson leaned forward. “Is that why you called us here? What are you going to do, Roman?”

A bitter smile tugged at the corners of Roman’s lips. “I spoke to my lawyer...”

“Michael?” Allen asked, joining in.

“Yes, and I have no choice but to play along for now. I can’t risk losing more clients or damaging the company’s reputation.”

Allen nodded. “The way I see it, she’s still got her fangs in you. We were pretty surprised you went along with declaring Olivia your girlfriend to the public. As far as I’ve known you, you’ve never taken a relationship seriously enough to comment in public because they were just flings to you. No, don’t glare at me like that. You know it’s true. Now you’re serious about this one. It’s not surprising she wants to rip you two apart. Whatever you decide, we’ve got your back, man. Whatever you need, just say the word.”

Roman sighed. “Thanks, guys. It means a lot to me.”

Thompson glanced at his watch. “You said you have another meeting with Scarlett. Are you sure it’s a good idea?”

Roman’s jaw clenched. “I have no choice at the moment.”

Allen placed a reassuring hand on Roman’s shoulder. “Just be careful, Roman. Don’t let her get under your skin.”

As they raised their glasses in a toast, Roman couldn’t help but feel tired. He suddenly felt the walls closing in on him and suffocated; he grabbed his coat and got up.

“Thank you for all the support but, I, uh, I gotta go.”

Roman excused himself from the table, bidding his friends a curt goodnight.

At the entrance, the buzzing of his phone caught his attention once again, and he glanced at the screen to see another text from Scarlett. Annoyed by

her relentless pursuit, he immediately deleted the message.

“Damn it!” he muttered under his breath; he was not going to read it.

The weight of the situation was bearing down on him, and he couldn't shake off the sense of frustration that clung to his every thought.

Scarlett. He needed a moment alone to gather his thoughts and decide how to handle the situation.

Walking a few steps away from the building, Roman reached for his phone and dialed Rashad, who didn't pick up. Then he dialed Scott, who picked up after a few rings.

“Scott, inform Rashad that I'll be walking home tonight,” Roman instructed.

“Will that be all, sir?”

“Yes. I need some time to clear my head and figure things out. I don't want to be trapped in a car.”

Scott acknowledged the request, assuring Roman that he would take care of it.

With a heavy sigh, he turned off his phone and began his solitary journey through the dimly lit streets. The cool night air brushed against his face.

Walking allowed him to think, unravel the intricacies of his emotions, and find clarity amidst the turmoil. Scarlett wanted to meet him the next day.

There was nothing he could do to avoid that.

The city seemed to grow quieter as he ventured deeper into the night. Roman's footsteps echoed on the deserted sidewalks; his mind consumed by the weight of the decisions he had to make. And of Olivia. He couldn't escape the nagging feeling that his life was spiraling out of control, and it frustrated him to no end.

Chapter 30

“I told you I’d work it out, didn’t I?”

Roman sat across the table from Scarlett, his expression guarded. True to her word, she had managed to secure clients for him, and he couldn’t deny her effectiveness in that regard. However, her presence still grated him.

He adjusted himself in his seat again. He was on edge.

“So, Scarlett, who’s the latest client you’ve brought to the table?” Roman asked.

Scarlett leaned back in her chair, a self-satisfied smile playing on her lips. “Ah, Roman, you won’t believe the opportunity that has presented itself. It seems our dear friend Marcus has a prospective client, and I managed to get information on it before he even had a chance to approach them.”

Roman raised an eyebrow, intrigued despite himself. “And what is this information you have?”

Scarlett leaned in closer, eyes gleaming. “Let’s just say it’s a lucrative deal in the real estate industry. They’re looking for a partnership. A potential game-changer for your company. With my connections and your expertise, we could make it a reality.”

Curiosity and caution sang a tune of wariness from afar, but Roman couldn’t deny the appeal of such a deal.

“And how does your boyfriend feel about all this? Or your ex-boyfriend? I gotta admire your dedication to one-upping everyone. How do you sleep at night?” Roman asked sarcastically.

Scarlett’s expression hardened, and her eyes narrowed. “I don’t see why that’s any of your concern, Roman. This isn’t about him or us. This is about what we can achieve together.”

A flicker of annoyance flashed across Roman’s face as he replied, “You seem to be forgetting that I ended things between us a long time ago. I have no desire to revisit that chapter of my life.”

Scarlett’s anger was palpable, her voice sharp as she retorted, “Well, maybe I want to get back with you. Maybe I think we work well together. Instead of that Olivia girl who can’t even understand your world.”

Roman’s patience wore thin, his voice colder now. “This isn’t about Olivia. It’s about trust, Scarlett. And right now, I find it difficult to trust you. Your

methods, your motives—everything is clouded by your agenda.”

“You’re making a mistake, Roman. I’ve always been there for you, finding opportunities, and bringing clients. Don’t let your emotions blind you to what we can accomplish together. You’ll understand, sooner or later. We work well together. You said it.”

Scarlett’s words hung in the air.

“Scarlett, you crossed a line,” he said firmly. “Blackmail is not the foundation for any kind of relationship.”

“Well, Roman, sometimes people have to do what they have to do to get what they want. And what I want is you.”

Roman shook his head, admiring her commitment to this delusion. “I’ve made it clear, Scarlett. Our past is behind us. I’m not in love with you, and I never will be.”

Scarlett’s voice turned sharp, her anger rising. She slammed her fist against the table. “Do you think you can just throw me away after everything we’ve been through?? I’ve stood by your side, I’ve protected you, and this is how you repay me?”

Roman’s jaw tightened; his voice steady but firm. “What you did, Scarlett, keeping and using those pictures, that’s not protection. That’s manipulation.”

Scarlett’s expression shifted from anger to desperation. “But we can make it work, Roman. We were good together. We can have it all.”

“No, Scarlett. We can’t. We won’t. What we had was based on superficiality and shared desires for power. It wasn’t real. I’ve moved on, and you need to do the same. I’ll play along with you, for now.”

He couldn’t believe he once thought the world of the woman sitting across from him.

“There was a time I would have died for you.”

Roman meant it.

“But I was misguided, young, hotheaded and foolish.”

Scarlett’s eyes welled with tears, her voice breaking. “I did it because I thought we had something special. I thought you still cared about me.”

Roman’s voice softened, and he grabbed her hands. “You see this? It’s the problem with us. We bring out the worst in each other. I cared about you once, Scarlett. But that chapter of our lives is closed. It’s time for both of us to move forward.”

Scarlett’s shoulders slumped, her anger dissipating into resignation. “Fine, Roman. If that’s what you want. But remember, I have those pictures. And if you ever change your mind, I’ll be waiting. Meanwhile, hurry up on that tip. The window isn’t going to be open for long.”

“I know a friend who dated the daughter of the real estate holder. Don’t contact me unless it’s necessary.”

With those words hanging in the air, Roman turned away from Scarlett and walked away.

Hours later, and business over, Roman sat in his living room, the TV background noise, his thoughts consumed by Olivia, an assault on his conscience; he nursed a bottle of beer, its cold glass offering a temporary solace. He couldn't escape her; he couldn't talk to her. Each sip brought a bittersweet taste to his lips, a reflection of the emotions swirling within him.

He settled deeper into his thoughts, adjusting to his sofa. Sleep would not come; what else could he do? His phone buzzed, interrupting the melancholic silence. Roman sighed, annoyed at the intrusion, but still answered the call. It was Lily, his sister.

“Lily, what do you want?”

“I just got back from my volunteer mission in Namibia. What's this I'm hearing? Did you guys break up? There's your ex saying it was all staged.”

Always a sharpshooter, his sister.

“Yeah, so?”

“You can do better than that, Roman.”

Roman's frustration grew. “Why are you asking me? We're not together anymore, remember? Olivia is perfectly capable of taking care of herself and she can be independent and private when she wants to be.”

Lily paused for a moment. “You always do this, Roman. You push people away when they care about you. I thought you were better than that.”

His jaw tightened as her words hit a nerve. “Don’t pretend like you know me that well, Lily. You have no idea what I’ve been through or what I’m dealing with.”

Lily’s voice wavered with a hint of sadness. “You pushed yourself away after the incident. I know you felt guilty about the shooting, and I never blamed you for that. Please don’t make the same mistake again. Fake or not, you were so good together, and I hate seeing you both hurt.”

“I don’t see how—”

“Roman, I tried to reach out to her and couldn’t find her. You should know that Olivia has been dealing with a lot. She deleted all her social media because of the bullying she faced.”

Roman’s heart sank as he absorbed the magnitude of Olivia’s struggles. His grip on the bottle tightened as guilt seeped into his conscience. “Lily, I messed things up between us. It’s my fault, and I don’t know if I can fix it.”

There was a brief pause on the line. “Roman, you need to find a way to make things right. Olivia cares about you, and I believe you still care about her, too. Don’t let your pride get in the way of what could be something beautiful.”

There was a brief silence on the line, both parties grappling with their emotions.

He thought of Scarlett.

“I think it’s best if I don’t fix it now.”

“What do you mean? You know what? I’m done trying to make you see the reason. Olivia deserves better than this, and I hope she finds happiness without you.”

Before Roman could respond, Lily hung up; He stared into the half-empty beer bottle, its amber liquid sloshing around.

He felt like the biggest idiot in the world.

With a heavy sigh, he set the beer bottle aside.

He picked up his phone to dial her; how long had it been? It felt like an eternity.

He sent a message, but it didn’t deliver; he’d been blocked. No surprise there.

Chapter 31

The shrill sound of her alarm clock shattered the silence of the room, jolting Olivia awake from a restless night. With a heavy sigh, she reached over and shut off the alarm.

The room felt suffocating, and a sense of gloom settled on her.

“Another day to get through,” Olivia muttered to herself, her tone lackluster.

She swung her legs over the edge of the bed, rubbing her temples as she tried to shake off the remnants of sleep.

As she made her way to the bathroom, Sandy, her usually distant and disaffectionate cat, trailed behind her, sensing her disheartened mood. She meowed softly, but Olivia’s gaze remained fixated on the floor, lost in her thoughts.

“Shut up,” Olivia groggily murmured; she was annoyed for some reason; she switched on her phone and shuffled into the bathroom. She closed the door behind her, shutting out the world.

Inside the bathroom, Olivia splashed cold water on her face, hoping to shake herself awake. It didn’t work; she sighed and grabbed her bottle of almost empty shampoo, applied it, and turned on the shower; the droplets cascaded down her hair and face. She hummed and finished off; steam clouded the mirror, and she wiped it off.

As she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror, Olivia caught the weariness etched on her face. Her eyes appeared puffy from lack of sleep; her skin was breaking out—a sign of extreme stress.

Ignoring Sandy’s gentle scratching on the bathroom door, Olivia focused on the routine of getting ready for the day, mechanically going through the motions. Every movement felt hollow, as if she was there, but not there.

She didn’t care about color coordination or matching outfits, just that she looked decent enough for work.

Today, like many days lately, seemed to stretch out before her, an endless expanse of uncertainty and heartache.

Olivia stepped out of the bathroom and vigorously towed her hair dry; her phone rang persistently on the bathroom counter. She contemplated ignoring it. But on the second ring, she reluctantly picked it up; it was Avery.

“Hey, Liv, how’s it going?” Avery’s cheerful tone cut through Olivia’s somber mood.

“Oh, you know, just another day,” Olivia replied.

Avery sensed the heaviness in Olivia’s response and immediately shifted gears. “Guess what? I got another role! It’s not a major one, but I’m still excited about it.”

Olivia’s lips curved into a faint smile as she listened to Avery’s excitement. It was difficult not to feel a glimmer of joy for her friend’s success. At least one of them was happy.

“That’s amazing, Avery. I’m happy for you.”

Avery’s excitement spilled over into her words. “Thanks, Liv! I knew you’d be excited for me. You’ve always been my biggest supporter.”

“You deserve every bit of success, Avery. I’m happy you can take a step away from working and follow your dreams.”

Unlike me. She thought.

Avery’s voice, sensing the change, softened. “Liv, I hate seeing you like this. You know I’m here for you, right? Whatever you need, just let me know.”

“I know, Avery. And I appreciate it more than you know. I’m just going through a rough patch, but I’ll be okay.”

Avery's tone became resolute. "You will be okay, Liv. Remember, storms don't last forever. You're stronger than you think, and I do not doubt that you'll come out on the other side even stronger."

As she hung up, her cat was sitting before her, tail swishing slowly. Sandy was detached most of the time, but she had a talent for sensing when her owner was upset. She cocked her head to the side and mewed plaintively.

"Oh, it's nothing. I'll get over him eventually," she said.

"Follow me. I'll get you something special today."

Her cat pattered after her, silent this time.

As Olivia poured her food and watched her cat eat it up, she knew getting over him was going to be a long, difficult route. She just had to get through today.

As she made her way to her office, Olivia noticed Jane waving and approaching her with a stack of files in her hands. She greeted Olivia with a smile.

"Hey, Olivia," Jane said, feeling awkward.

"I have these files for you. The boss wanted them on his desk right away."

Olivia took the files from Jane, giving her a grateful nod. "Thanks, Jane. I appreciate it."

Jane hesitated for a moment before speaking again. “Listen, Olivia, we were wondering if you’d like to join us for lunch in the dining hall. The rest of the team will be waiting.”

Olivia looked up, surprised by the invitation. She had been feeling isolated lately, but the gesture from her coworkers, who hardly ever spoke to her, apart from Linda, warmed her heart. “Oh, um, sure. That sounds nice. I’ll join you.”

Jane’s face lit up with a smile. “Great! They will be seated at that big table in the corner. We saved a spot for you. I hope you don’t mind that I rattled, but I had to clear up the story for everyone.”

“That’s okay, I’d prefer I didn’t explain. Thank you for clearing things up.”

The three hours of work flew by in a haze, and Olivia found herself following Jane to the dining hall, feeling a mixture of apprehension and gratitude.

As she entered the room, she saw her coworkers sitting around a large table, waving and calling her name. She smiled, feeling warm.

She walked over to the table, greeted by friendly faces and cheerful conversation. The atmosphere was lively, and temporarily, Olivia forgot her worries. It felt good to be among colleagues who genuinely cared about her well-being.

“Here, sit beside me,” Linda said, patting an empty chair.

“Thank you all for inviting me,” Olivia said. “I needed this today.”

“Olivia, don’t let him get to you. You’re strong and capable,” Sarah, her office neighbor, reassured her.

“Besides, we know the man has the emotions of a bear,” Linda added. “Believe me, I’ve worked with him the longest. Don’t focus too much on it.”

The group burst into hearty laughter.

“Yeah, he’s the one who messed up. You deserve better,” Mike added, smiling at Jane, who nodded.

Their support brought a flicker of a smile to Olivia’s face. “Thank you, guys. I appreciate it.”

The dinner ended, and Olivia went back to her office.

The weight on her shoulders lifted it just a bit.

A knock sounded on her door just as Olivia was trying to gather her thoughts and focus on her work. Linda entered the room carrying some files and a new assignment. “Olivia, we need you to take over the Anderson account. It’s a big opportunity for you to showcase your skills, maybe bump up your position up the....”

“Ridiculous Scoreboard?”

Linda laughed. “Yes, that.”

Olivia nodded as she collected the file, though her mind was still clouded with thoughts of Roman. She struggled to concentrate on her new task,

fumbling with files and mixing up important details. The weight of her emotions proved to be a significant distraction, murdering her usual efficiency. It took a toll at the end of the day to go through the file. Normally, it took her an hour, but she was sure Linda would understand.

At the end of the long and emotionally draining day, Olivia finally turned the key to her door.

She changed into comfortable cotton PJs and curled up on the couch with Sandy; her soft purrs and gentle nuzzles offered some comfort.

“Hey, Sandy,” Olivia whispered, stroking the cat’s soft fur. “It’s been a rough day, hasn’t it? Roman... I don’t know what happened between us. I thought we had something special, but now everything feels shattered.”

Sandy blinked back, seemingly understanding Olivia’s pain.

“I don’t know how to move forward, Sandy. Every time I see him, it’s like a knife twisting in my heart. And now he’s acting like I don’t even exist. It hurts, Sandy. It hurts so much.”

Sandy bounded out of the sofa and disappeared from the room.

Olivia switched on the TV and settled into her couch; she regretted it immediately.

The conversation from the interview played in the background. The voices of Scarlett and Roman filtered through. It was an interview for both of them.

“Oh, Roman has always been a man of ambition and determination. I’m just lucky to be by his side, supporting him in his endeavors,” Scarlett said, grabbing his hand and squeezing it affectionately.

Roman’s response was noticeably more guarded and stiff. “Yes, Scarlett has been a great support. We make a good team.”

Olivia’s brow furrowed as she listened. Their words seemed rehearsed.

She shook her head, trying to push the thoughts aside. She didn’t want to dwell on the charade playing out on the TV screen.

“Look at their false charm and empty words,” Olivia muttered to herself.

Olivia grabbed the remote and switched the channel to find something more lighthearted. A baking competition show caught her attention, so she settled in, choosing to let the proper measurements of flour and how to properly apply butter fondant distract her.

As she drifted off to sleep on her couch, Sandy curled up beside her, purring softly, offering a sense of comfort and companionship.

Chapter 32

“The manager of the swans’ team wants to talk to you about a merchandise contract,” Scarlett said casually and slid into the car beside Roman. She chewed gum noisily, engrossed in her phone.

Roman, on the other hand, sat in the driver’s seat, his mind elsewhere. He grunted in response, his lack of interest evident.

Scarlett glanced up from her phone, her eyes searching. “Did you hear what I just said? This could be a big opportunity for us,” she said.

He knew that tone; it was that there was a desperate need for approval.

Roman sighed and ran a hand through his hair. “Yeah, sure, whatever,” he muttered dismissively, still lost in his thoughts.

Scarlett’s eyes narrowed with hurt and anger. She wanted Roman’s affection, his attention.

“Are you even listening to me, Roman? Why are you being so distant?” she snapped, her bangles clinking with the movement of her wrists.

Roman’s grip tightened on the steering wheel; his jaw clenched. The mention of his distance struck a nerve. He felt he was going insane slowly, Olivia. His mind was consumed by thoughts of her.

“It’s nothing,” he muttered. “Just work stuff.”

Scarlett scoffed, her irritation bubbling over. “Work stuff? That’s all you ever say. I can see right through you, Roman. You’re still thinking about her, aren’t you?”

He kept his gaze focused on the road, choosing to ignore her. She clenched her fists, frustration transforming into anger. “I can’t believe this,” she hissed, her voice filled with betrayal. “After everything I’ve done for you, this is how you repay me?”

Roman’s face hardened, his guilt mingling with his anger. “Everything? This isn’t about you, Scarlett.”

Scarlett shook her head, tears welling in her eyes. “I just want us to be together. I know I’m a bit forceful...but I wanted us to be together, don’t you see? This is all for us.”

The tension in the car escalated rapidly as Roman’s anger got the better of him. He sneered at Scarlett; his voice laced with sarcasm. “Oh, so you think you’ve done everything for me out of the goodness of your heart? Please,

Scarlett, let's not pretend you're not a manipulative, self-centered, shallow woman."

"How dare you!" she spat, her voice trembling with emotion.

Roman's grip tightened on the steering wheel, his voice cool, "You can go ahead and do whatever you want."

Scarlett's voice quivered with desperation as she made one final attempt to salvage this.

"Roman, we should go out on a date, a grand public appearance at the Palazzo Theatre. It would generate more press for us and help restore our image."

Roman remained silent, his eyes fixed on the road ahead. Scarlett shifted uncomfortably in her seat, the silence between them becoming unbearable.

"Roman, please," she pleaded, her voice tinged with desperation. "We need to show the world that we're still a power couple, that nothing can break us."

Finally, Roman spoke, his voice cold and detached.

"Let's make one thing clear, Scarlett. I wouldn't be with you if you weren't blackmailing me. This relationship was built on manipulation, not love. Going out on a date won't fix what's broken between us. It won't change the fact that we've hurt each other beyond repair."

Scarlett's face contorted with a mixture of hurt and frustration. "So, you're just giving up?"

“Give me all the copies of the pictures and videos you’ve got, then.”

“Without it, you’ll have nothing to do with me. I know you. You don’t forgive a mistake.”

Roman’s grip on the steering wheel tightened, his knuckles turning white. “Exactly. It’s not just one mistake, Scarlett. It’s a culmination of lies, deceit, and manipulation.”

Roman’s gaze softened briefly as he glanced at Scarlett, a flicker of sadness in his eyes. “Scarlett, maybe it’s time we face the truth. We were never meant to be together. Our relationship is built on superficiality and convenience, not on love and genuine connection. You knew exactly what you were getting into. Once upon a time, Scarlett, you were my forever. But now, I realize that you were just a part of my past, a long-gone chapter of my life. I regret ever getting involved with you.”

Scarlett’s breath hitched, the words cutting through her like a knife. “I’ve changed, Scarlett. I’ve grown, learned from my mistakes, and I’ve refused to let the shadows of my past consume me any longer. I guess my past is not quite over, seeing as you’re here with me and I hate that you are a reminder of the person I used to be.”

Tears streamed down Scarlett’s face as the weight of Roman’s words settled upon her. She had always believed that their connection was genuine, that their love could withstand any storm. But now, faced with the cold reality of their shattered relationship, she felt the sting of his rejection pierce her heart.

“Roman, I...” Scarlett’s voice trailed off; her words caught in the knot of emotions that swelled within her. She had no retort, no defense to offer.

“Just consider—”

“Oh, will you just shut it!” Roman exploded, speeding up.

“Okay, I want to get out. Now!”

Roman pressed the brake, bringing the car suddenly to a stop.

“If you want to get out of this car, be my guest,” he seethed.

Scarlett’s breath caught in her throat, her heart pounding in her chest. With a shaky hand, she reached for the door handle, her voice trembling as she spoke. “Gladly,” she said. Scarlett stepped out, her eyes locked with Roman’s. Without a word, she removed her high heels, put her purse under her arm, and walked away slowly. The road was emptied except for the occasional car. He watched her stop a taxi. He leaned over to close his car door with a definitive thud, and with a heavy sigh, Roman put the car in drive.

He knew Scarlett well enough to know it was only a matter of time before those pictures leaked to the public. He pulled over to a quiet spot and dialed his lawyer’s number, his hand clammy as he waited for Michael to pick up. After a few rings, the familiar voice of his lawyer filled his ear.

“Roman, my boy! You’re making waves with all these contracts coming in. The company’s doing great.”

“Yeah, yeah, sure,” he said

“But how are you holding up?” Michael’s voice was one of concern.

Roman sighed heavily. “I appreciate the success, Michael, but obviously, I’m not in a great place. The talk with Olivia about the breakup didn’t go well. It’s a mess. And anytime from now, Scarlett could compromise me. I don’t know how much longer I can handle this, Michael. Scarlett is relentless, and she’s holding those pictures and videos over my head. I need a way to sever ties with her without risking everything I’ve built.”

There was a brief pause on the other end of the line before Michael responded. “I’m sorry to hear that, Roman. Breakups are never easy.”

Roman’s shoulders slumped, and he leaned back in his seat.

“Roman, my friend, I apologize for all that you’ve been through. I have to admit, I played a part in pushing you towards Scarlett, thinking it would protect your hard work and success. I never wanted to see everything you’ve built go to waste, but seeing as all this is happening to you, I didn’t know you liked her that much. I thought it was like the other women in your life,” Michael said.

Roman let out a tired sigh. “Michael, I appreciate your honesty. Olivia is not just some woman, I realized that some time ago, but it was ultimately my choice. I let myself get tangled in this mess. I’m tired, and I need a way out of this blackmail situation.”

There was a moment of silence on the other end before Michael responded. “You’re right, Roman. It was your choice, but I should have advised you better. I’m sorry about that. Now, let’s focus on finding a way to untangle this web. I’ll find a legal loophole, a way to break free from Scarlett’s hold on you.”

Roman nodded, even though Michael couldn’t see him. “I trust your judgment, Michael. I know you’ll do everything possible to protect both me and the company. I just want this nightmare to end.”

“We’ll explore all avenues, contractual obligations, confidentiality agreements, anything that can help us get out of this without jeopardizing your reputation or the company. You have my word.”

“Thank you, Michael. I’m counting on you to find that loophole, to give me a way out of this mess.”

“Stay strong, my friend. I’ll be in touch as soon as I have something substantial,” Michael assured him.

Roman let out a weary sigh. “I appreciate your dedication, Michael. I don’t know what I would do without you. This situation has taken a toll on me, and I just want to find a way out. I’m going insane over here.”

“I’m here for you, Roman.”

“Thank you, Michael. I’ll leave it in your capable hands. Just let me know when you have something. I’ll also work my way here, I’ll let you know

everything I have as soon as I get them,” Roman replied, feeling lighter than he’d had in days.

They exchanged a few more words before Roman ended the call. As he set his phone down beside him, he couldn’t still shake the weariness that weighed on him. How was he going to deal with this, exactly?

Chapter 33

On Saturday, Olivia sat on the couch, her head resting on Avery's lap as they caught up on each other's lives.

“So, he's the main character, right? He's supposed to have all this chemistry with the female lead, but he's been paying more attention to me!” Avery exclaimed, bursting into laughter.

Olivia chuckled, lifting her head slightly. “Stealing the spotlight already, that'll make for an interesting future social media rivalry. Then I can come out and fiercely defend you.”

Avery playfully rolled her eyes. “Oh, please! I'm just doing my job, but this guy seems to think he's starring in a different movie altogether. It's hilarious.”

They shared a laugh. “So, spill,” Avery said, adjusting her position slightly. “How are you holding up? Any updates on the Roman front?”

Olivia sighed, her smile fading. “Honestly, it’s been tough. We haven’t spoken since that day, and it feels like everything is falling apart. But I’m trying to focus on work and keep moving forward.”

“So, how’s your mom doing? Is she getting better?” Avery asked, changing the subject.

Olivia’s face brightened. “She’s doing well. She’s been recovering faster than expected. She’s even up and about, slowly doing her chores and taking care of herself. It’s the one great thing happening in my life right now.”

Avery smiled. “That’s wonderful, Liv. I’m glad she’s on the road to recovery. It must be such a relief for you to see her getting better.”

Olivia nodded, “It is. I was so worried about her, but she’s shown incredible strength throughout this whole ordeal. It gives me hope and reminds me that even in the darkest times, there’s always a glimmer of light.”

Avery squeezed Olivia’s hand gently. “Your mom is a fighter, just like you.”

Olivia decided to broach a topic that had been on her mind.

“You know, I always thought Mr. Johnson had a thing for you,” Olivia remarked with a mischievous smile.

Avery chuckled, her fingers gently running through Olivia’s hair. “Oh please, Liv. He’s just an older widower who believes in sponsoring dreams as long as you put in the hard work. No romantic interests there, thankfully.”

“That’s good to know. It’s amazing how someone’s support can make such a difference in our lives. I’m glad he helped you find your passion. Imagine if you decided to cancel your shift that day like you wanted to.

Avery’s smile grew wider as she looked down at her friend. “ I wouldn’t be where I am today without his support. It’s all about being in the right place at the right time, I guess.”

“Speaking of being in the right place, are you hungry? I can make my special cheese sandwich. It’s the only thing I can whip up since I haven’t gone grocery shopping.”

Avery’s eyes lit up at the mention of the cheese sandwich. “Yes, please! I’ve been craving that delicious, abominable concoction of yours. But hey, I can always lend a hand if you need it.”

“Thanks, Avery, but you don’t have to. I’ve got it under control. Just sit back, relax, and enjoy the sandwich when it’s ready.”

Avery leaned back; her head propped up on her hand as she watched Olivia with fondness. “You’re such a great friend, Liv, making me food with an ungodly amount of cheese, just like I love.”

Olivia headed for the kitchen. “Oh, there’s one more thing. I’ve decided to quit my job.”

Olivia’s sudden declaration left Avery taken aback. “Quit your job? Are you serious, Liv?” she questioned, sitting up straight.

Olivia nodded. “I’ve thought about it a lot, Avery, and I’ve come to the

decision that it's time for a change. I can't continue pouring my energy into something that no longer brings me joy."

"But Liv, you love sports! It's your passion! You can't just let Roman's actions dictate your entire career."

Olivia's brown eyes were a dull sheen as she interjected, "It's not just about Roman, Avery. This goes deeper than that. I've lost my spark, my drive. It's been fading for a while now, and I can't ignore it."

Avery leaned forward. "I understand that you're hurting, Liv. But quitting is not the answer. Take a break, give yourself some time to heal, but don't throw away your passion."

Olivia kept her voice steady. "I appreciate your concern, Ave, but this is something I need to do for myself. I can't continue living in a cycle of unhappiness. It's time to explore new avenues and find a fresh start. It's not too late for me."

Avery's frustration grew. "And what about all the hard work you've put into your career? All those years of dedication? You can't just walk away from it all."

Tears welled up in Olivia's eyes, her voice wavering. "I know it's not an easy decision, but staying in a job that drains me is not the solution. I need to find my passion again, even if it means taking a different path."

Avery sighed, and her tone softened. "Liv, I just want what's best for you. If you truly believe quitting is the right choice, then I'll support you. But

promise me you'll take some time to reconsider and explore other options."

Olivia nodded, tears streaming down her face. "I promise, Ave. I'll give it some more thought. But right now, this feels like the right decision for me."

The room fell into a heavy silence as the weight of Olivia's choice hung in the air. Avery reached out, enveloping Olivia in a comforting embrace. They sat there, holding each other.

Roman stepped out of his car, his head throbbing with a persistent ache. As he made his way towards the company's entrance, Linda, his assistant, intercepted him.

"Roman, someone is waiting for you in your office," she said, avoiding his gaze and fidgeting with a stack of papers in her hands.

His irritation peaked at her vague response. "Who is it?" he snapped.

Linda hesitated for a moment before finally responding, "She didn't provide her name, but she insisted on seeing you personally."

Rolling his eyes, Roman let out an exasperated sigh. "Great, just what I needed today. Fine, I'll see whoever it is. Get me some aspirin, would you? This headache is killing me."

Linda nodded, relief evident on her face as she scurried off to fetch the painkillers. Roman continued his way toward his office.

As he entered his office, he found a woman standing by the window, her arms crossed and a furious expression on her face. Roman's surprise was evident as he stopped in his tracks; momentarily taken aback, he recognized her. She was Olivia's friend.

"Avery, I assume? What are you doing here?" Roman asked.

"Here to have a serious conversation with you, Roman," she said, her anger simmering.

Before Roman could utter a single word, Avery closed the distance between them, surprising him, her finger jabbing into his chest with accusation. He was taken aback by her assertiveness.

"I've heard a lot about you."

Roman cleared his throat, trying to regain his composure. "Yes, I'm Roman. And you are Olivia's friend, I presume?"

Avery scoffed. "Yes. I'm Avery, Olivia's best friend. The one who witnessed her passion for sports, the one who saw her light up when she talked about her dreams."

"What do you mean?"

"Because of you, she's quitting."

Roman's heart sank as he connected the dots. The pieces fell into place. Guilt washed over him, weighing heavily on his shoulders.

“I didn’t realize,” Roman began, “I’ve been so caught up, I never intended for Olivia to give up on her passion because of me.”

Avery’s expression softened slightly. “Well, now you know ,” she said, “it’s up to you to fix this mess. My friend will not be hanging up on her passion because of you.”

Roman nodded.

“You’re right, Avery, I’ll do whatever it takes to make things right. She’s not quitting because of me. That is unacceptable.”

Avery studied him for a moment, assessing his sincerity. She recognized the genuine remorse in his eyes and nodded; he was more upfront than she thought.

“I hope you mean that, Roman,” she said, her voice softer now. “Olivia deserves someone who will support her dreams, not someone who takes them away. Don’t let her down.”

Without another word, Avery walked out of his office, leaving him to contemplate.

Chapter 34

Olivia turned the key in her front door, the click echoing through the quiet hallway. She stepped inside. It was night already; the moonlight provided a nice backdrop; maybe she'd get a chair and watch the moon tonight.

She hummed a tune, feeling unusually cheery; she'd just had a rejuvenating skating session. After the uneasy discussion with Avery, she needed to ease her tension, which worked better than she imagined.

The familiar scent of her apartment greeted her. As soon as she closed the door behind her, a soft knock echoed through the hallway. Olivia paused, her eyebrows furrowing in curiosity.

Who could be knocking by this time?

Curiosity piqued, she approached the door cautiously, her hand hesitating over the doorknob. Taking a deep breath, she slowly turned the knob and

opened the door.

Standing with a look of indignation and as devastatingly handsome as she remembered, was Roman.

“What the hell, Olivia?”

She tried to shut the door in his face, but Roman forcefully wedged his foot in the door, preventing Olivia from shutting it in his face.

His eyes burned.

“What are you doing here, Roman?” she retorted as he swore, holding the door.

Olivia’s face twisted with anger. She tried to shove him away and slam the door shut, but Roman grabbed her hands, his grip on her hands tightened, refusing to let her go. “Let me go, Roman!” she exclaimed.

“Please, just listen to me,” Roman pleaded. “I messed up, Olivia. I let fear control me, but I can’t bear to see you give up on your passion because of me.”

“You don’t get it, do you? I don’t want to be a part of your mess anymore! I don’t want to be used and discarded like some pawn in your game.”

“I never meant to use you, Olivia. I care about you, more than you can imagine. I want to make things right, to find a way out of this mess and protect you from the chaos.”

Tears welled up in Olivia's eyes as she fought against his grip.

"You can't protect me, Roman. You've already hurt me enough." She struggled again, and he pulled her close to him, their hearts beating fast; Olivia's breath was ragged and shallow.

The silence hung heavily between them, the weight of their conflicting emotions filling the space. Roman's grip softened, his grip loosening slightly as he reluctantly released her hands.

"I don't like this. I don't like what I've become because of you. I'm a mess, dammit!" Olivia's voice broke, and her words choked with sobs as she crumbled to her knees. Roman instinctively knelt, pulling her close into an embrace.

He ran his fingers through his hair, a gesture of frustration. "I came here because I heard you're quitting. You can't just give up on your passion like that."

Olivia's bitter laughter filled the space between them. "Passion? You mean like you gave up on your passion for power and success for the sake of your precious 'handbag'?" Her words dripped with disdain, referring to Scarlett.

Roman's face tightened at her words, his anger momentarily shifting to guilt. "That's not fair, Olivia," he muttered.

"Oh, it's not fair?" Olivia's voice rose, her eyes narrowing with a bitter intensity. "Do you know what's not fair? You use me, manipulate me, and

then toss me aside like I'm nothing. And now you dare to lecture me about passion?"

Roman clenched his jaw. "I never wanted any of this to happen," he confessed. "I didn't plan for any of it, but I'm trying to fix it now."

Olivia shook her head. "Fix it? Can you fix everything, Roman? Can you bring back the joy and passion I had before I met you?"

Roman's shoulders sagged. "I don't know, Olivia. But I don't want to see you lose that spark. You deserve better than this mess. I'm so sorry, Olivia," Roman whispered. He gently ran his fingers through her curly brown hair. "I never wanted to cause you this pain. I never wanted to see you like this."

A tremor of a smile touched Roman's lips as he attempted to lighten the heavy atmosphere. "Well, at least you're a beautiful mess," he said softly, his attempt at a little joke.

Olivia let out a mix of a laugh and a sob, her tears continuing to flow as she sniffled against him.

Some sort of apology was what she'd been waiting for. The weight of her chest seemed to lessen considerably. She hated that all the anger and hurt faded away just like that.

She looked up at him, her eyes red and swollen, her voice trembling as she asked, "What now, Roman? Where do we go from here? What exactly is your plan?"

"I have a plan in the works to shake off Scarlett. I was trying to play it safe,

but hearing you talk about quitting shook me out of these past three weeks of bad dreams.”

Roman’s gaze softened as he wiped away a stray tear from her cheek. “We’ll find a way, Olivia. I’ll figure out a plan to get us out of this mess, to protect you and give you the freedom you deserve. But first, I need you to trust me.”

Olivia nodded, a flicker of hope mingling with her tears. “I want to trust you, Roman. I want to believe that we can make things right.”

Roman tenderly cupped Olivia’s face, the moonlight bathing them in a soft glow. He pulled her closer, their bodies entwined, and their lips met in a long, slow, and intimate kiss.

“I’ve missed you,” Roman whispered. Without a word, she leaned in, capturing his lips in a passionate kiss. Their bodies pressed against each other, the heat of their connection igniting a fire within.

At that moment, time seemed to cease, and their lips moved in perfect harmony, rediscovering the familiarity and tenderness they had once shared.

The world around them fades away as they lose themselves in the embrace, the outside noise muted by the depth of their connection.

Olivia pulled back. “Wanna come in?” she asked, her voice vulnerable.

“You...you forgive me?”

“I do.”

Roman's heart skipped a beat at her invitation. Without hesitation, he scooped her up into his arms, carrying her across the threshold and into her bedroom. The door closed behind them.

With tenderness in his touch, Roman cradled Olivia's face in his hands, his fingers caressing her cheeks.

"God, I've missed you," he whispered, in adoration. His lips descended on hers again.

"I've missed your smart little mouth, the way your hair tumbles around your face, and how utterly beautiful you are."

Roman's hands explored the curves of Olivia's body, igniting a fire within them both.

Chapter 35

She stepped back to take him in; the dark trousers and a navy shirt unbuttoned at the collar, the fit emphasizing his muscular build and trim waist, the color setting off his tan and the blue of his eyes. He smelled like he had combed some product through his hair, taming the wild strands.

Olivia wet her suddenly dry lips and paused before him, pressing her palms into his chest before she could lose her nerve. Her body contracted beneath his touch.

Olivia paused again, taking a second to appreciate his scent, another his warmth, and then she dropped back, moving away as his arm locked around her, keeping her close.

“Are you sure of this?” Roman asked.

“Of course, I am.”

“You like playing with fire, don’t you?”

“Only when it’s fun.”

“Fun for who? You?”

“For the both of us.”

His eyes glittered, the pulse in his jaw twitched, and Roman pulled away before he could succumb to the urge burning through his very veins because all he wanted to do was kiss her. Kiss her and forget everything.

“Come here,” Olivia pulled him close, and suddenly she was crushed up against hot, hard muscle, a frisson of excitement rushing south.

“I’m all for it.”

He growled low in his chest, the rumble filtering through to her.

She kissed him harder, kissed him to mute her thoughts, kissed him to remind herself of what mattered right now...this.

He tore his mouth from hers and dragged kisses from her jaw to her ear and just beneath, where the sensitized pulse point made her whimper and writhe.

“This outfit... it’s killing me.”

“It’s nothing special.”

He caressed her through the fabric, his touch setting her skin alight. “You’re wrong. The way it looks against your skin, the way it feels... It’s my

favorite.”

Roman murmured his agreement into the curve of her neck, his teeth nipping, his lips soft. He hooked his finger beneath one strap and teased it down.

“No bra too...”

Her insides quivered at the lustful heat in his voice, the thrill of what was to come.

“You are killing me, Olivia.”

“If this is how dying feels....” she forked her fingers through his hair and watched him as he continued to unveil her. “I’d do it a thousand times over with you.”

It came out without thought, without reservation, and his eyes flicked to hers, passion blazing in their depths. She wondered if she’d said too much and overstepped an invisible line... panic pulsed through her, her fingers tightening in his hair.

“You and me both.” It was barely audible, a second’s relief before the heat took over, warmth rushing through her core as he exposed one taut and needy peak to the cool air of the room.

She watched, enraptured as he wet his bottom lip, the glimpse of tongue making her stomach clench, and he bowed his head, his breath sweeping over the sensitized nipple, his tongue following, sucking slowly and deeply.

Olivia gripped his shoulders, her nails clawing into his shirt as she arched into the caress, his name a moan on her lips. Roman cupped her breast and held her steady to his attention, his teeth grazing, his tongue flicking, his mouth sucking her in deep.

Pleasure surged fast and furious within her, her toes curling into the bed sheets as she grasped him like some form of anchor, fearing its intensity and reveling in it all the same. She pressed her head back into the pillow and clamped her eyes shut as she panted for air and cried out for more.

His hand fell to the belt at her waist, the only thing holding her pants in place, and with one sharp tug, he saw it undone.

He rose onto his knees, hemming her in with his thighs—it had never felt so good to be trapped. “One wrong move and it’s-”

He pulled down her pants, trailing fingers along her thighs to demonstrate his point, her small black thong shimmering in the light as he hungrily took her all in.

Brazenly, she lay there, goosebumps prickling over her skin, her nipples tightening further against the coolness of the room.

“I could watch forever.”

She gave a soft laugh. “Get back here.”

His grin was devilish as he dropped forward, and she pressed her palms into his chest, preventing him from getting any closer. “Not so fast.”

She reached for the buttons of his shirt, undid one, and felt the tension in his body swell exponentially; she saw his jaw and mouth tighten.

His breath shuddered out of him, his eyes blazing into hers as he kissed her deeply again. “Here I am.”

Her heart pulsed, her fingers unsteady as she stroked the shirt from his shoulders down his back, savoring the heat of his bare skin, the strength rippling beneath her touch.

He rose when she couldn’t reach any further, tugging the rest of it away, and she couldn’t breathe at the sight of him. He was everything—he made ‘pretty’ masculine. He was beautiful, sexy, magnificent, and God, how she wanted him.

He came back to her, his hands planted into her bed on either side of her, and she shook her head.

She lowered her hands to his bronzed chest, marveling at the sheer strength beneath her touch, the trail of dark hair, the journey of tattoos, and a short scar that trailed along his side.

She leaned forward, her hair brushing against his skin. “Do you mind if I touch them? Your tattoos?”

His throat bobbed, his laugh tight. “You can do anything you like. I’m yours for tonight.”

He pressed a light kiss to her cheek, tracing a line. ‘You’re one hell of a specimen, Olivia.’

“So are you,” she said.

Another tight laugh. “I’m one scarred specimen.”

She pressed a kiss to his collarbone, letting her tongue caress his flesh.

“You are incredible,” he breathed.

His nose flared with his breath, and his hands were so large as they lifted to hold her hips, but she wriggled free, dipping to take her desired tour of his body. She kissed every ink, every little scar. It was her turn to take control.

She told him how beautiful he was, how strong and sexy, and relished every groan he gave, every flex of his fingers, his body, as he succumbed to the pleasure she gave.

She reached the waistband to his trousers and rose, her fingers making light work of the button there, the zip too. She shimmied them away. His socks too. He grabbed her hands, hoisting himself above her, pinning her arms tightly.

His eyes were dark and hungry, his smile carnal, and she didn’t wait; she was too eager to please, too eager to watch his face change as she slid the flimsy fabric down her hips.

“Olivia. You are...you are going to be the death of me.”

“I hope not, because I want this to last the whole night.”

His laugh was gruff.

“Never mind me.” She eyed his briefs. “I’m waiting.”

Roman pulled them off, the move so quick she squealed when he came at her, his hands on her waist as he pulled up the bed with him.

He bowed his head to kiss her, her lashes fluttering closed as she wrapped her legs around his hips and positioned him just where she wanted him.

‘I want you, Olivia, so much I don’t know what to do with myself.’

He reached out for the condom and rose, his eyes on hers as he sheathed himself and gritted his teeth against the rush within. Slowly he lowered himself over her, careful to keep his weight on his elbows as he kissed her, loving how she matched him move for move, her legs hooking around his hips, moving him against her.

Then quite suddenly, he thrust into her. He was deep inside her before she knew it, and she welcomed him, warm, tight, and incredibly moist.

She groaned, holding him by the shoulder as he moved in an urgent rhythm.

The blood rushed through his ears and his core, and his ability to breathe was lost as she offered him everything he could want. She cried his name in sweaty ecstasy.

He lifted her, and she hooked her legs around his waist, their lips melding back together as though they’d never get enough. He backed her up against the bed, pushing inside her; she quaked, trembled, and heaved.

He called out her name, completely lost and found in her.

After they were both completely spent, they fell asleep wrapped in each other's arms.

Chapter 36

Olivia's alarm buzzed softly, stirring them awake.

"You were incredible last night," Roman whispered, pressing a soft kiss on Olivia's cheek as he nuzzled her awake. She stirred, her eyes fluttering open and a smile spreading across her face.

"You were pretty amazing too," she replied, her voice still sleepy. But as her eyes met Roman's, her expression grew serious. "But what do we do about Scarlett?"

Roman sighed, his fingers brushing against his stubbled chin. "I already reached out to my lawyer. He's asking around, trying to gather information and find a way to counter her threats, which I already filled him in. I also showed him where to look. I should hear from him soon," he explained, a faint frown on his face.

“What’s wrong?” she asked, sensing there was something else that caused the shift in Roman’s mood.

“You might not want to see it. It’s nasty.”

“Is it from Scarlett?”

Roman turned his phone towards her, revealing a series of nasty messages from Scarlett. Olivia’s brows furrowed as she read the numerous messages sent overnight. Scarlett’s ultimatum was clear: return to her and end things with Olivia or face the release of damaging material from his past.

She reached out and clasped his hand, “it’ll be okay.”

Just as she finished speaking, Roman’s phone rang.

“It’s Michael, my lawyer,” he announced.

Olivia watched as Roman’s expression shifted, his brows furrowed in concentration. She could only imagine the conversation happening on the other end of the line.

After a few minutes, he ended the call. “Well, what did he say?”

“He wants me to meet him right away. It seems like he tugged on the rope and pulled in the bait.”

Olivia stumbled out of bed.

“Let me get dressed.”

“Wear something pretty.”

“Huh? Why?”

“Just trust me.”

In 20 minutes, they’d both showered and gotten dressed; Roman eased into his discarded clothes and stood outside, waiting for Olivia by his car.

“You ready?” Roman asked as Olivia locked her door, struggling to slip her feet into her high heels, her fingers fumbling with the straps. She huffed in frustration before finally managing to secure them in place.

Striking a pose in her gown, she looked up at Roman and asked playfully, “Do you like it?”

Roman walked towards her, his strong arms reaching out to lift her effortlessly. She let out a surprised shriek, her laughter mingling with his. He held her close, their faces inches apart, and planted a tender kiss on her lips.

“I’d have to get a thousand gowns just to show you off,” he teased. “You look perfect, my Olivia.”

As they settled into his Aventador, SVJ, the engine roared to life, filling the air. Olivia’s heart raced with a frisson of what they were going to meet as they sped down the streets of New York to his company, where Michael waited.

The city lights blurred into streaks of color as they weaved through the bustling traffic on Madison Avenue. The ride in the car was silent. Olivia

watched Roman, a grim look on his face, and she decided to let him be.

Olivia watched as they sped past elegant storefronts, busy pedestrians, and iconic landmarks.

“We’re here,” he announced, pulling up to the imposing building. They stepped out of the car, their hands intertwined.

As they made their way towards the building, Roman glanced at Olivia and squeezed her hand reassuringly. “Everything will be alright,” he said softly.

Linda, ever ready, ever efficient, was standing, waiting for her boss.

She greeted them with a warm smile. “Michael is waiting for you in your office.”

“Thank you, Linda,” Roman replied, turning his attention back to Olivia.

“Can I speak to her, boss?” Linda asked as she grabbed Olivia and leaned in closer, her voice barely above a whisper, “I must admit, I’m surprised to see you and Roman together. I guess you two aren’t over after all.”

Olivia smiled softly. She was surprised, too, and she appreciated Linda’s concern. “I understand why you might think that, but we’ve had some difficult times lately. Roman was backed into a corner, but we’re finding a way to work through it. At least, I hope.”

Linda nodded. “I hope you know what you’re getting into, Olivia. Roman can be complicated, but I’ve seen how much he cares about you.”

Taking Linda's hand in hers, "Thank you for looking out for me, Linda."

Linda smiled, but her eyes were skeptical.

"Well, I hope it all works out for the best. Just remember, I'm here if you ever need someone to talk to."

"I appreciate that, Linda," Olivia replied, giving her a gentle squeeze. "I know things might not be easy, but we're willing to put in the effort. Together."

With a nod, Linda stepped back, and Olivia took a deep breath and caught up to Roman.

He took her hand again. Was it her, or was Roman suddenly more open to holding her?

Olivia smiled a little as they walked silently to his private elevator and into his office.

Michael got up as soon as they walked in; he extended his hand towards Olivia, giving her a firm handshake. "Ah, so you're the famous Olivia," he said with a warm smile. "I've heard quite a lot about you."

Olivia returned the handshake. "Likewise, Michael. It's good to finally meet you."

As they settled into their seats, Michael began explaining the progress he had made with the information provided by Roman. "I followed the lead you

gave me, Roman, and traced some of your old acquaintances back in Italy. It seems the only person who might have something of value is Speedy Alex.”

Roman let out a groan at the mention of Alex’s name. “I remember him,” he replied curtly. “We didn’t exactly part ways on the best of terms.”

Michael nodded. “I gathered as much when I mentioned your name, Roman. As soon as he heard it, he hung up the phone. It seems he’s still holding a grudge, if only—“

“Wait a minute,” she interrupted their conversation. “Did you say he’s Speedy Alex?”

“Yes..” Michael responded, wondering what she meant.

“Did he major in philosophy?”

Michael turned his attention to Olivia. “Yes, that’s him. How do you know him?”

“We met in college. I can’t believe it,” she said softly, bursting into a chuckle.

“And let’s just say he still has a bit of a soft spot for me.”

Roman turned to Olivia. “You know him? This could work in our favor.”

Michael, sensing an opportunity, leaned in.

“Well, well, this just got interesting. We might have an unexpected advantage on our side, are you guys still in contact?”

“Well, I heard from him the last time I was on Facebook. I could text him.”

“Perfect,” Michael said with a smile.

Now they were getting somewhere.

The golf course sprawled out in front of her, dotted with golfers, mostly paunch, older men with questionable skills and super-sized egos.

Some were taking swings at the driving range, while others were leisurely making their way from one hole to another. The atmosphere was relaxed and casual; they chatted and laughed as they enjoyed their game.

Scarlett scoffed and kicked the grass with her heels as she walked past them, ignoring the whistles that followed her.

Her father brought her to places like this as a kid to teach her the art of negotiation, but her visits here were unpleasant memories of ugly, older men ogling her and the groping she escaped.

She stepped into the clubhouse; at least, it was cozy, with large windows overlooking the course, where golfers could gather for a drink or a bite to eat after their rounds. It was a popular spot for local businesspeople to unwind and network, with a friendly and laid-back vibe that made everyone feel welcome.

She waited for Marcus as she sat, filing her manicured nails against the table. She knew he got her text and was possibly angry. Scratch that, she saw

him walking towards her, golf bag in hand. He was angry.

“Are you crazy?” Marcus exclaimed.

“Sit down,” she hissed.

“I can’t believe you, Scarlett. Even daring to approach me after everything that happened .”

Scarlett feigned an insincere smile, attempting to apologize and win him back. “Marcus, I... I didn’t mean for things to end this way. I just want us to be together again.”

His eyes narrowed. He saw through her facade. “Don’t even bother, Scarlett. I know this sudden change of heart is only because Roman didn’t accept you. You’re just trying to use me to get back at him.”

“Okay, okay, just hear me out.”

“Leave. Now.” Marcus seethed.

She hardly ever saw him angry, but it was impossible to talk to him when he was angry.

She stormed out, her heels clicking against the ground as she made her exit.

Time to call Roman again; as she reached for her phone, it buzzed. Well, this was a first. It was Roman.

Before she could talk, she was interrupted by his voice on the other end.

“Scarlett, before you say anything, I want to meet you. Come to my company. We have some unfinished business to discuss.”

Scarlett stood and contemplated her next move. What did she have to lose, anyway? Everything was still going as she wanted it.

Chapter 37

The air in Roman's office was tense as they waited for Scarlett. Olivia felt Roman's comforting grip on her hands.

The room fell into a speculative silence, each of them lost in their thoughts.

Suddenly, the shrill ring of the phone shattered the stillness, causing them to start. It was Linda, Roman's secretary, informing him that Scarlett had arrived. Roman exchanged a knowing glance with Olivia before answering the call, his voice steady as he spoke to Linda.

The door swung open without a knock, and Scarlett stormed into the room.

She sent a disdainful glance at Olivia and Michael, clearly not impressed by their presence. Roman, ever calm, motioned for Scarlett to take a seat.

Scarlett rolled her eyes, contempt written across her face.

Olivia felt a surge of anger rise in her. Who the hell did she think she was?

The silence continued for a moment; tension thick in the air. All eyes were fixed on Scarlett, waiting for her to speak. With a dismissive flick of her hand, she finally broke the silence, “Well, aren’t we all just one big happy family here,” she sneered, looking from Roman to Olivia to Michael.

The room remained quiet.

“Sit down, Scarlett,” Roman repeated firmly, irritated now.

Scarlett scoffed as she took a seat, crossing her arms. “How generous of you to invite me into your little meeting. What do you have for me? If it’s not good, best believe I’m going out to the press the moment I walk out of here.”

Olivia tightened her grip on Roman’s hand, silently urging him to stay calm. “We’re here to discuss the situation and find a resolution,” Olivia added.

Scarlett rolled her eyes again with a smirk. “Resolution? There’s nothing to discuss. You’re nothing more than a cheap distraction, Olivia,” she spat, her words dripping with venom.

Michael cleared his throat; his expression was stern. “Scarlett, we’re well aware of your threats. Please keep that classless attitude at the door and let’s discuss like the adults that we are.”

Scarlett’s laughter filled the room, sharp and bitter. “Classless? Please, you’re all delusional if you think you can stop me. Roman, you know what I’m capable of.”

Roman's jaw clenched; his gaze unwavering. "I know exactly what you're capable of, Scarlett. Thanks to you, we got to find out more."

Scarlett's expression shifted, a flicker of uncertainty crossing her face. "You have no idea what you're up against," she said, clearing her throat.

Michael leaned back in his chair, a satisfied smile playing on his lips. "Scarlett, we do. And trust me, you won't come out on top."

"You see, I just had the chance to rekindle old friendships. He was not pleased speaking to me, but he gave me what I needed. Thanks to Olivia."

"What are you talking about, Roman?"

"I'm saying you remember Speedy Alex? Olivia knows Alex. She knows him quite well."

Scarlett's face paled, her eyes widening in disbelief. "Does she know him?" she stammered and stood up, taking a step back, as if trying to distance herself from the revelation.

Roman reached into his pocket and pulled out his iPad. With a few taps, he brought up a video that sent a chill down Scarlett's spine. It was a recording of a drunk Scarlett behind the wheel of a car, speeding recklessly beside Alex's racetrack. The vehicle collided with a teenager, and Scarlett emerged from the car, intoxicated, and celebrating with her friends.

Scarlett's breath caught in her throat as she watched the damning footage unfold before her eyes. She was at a loss for words.

“I can play it again if you don’t remember. Maybe you were too drunk to realize the extent of what you’ve done. You know the interesting thing was how, after minutes of dancing after hitting a child, you sped away and returned to New York?”

“Alex is in touch with the victim and their family. They are willing to testify against you,”

Michael rose from his seat. “Alternatively, we can explore the option of settling outside of court, compensating the victim’s family for the damages caused. And as for you, Scarlett, you will sign an agreement stating that you will never interfere with Roman’s life again. You have a few minutes to consider.”

Scarlett’s hands trembled, and after a few minutes, she said, “Will you give me the footage?”

“If you give me all the copies of videos and pictures, you have of me. Frankly, you’re going to get more damage than me if we release what we have on each other. Consider this a favor from me.”

“You win. I’m tired of playing this game anyway. Give me the contract.”

She quickly signed the contract without hesitation, her hand trembling with the weight of defeat.

With a silent nod from Michael, Scarlett turned and walked out. She promised to mail everything she had to Roman.

As the door closed behind Scarlett, Roman pulled Olivia closer, pulling her

into a warm embrace. "I couldn't have done it without you," he whispered.

"Well, Roman, looks like you narrowly escaped this one. I hope the next call I receive from you is about a raise," Michael joked, bringing lightness to the tense atmosphere.

"I'll leave you two lovebirds."

With a parting nod, Michael disappeared.

"We did it," Olivia said softly, eyes shining with tears.

But Roman's expression turned serious; his eyes locked onto Olivia's. He lowered himself to one knee and took a deep breath, his gaze unwavering as he looked into Olivia's eyes, holding her gaze with his blue eyes, oceans deep.

"Roman, what are you doing?"

His voice trembled with emotion as he spoke.

"Olivia, these past few weeks have been a rollercoaster. I left, and I thought I'd be okay. My life turned upside down without you in it. I can't imagine my life without you by my side."

Olivia's heart skipped a beat as she realized what was happening. Her eyes widened. "Roman, what are you...what are you doing?"

"Look, Olivia, there's no rush for our relationship to magically work out. But I know what's in your heart, and I happen to love you with all of mine. I

want you to know that I'm willing to wait as long as you need to accept me. I love you, Olivia. I don't want to wait to tell you how I feel. Life is uncertain and can be taken away in a second. I know that I have work to do and I'm far from perfect, but I perfectly love you and I want to have a family with you if you agree, and ... we can build a family and then have a child." she shivered and laughed as he touched her stomach. "And the child will be the luckiest kid on earth to be surrounded by so much love."

He kissed her again.

"I want you to be my wife."

Olivia felt like she was in a dream. "You're going so...fast my head is spinning."

"Don't overthink it. All that's left for you is to say yes, you'll think of it."

Tears glimmered in her eyes. "I'll marry you, Roman. I'm ready to spend the rest of my life with you. I'm just realizing you're the only person I can ever see myself loving. It's always been you, even before the incident that left me in pieces."

He got up and scooped her up. "I don't mind spending the rest of my life atoning for that."

With you, Olivia, I feel like I've found home, a real home, and not just a place to lay my head at night because up until you, that's all I've ever done. I'm done running away or waiting for you to come back. I want to run to you. I love you," Roman murmured.

“I love you too, Roman,” Olivia replied, her voice choked with emotion.

“And I can’t imagine loving anyone more than I love you. I don’t care where you want to settle down, because you’re my home,” Roman whispered and wrapped his arms around her. The woman who would be his bride and pressed his lips to hers.

“I almost lost you. I never want to have that feeling again.”

He kissed her. His love. His Olivia. His home.

And at that moment, Olivia felt complete.

Chapter 38

Two months later, Roman stood at the altar, his heart pounding with anticipation and fidgeting. The grand church was a vision of opulence, with its towering stained-glass windows casting brilliant hues across the polished marble floors. Lavish floral arrangements adorned every pew, and their sweet fragrance permeated the air. Today could not have been more perfect in the elegant simplicity of the ceremony.

The choir sang as the soft notes of classical music filled the sacred space; Roman kept his eyes fixed on the ornate double doors at the back of the church, waiting for the bride. The congregation turned in unison, their breath held in anticipation. And then the moment arrived.

The doors swung open, and the bride-to-be stepped in; Roman's breath caught in his throat as he beheld his bride. She glided down the aisle, head bowed. Her delicate lace gown flowed like an angel's grace around her. The intricate patterns of the lace mirrored her beauty.

Her brown curls cascaded down her shoulders, framing her face like a halo, and her honey-brown eyes glowed. Roman's breath hitched in his throat, and he swallowed.

Beside him, Thompson, his best man, leaned over and whispered, "Hold back those tears, Roman. We wouldn't want your pristine suit to be ruined." Roman couldn't help but chuckle.

As Olivia came even closer, Roman's heart skipped another beat. The love he felt for her swelled. She reached the altar, her eyes still locked on his, and at that moment, time seemed to stand still.

Olivia was a bundle of nerves as she stood before Roman. He was in a perfectly tailored black suit. His tattoos peeked out from beneath the fabric, and Roman's piercing blue eyes held a depth that impossibly drew her in; she felt shy, like she was meeting him for the first time.

His strong jawline and aquiline nose added to his rugged masculinity, making him undeniably attractive.

Roman gently took Olivia's hands in his, his touch sending a wave of warmth and reassurance through her. "You're beautiful," he whispered.

Olivia smiled again as she looked up at him. "You promised not to make me cry. But I can't help it. It feels like I'm living in a dream."

Roman's thumb gently brushed against the back of her hand. "It's real," he assured her.

Avery, dressed in a vibrant hot pink gown behind Olivia, whispered, "Hey

lovebirds, maybe you should get a room.” Her mischievous tone added a light-hearted touch to the moment, making Olivia chuckle.

Olivia glanced over her shoulder; her heart swelled with joy at the sight of familiar faces. Sylvia, Meredith, and Bella, her sisters and closest friends, including Jane and Linda, beamed at the bride. And there, in the front row, sat her mother in a beautiful dress, her eyes glistening with tears and pride.

The priest cleared his throat. “We’re here, surrounded by the people we love, ready to embark on this incredible journey together. Olivia West and Roman Knight.....”

The atmosphere in the church was serene as the ceremony began. The priest, solemn and composed, led the couple through their vows.

Together, Roman and Olivia exchanged vows, their words carrying the weight of a promise that would transcend time.

“Now, you may kiss the bride,” the priest said.

“Ready?” Roman asked.

“When am I not?” Olivia teased.

Roman pulled her close and devoured her, soft and hot. The church erupted in applause and cheers. Roman’s heart overflowed with happiness.

The grand banquet hall was an air of opulence and elegance befitting a billionaire’s wedding celebration. Intricate chandeliers adorned the high

ceilings, casting a warm, golden glow over the large room. The walls were adorned with tasteful tapestries and ornate artwork, adding a touch of sophistication to the ambiance.

The tables were covered in crisp white linens, adorned with exquisite floral centerpieces that boasted an array of vibrant colors and delicate blooms. Crystal glassware sparkled under the soft lighting, while polished silverware reflected the surrounding splendor.

The banquet hall was meticulously decorated with cascading draperies in luxurious fabrics, creating an enchanting backdrop for the festivities. The dance floor was expansive and gleaming; the high-profile guests talked business and danced.

Impeccably dressed waitstaff glided through the room, attending to the guests' every need while the tantalizing aroma of gourmet cuisine wafted from the lavish buffet stations.

As the music swelled and enveloped the banquet hall again, Thompson leaned closer to Roman and whispered, "I think you hit the jackpot with this one." Roman nodded, his gaze fixed on Olivia as he watched her chat with his family; they doubled down in laughter over something she said.

The master of ceremonies took center stage. "Ladies and gentlemen, it is now time for the first dance of the newlyweds."

Roman extended his hand to Olivia, a mix of anticipation and tenderness in his eyes.

“Mrs. Knight, care to join me?”

“If you insist, Mr. Knight,” she said in a mock British accent.

She placed her hand in his, and they moved toward the center of the dance floor. The soft glow of the overhead lights highlighted their figures as they swayed together, music played, their bodies moving in perfect harmony.

As they danced, their eyes wandered across the room, taking in the joyous scene. Roman noticed his mother, Sloane, and his sister, Lily, gracefully twirling across the dance floor. The sight brought warmth to his heart as his usually gruff father stood nearby, wearing an uncharacteristically contented expression.

Olivia chuckled at the sight, also pointing out Avery and Thompson in a cozy corner, laughing in animated conversation.

Their surroundings faded into the background as they locked eyes, their connection intensifying with each passing moment. The room seemed to disappear, leaving only the two of them lost in a world of their own.

Roman leaned in and whispered, “Do you remember when you collided with me that day? It was as if fate had orchestrated our meeting, and I’m eternally grateful for that moment.”

Olivia’s lips curled into a soft smile as she reminisced. “Yes, it was quite the collision, wasn’t it? We didn’t know it would lead us here.”

Roman’s voice grew tender as he said, “When I first laid eyes on you, wide-eyed and slightly clumsy, you stole my heart. Thank you for being

exactly who you are.”

“Roman, you’re going to make me cry again.”

“I can’t wait to get out of here with you, take off that dress, and.... explore,” he whispered.

Familiar heat enveloped her lower body; this man held that swaying knee on her.

“So do I,” she whispered.

“Let’s disappear after this dance.”

“Roman? We’ll just leave everyone?”

“I’m sure they won’t mind.”

As the song came to an end, the assembly erupted in bravos and cheers.

The MC dropped the microphone and smoothly leaped off the stage, whooping.

Roman drew her into his arms and kissed her. They kissed as if a roomful of people were not watching, as if photographers weren’t snapping photos like mad. He cupped her face and kissed her tenderly, lovingly, until she was out of breath and out of words to express her love.

“Let’s get out of here. Now,” he whispered.

“I agree.”

“A hundred points for you, Mrs. Knight. You’re at the top of the scoreboard.”

He leaned in and tenderly kissed her again.



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