



My Grumpy
SEAL

JAYLEE ROWSE

MY GRUMPY SEAL

A BEST FRIEND'S BROTHER AGE GAP
ROMANCE

JAYLEE ROWSE

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CHAPTER 1

BELLA

As I walk along the beach, the sand is warm beneath my bare feet, and the sun is starting to dip below the horizon. The sky is painted with shades of orange, pink, and purple, creating a breathtaking backdrop for the crashing waves. I can feel a gentle breeze blowing through my hair and across my skin, carrying the scent of salt and sea.

Jessica just got me a job at her annoying older brother's fancy resort. Although I haven't seen him in ten years, I have heard tales of his arrogance. I notice the boats along the shore. I plan on having a little fun before I let anyone know I left Los Angeles this morning.

"If you're going for a ride, you need to get a life jacket. It helps you stay afloat if you somehow find yourself in the ocean," a man says from behind me. I stop in my tracks. I can hear the condescending tone the voice speaks with, like he's used to explaining the simplest things to people all the time.

"Did you just 'mansplain' the meaning of a life jacket to me?" I ask, not bothering to turn, not giving him the pleasure of my attention.

"Well, I can see you're walking towards the boats without one, which isn't advisable for newbie's, so yes, maybe you need someone to explain a few things," he says.

Embarrassment and rage make heat flood my cheeks. I can feel my entire face turn red.

"I guess it's a good thing I'm not a newbie then," I say, turning around to glare at the stranger.

I ignore the flip in my stomach as I face the man behind me. He's shirtless and covered in tattoos that make him dangerously sexy. He's wearing only beach shorts, revealing his very long legs. He has a well-sculpted body with dark hair that the wind tousles. If I weren't so furious, maybe I'd take a moment to admire how water slowly rolls down between his two large pecs down to his abs that look like carved granite. He's sexy, there's no simpler way to explain it. I feel my belly flutter even more aggressively.

"Right, I guess you'll be going on the boat without any of the resort's assistants as well since you're such a 'pro' at boating." He makes air quotes when he says 'pro.'

I can tell he's goading me, but his condescending attitude makes me want to prove him wrong.

"You know what? Fuck you," I say, and I turn, marching angrily towards the boats.

I step in shakily. I can feel his intense gaze on my back, but I ignore it, as well as the fluttering in my stomach that the feeling brings.

The boat has several buttons, but the giant red start button is hard to miss. I push it and the boat rocks beneath me as it purrs and pushes itself from the dock. It's been set to autopilot like all the other boats; this resort really is ahead of its time. No wonder Jake is so cocky; he must be making a ton of money.

"See," I say, turning to the gorgeous man that stands at the dock staring at me with an amused expression on his face. I walk to the edge of the boat so he can see my triumphant smirk clearly. "I can handle my—"

My feet slip, and I tumble down into the cool water as my boat drives away without me.

'Traitor!' is the first thought that pops into my head as I sink in the clear blue water.

The second thought that follows makes me panic. 'I can't swim!'

The lit surface above mocks me. I kick my legs as fast as possible, like the swimming coach I had the summer before I turned ten had told me while I was getting swimming lessons as a kid. I part the water with huge strokes of my arms, and I can feel the panic fueling every stroke vividly. I'm probably not swimming with any coordination, but I don't care. My chest is on fire. I need to breathe.

The next thing I feel is an arm around my waist, and I'm dragged onto dry land almost immediately.

My body heaves up water, and my lungs try to steal all the air they've been deprived of.

"Are you alright?" the sexy tattooed man asks.

No, I am not alright. I just felt death's cold grip! I wrap my arms around myself, shivering. Fear grips me at the thought of almost dying.

"Let's get you a towel." He leads me to the public bathroom on the resort with his arms around me the whole time. I feel my body react to his touch, against my will. Luckily there are only a few people around, though their stares are intense; I can just imagine how we look. A shirtless tattooed man leading a dripping wet woman. *Oh, the scandal!*

"You should shower first. I will go find you that towel and a change of clothes." He leaves me standing in the middle of the bathroom, and I feel goose bumps cover my skin. I know these ones are not caused by the cold.



AFTER MY SHOWER, I step out of the bathroom to meet the towel and dry clothes waiting for me. On top of the towel is a note. I reach for it and unfold it.

Come to the bar if you are up to it. I have something for the nerves.

Against my better judgment, I find myself walking up to the handsome stranger already seated at the bar. He is now wearing a shirt similar to mine and I immediately know where

he got my clothes from. There is no one present other than him and the bartender. He turns to me and his eyes rake my body from head to toe. Maybe it's just me, but I think I saw possession in his startling blue eyes and I quickly turn away.

Fully aware of my beet red cheeks, I take the stool beside him. "Thank you," I mumble.

"Did you say something?"

I am about to repeat myself when I see the small smile playing on his face. "Let's not get too cocky."

"Like you were?" His smile stretches.

"I slipped! Not connected to my skills with a boat."

"Sure." He slides a glass towards me. "Take this. Your hands are still shaking."

The alcohol leaves a hot trail down my throat. The warmth is necessary. We sit in awkward silence for a minute before the bartender suddenly stretches and groans.

"Done for the night," he tells my drinking partner. "Think you can close up?"

"Sure, good night George."

I turn to him once the bartender leaves. "You work here?"

He cocks his head. "Something like that. I'm close with the owner."

That explains his arrogance; any friend of Jake must be just as cocky as him. They do say birds of a feather flock together.

"What about you? Here on vacation?"

"Hmm today, yes. Tomorrow I get serious," I say, staring down at my already empty glass. Almost on cue, he reaches for the bottle and refills my glass. I smile at him in gratitude.

"What kind of work?" he asks.

"I'm not about to tell a stranger details about my life, especially one giving such vague replies."

He smiles and raises his glass to me. "Let's focus on getting warm then."

Three drinks later and I can feel my inhibitions giving way. I should leave before I get too drunk. "I'm going to call it a night." I move to leave but he places his hand on my thighs. "You shouldn't do that."

He removes his hand. "Don't go yet. The night is still young."

"That sounds like the start of an irresponsible decision," I giggle and stop immediately. What was that?

His eyes rake my body again. "I doubt I'd have any regrets," he mumbles in a low voice that sends chills down my spine. *Leave now, Bella.*

"Besides, we haven't emptied the bottle." He reaches for the half empty bottle and pours himself a drink before offering it to me.

"Pretty sure I've reached my limit," but I raise my glass for him to fill. I take that chance to study his features. He has hair as black as midnight with an aquiline nose to match his piercing blue eyes. He has startlingly pink puckered lips. Though he is wearing a shirt, his body is not left to my imagination, a sculpted chest and thick arms covered in tattoos.

"You have so many tattoos," I find myself saying.

"In more places than you know," he smirks. "And you have cute dimples."

My face flushes red. "Are you flirting with me?"

He stares at me before replying. "Depends on your response."

"I don't know you and I think I'm drunk," I reply. He makes a deep throaty laugh and I squeeze my thighs together. I bite my lips at the images flashing through my head.

"Ditto, but if you keep biting your lip like that I don't think that's going to matter anymore."

“Maybe...it shouldn't matter.” Against my better judgment screaming at me to get the hell out of there, I reach out and lead his hand back to my thigh. “You have shockingly pink lips.”

He stares at me again, more intensely and I tighten my thighs. He growls deeply, “Fuck it.”

His lips are on mine before I realize what is happening. God they are soft!

He grips my thigh tighter as sparks and excitement leave a hot trail through me. He leaves my lips to trail kisses down the side of my jaw before going down to my neck. His actions cause me to moan and I slap a hand to my mouth.

He chuckles into my neck. “We're just getting started.”

Oh, God. The promises behind those words have me tightening my thighs again. He growls and pushes them apart. “We need to get rid of these shorts.” I completely agree. In one deft move, he lifts me and places me on top of the counter. He starts to tug at my shorts and I lift my hips in assistance. Thanks to the fall earlier, I have no pants on and am completely open to his intense gaze.

Feeling self-conscious under his gaze, I take the initiative and stroke myself. “Like what you see?” His gaze turns to me and my breath hitches at intensity in them. I press harder and moan. “I don't think I've ever been this wet.”

He reaches for his erection, already prominent through his shorts. I slip in a second finger and moan harder. I stroke harder and throw my head back in ecstasy as I cum on my fingers.

Feeling more confident than I should, I gesture at his erection. “Need a hand with that?” I hop off the counter and lower myself till I am facing his bulge. I stroke it through his shorts and he moans. Emboldened, I pull his shorts down and he springs out. “That looks painful,” I say and stroke my thumb on the tip.

“I don't like being teased,” he growls.

Slowly I take him in my mouth and wrap my tongue around him, relishing every moan and gasp of breath. I savor his salty taste until he releases himself. I look up at him and smile, wiping my mouth.

“What next?” I ask.

He raises a brow. “Ever had beach sex?”

CHAPTER 2

JAKE

“Mr. Hunt, Mr. Levine is here to see you,” my secretary says over the phone and I sigh. The last thing I need is listening to Harry rave about how stressful planning a wedding is this morning, especially when it feels like someone is banging on my brain with a hammer. But will this reduce how frequently I consume alcohol? No.

Harry barges into my office, banging the door behind him and I wince. Maybe, just one month of abstinence from the liquor, I think.

“She doesn’t like the flower arrangement and it’s my fault,” Harry exclaims. “She picked out the damn flowers herself!”

“I don’t understand how that affects me,” I grumble, reaching for a cup of water and painkillers.

Harry pouts, “You are my best friend. Who else am I supposed to complain to?”

Believe me, I care about Harry a lot; I care about him so much that he is having his wedding at my resort. I am very actively involved in this wedding. “Sorry, I just have a really bad headache.”

Harry narrows his eyes at me. “You went out drinking yesterday, didn’t you?”

A small smile plays on my lips when I remember the event of last night. It’s been a while since I let loose that much.

“Wait, you are smiling. Did something else happen last night?” He raises his finger as if thinking and narrows his eyes

more at me, though I don't believe the human eyes can get any narrower. "You had a drinking partner? Maybe you made a new friend?"

She was a partner, yes, in more ways than one.

"Wait," Harry yells and I wince again. "You had sex last night!" He gasps at his revelation and my smile widens involuntarily.

"Oh my, you really had sex last night. With whom, was it any good?" He immediately takes the seat opposite me and leans towards me with his head in his palms. "I want all the details."

"I don't kiss and tell, asshole and you should focus on planning your wedding," I tell him, but he is already off in his head trying to piece everything together.

He stares hard at the ceiling. "You are too strict to have an outside the office affair with your staff. So it's either a one night stand, relapse sex with an ex, or someone I don't know. It can't be relapse sex because you are definitely not stupid enough...unless..." He looks at me suspiciously.

"Stephanie is in New York, dumbass," I tell him and regret it immediately. Why am I helping him?

"Then a one night stand. It's been a while since I had one of those." A look of longing covers his face before he focuses his attention on me again. "So how was it?"

"Forget it." I reach for a document on the table in a bid to end the conversation, but Harry has never been one to give up.

"Come on," he whines. "In a few weeks my bondage will be official. Let me live vicariously through you."

"Wonder what Cecilia would say if she heard this." That shuts him up immediately.

"Speaking about my soon to be wife, I'm going to need help with these flower arrangements. Cecilia tasked me with getting a new batch of flowers and I don't know shit about flowers. If she didn't like the ones she picked out herself, how in the world am I supposed to be able to please her?"

“That’s on you, man,” I say, already distracted by the bills on my table. Why did we spend so much on drinks this month?

“Come on, help a friend out. Get a staff to do it or something. I’ll even pay for the services.” I stare at him and he pouts at me. “Name your price.”

I lean back in my chair. “Picking flower arrangements aren’t part of the services we offer. You should be talking to your wedding planner.”

Harry sighs. “Cecilia fired her today. I swear it’s like she is a Bridezilla and Cruella all wrapped in one. Come on, man. Help a friend out.” He rubs his face and I know the stress is getting to him already. Harry was never one to work under pressure.

I sigh. “Fine, might as well plan the wedding at this rate.” With the already discounted offer he is getting to have his wedding at the resort, throwing in a wedding planner will cost him more. But if he is ready to pay, who am I to complain?

“Do I get a discount?” he says, and I glare at him.

“I’ll see what I can do,” I grumble and he hoots.

“Thank you, man. You’re a lifesaver!” I wince as that imaginary hammer goes at my head again. “On that note, I’ll leave you to take care of that headache. Get some rest and we’ll see you bright and early tomorrow with that wedding planner. Thank you!” He bangs the door on his way out and I wince again. I may die from this headache and Harry would be an accessory to my murder.

Harry and I met in the Navy. He was that quirky eager to please kid and I didn’t give a shit about anyone. I didn’t want to make friends with him but the overgrown man-child was persistent. Years later I am happy for his persistence. Harry has been with me through every thick and thin and he happens to be the only person outside my family that I am ready to drop everything for.

Leaning back I try to get some sleep while the painkiller kicks in. A text from Jessica pops up on my phone. She is reminding me of the new employee she convinced me into

hiring, her old-time friend looking for a new start. I set my phone on Do-not-disturb and lean back into my chair; I'll deal with Jessica and her friend later.



THE INCESSANT RINGING forces me awake and I groan. I thought I set my phone on Do-not-disturb. I pick up my phone and realize it's not the one ringing, but the ringing stops before I can figure out the actual source and I lean back again with relief. Then it starts up again.

"The hell," I grumble looking around my table. It's my office line. "Yes, Samantha," I ask my secretary groggily while I check my watch for the time. Slept for two hours. That's more than enough sleep for me. I have a resort to run.

"Your sister is on the line, sir and she insists she must talk to you. She didn't give me much of a choice."

I sigh. I could hear the guilt in her voice. Samantha probably checked on me and realizing I was sleeping, tried to fend off any other visitor. "It's okay put her through."

"I've been calling you for over an hour now," is the first thing my sister says.

"Last I checked our parents trained us in all the proper etiquettes, Jessica. Hello to you too, dear sister."

Knowing she won't win this argument she changes the topic. "Your new employee is with me. You were supposed to meet with us an hour ago, oh proper one."

Smiling at her quip I say, "Meet me at the restaurant. I'll be there in a minute."

She hangs up immediately and I drop the receiver. Stretching, I try to work out the discomfort caused by sleeping on my chair.

I haven't seen Bella in ten years since she left for Los Angeles. Last I remember she was a quirky teenager at the cusp of adulthood with no focus on her over-the-top energy.

Not the most ideal person for an employee for me. I hire more grounded people, but Jessica had begged me. Said she needs a fresh start and promised there would be no misbehaviors. Though if ten years later, Bella is still the same as she was at nineteen then that would just be sad.

I meet Samantha typing away at her desk when I step out of my office. “Is the work going fine?” I ask as I pass her desk.

She gives me a guilty look. “Sorry boss, but your sister was persistent and you know how no one can win an argument against her.”

“It’s no problem.” I wave my hand to show there are no hard feelings. “I’ve been on the receiving end of Jessica’s bullheadedness one too many times, so I understand.”

She gives me a grateful smile and I leave her to her work. Samantha has worked as my secretary from the very first day I opened the resort and though I frown on it, we have developed an out of office relationship, moving from boss and employee to friends. Her husband Phil is the designated repair man for all electrical mishaps at the resort and her oldest daughter, Carla, works at the resort during her summer breaks.

I walk into the restaurant and look for a head of hair identical to mine. Black bouncy curls catch my attention and I head in that direction. She is animatedly talking to someone whose back is to me. I only see her brunette hair which looks oddly familiar. As I get close, she notices me and waves at me. The brunette turns and I stop dead in my tracks. Isn’t that...

Jessica continues to wave at me so I have no choice but to keep moving towards them. She indicates the chair beside her and I take it. The brunette on her part is just as surprised as me and I hope to God she wipes the shock off her face before Jessica notices.

“Jake, meet my old friend, Bella. She has changed so much, right?”

Change, that’s one way to put it. Where are all the lanky limbs I had associated her with? She has filled it out

everywhere. And I, more than anyone, know her. I can still feel her soft curves in my hands.

Shaking my head at the memory, I stretch my hand out to her. “It’s been how many years?”

She barely manages to pick her falling jaw off the floor before taking my hands. “Ten years. You look good.”

I breathe a sigh of relief. Good, she is willing to play along. The last thing I need is to explain to my sister how I ended up having a one-night stand with her best friend of ten years. “So, Jessica tells me you want to work here.” I immediately switch to official mode. Best if I lay out the boundaries immediately.

“Do you have any experience working at a resort?”

She seems to fumble. “Well, I worked as a waitress in a hotel restaurant a long time ago.”

I barely hold in my groan. “What was your former place of employment?”

“I worked with an event planning agency; I was one of the best employees they had actually. Then I worked as a freelance blogger for them before leaving.”

I narrow my gaze. “Sounds like you had a good deal. Why did you leave?”

Something flashes through her eyes. I’m not sure if I imagined it. “I thought I’d try something different. Use my degree in hospitality management.”

She sounds like the same unfocused nineteen-year-old I knew back then. But her eyes tell a different story. She stares at me with determination and I’m curious to find out what she can do. “Hmm sounds like you enjoy changing jobs and here at this resort we like to work with people who plan to stay.”

Jessica jabs me in my side but I only notice the fire ignite in Bella’s eyes. The same fire I saw yesterday before she fell into the water. Now I’m very curious about what sort of determination lurks behind that pretty face. “But I have

recently come into need of an event manager so let's give this a try." I offer her a smile which she returns with relief.

I turn to Jessica. "Do you want to show her around or should I?" I eye her round belly for emphasis.

"I'm pregnant, not handicapped," she laughs, then jerks her thumb at me. "This guy!"

I try to help her get up but she swats my hands away. Even with a child on the way, my sister still has an independent streak. "I'll introduce her to the manager and get her acquainted with the other employees. You just go back to your office till I need you again," she tells me, already guiding Bella away from me.

"Yes, ma'am," I mumble before heading in the direction of my office. Flashes of last night play through my head and I try to shake them off. I remember her satiated expression before she collapsed on my chest, her quiet moans...nope, nope. I pick up the pace to my office and quickly shut the door behind me. I better get her out of my head or I just might give the employees something to gossip about.

I look down at myself and groan for the umpteenth time before walking towards the connecting toilet in my office. "Best stop having improper thoughts about my sister's best friend."

I suddenly stop at the toilet door. I didn't check to see if there was a ring on her finger. Another groan. I hope I haven't gone and had sex with my sister's *married* best friend. I can just imagine the story: *Boss Hired His Married Mistress*. Bad for business, very bad.

CHAPTER 3

BELLA

I mindlessly nod at Jessica as she introduces me to the manager. I had sex with Jake Hunt. I had sex with Jessica's overbearing arrogant brother! Let the ground swallow me now!

"Bella, are you there?" Jessica waves her hand in front of my face and I snap out of my trance.

"I'm Tristan," the manager offers me his hand and a smile. He raises his brow when I don't respond in kind.

"Bella, I'm Bella." I quickly take his hand.

"Bella is going to be in charge of event management, especially the upcoming wedding we will be having," Jessica explains and I offer the manager a smile.

"Happy to have you on board, if you need anything, my office is close to the pool area."

Immediately after he leaves, Jessica turns to me with wiggling eyebrows. "He has the hots for you."

I smile. "I just got this job. Let's not give your brother a reason to fire me."

"Jake always has his panties in a bunch." She waves his topic off. "But I'll oblige you on the condition that you hit that fine specimen the minute you get the chance."

"How's the family, Jessica?" I say in an attempt to change the topic. "How's Malcolm?"

"Stressing over the pregnancy like it isn't our third time." She strokes her stomach as she talks. "What happened with

Daxton though? I never got the full story.”

I shrug. “What can I say? Five-year relationship down the drain and he got married to someone he dated for less than a year.”

The look of sympathy on her face sparks irritation in me. I hate feeling pitied. “I’ve gotten around since then,” I say in a futile attempt. “Just haven’t gotten one to stick around long enough to consider me in a relationship.”

Jessica laughs. “That’s the same thing Jake says. You guys are quite similar in that aspect.”

I swallow before asking, “He isn’t married?”

“Almost, but it didn’t work out. None has stuck since then.”

For some reason, that puts my heart at ease. It’s probably relief at the fact that I didn’t have a one-night stand with a married man.

“I think he has sworn off relationships because he doesn’t seem to be making an effort anymore.” Jessica strokes her chin thinking about it before she shrugs. “The main goal right now is getting you a man, one who can get you out of this single funk you are in.”

Oh, if you only knew, dear friend.



JESSICA LEAVES an hour later after catching up. I wave at her as she drives off.

“She is having her third child and she still insists on driving herself.” I nearly jump out of my skin at his voice. I slowly turn to see Jake standing behind me with a grave expression. I gulp.

“I’d like to see you in my office, Miss Ortiz.” He turns around, not leaving me with a chance to refuse.

Without a choice, I trail behind him till we reach his office. His office is a mix of solid black and white. The walls are covered in white from top to bottom. There is an imposing black desk paired with an equally imposing black chair, a window giving off an impressive view behind it. There are two black chairs in front of his desk and a black three seater couch present too.

He settles into his chair and gestures to the seat in front of him. I grudgingly take the seat, already miffed at his controlling behavior.

He slides a file over to me. “Here’s your first assignment. We have an upcoming wedding next month and the groom has hired our services to plan the wedding. It’s last minute, but according to you, you used to be one of the best at your former place of employment.” He raises his brow at me and I involuntarily shiver at the memory of him doing the same thing last night. *How the hell is he so calm?!*

I open the file as he explains, “Luckily most of the arrangement has already been handled by the previous wedding planner so we are only tasked with last-minute matters. Any questions?”

Yes, how the hell are you so calm?! “It says here that the theme color is white and undecided?”

He rolls his eyes. “The bride has decided to go with the wind on some of her wedding choices. If that’s all,” he makes to get up. I have no idea what comes over me but I just panic.

“Are you going to ignore the fact that we fucked?!”

“Jesus!” He falls back into his chair. “This is an office, Miss Ortiz.”

First I go mute, then, “I’m sorry, but we should talk about this. I have strict boundaries with work and my friends’ siblings. I crossed both last night and maybe this is just another day for you, but I am freaking out.”

He gives me that intense stare again except this time anger replaces lust. “What are you talking about, Miss Ortiz?”

The emphasis he places on my surname makes me shrink in my chair.

“To the best of my knowledge, I had a one-night fling with a woman due to heightened emotions and alcohol. I have moved on and expect that she would have done the same. Do you have any questions concerning the wedding arrangements, Miss Ortiz?”

“No, sir.”

I step out of Jake’s office as red as a tomato. The secretary in front of the house office gives me a curious look and I quickly walk away. I mean, what was I expecting? An arrogant cocky bastard like Jake probably did this so often and moved on just as fast, and I should too. I would have moved on if he had been a random John, not my best friend’s freaking arrogant brother who I never got along with.

“Hey Jessica, so I’ve got something important to tell you. I fucked your brother last night and now I don’t know how to feel because I think I’m attracted to him.” I try saying it out loud and squeeze my face in distaste. “Fuck,” I groan out loud and hear a gasp behind me. I turn to see a mother and her little son staring at me.

The boy stares at me wide-eyed. “You pucked Jessica’s brother?”

“I…”

The mother levels me with a glare. “Thanks a lot. It’s going to take forever before he drops this one.” She drags her little son in the opposite direction.

“Sorry?” I say to the empty space.

I rub my forehead as I walk away. I’m so distracted I don’t see Tristan till I bump into him.

“Whoa, there.” He steadies me before glancing at the file in my hand. “Boss already overworking you?”

“If he is making me think this much right off the bat, I’m scared of what the future holds for me.”

He gives me a curious look but doesn't pursue the topic. "Is that the Levine file? They are such a great couple. They've spent every single one of their anniversaries here and now they are getting married. Piece of advice if you want to ensure everyone remains happy, just go with the bride's ideas."

I smile at him. "Thank you."

Someone clears their throat behind me and I jump. I turn around to see Jake glaring at Tristan and me. "Miss Ortiz, you should know that I expect full dedication from my employees."

He stares at me and I stare back in awkward silence. "Okay, sir?"

His frown deepens and he walks away.

Tristan chuckles as I stare after his receding. "He is a bit intense but a great boss. Just takes some getting used to."

"How do you get used to that?" I ask, surprised.

He places a hand on my shoulder. "Give it time. If you need anything you know where to find me." He walks off.

Later that evening I'm at home looking through the file for the Levine wedding. I had rented a small apartment just five minutes away from the resort, thanks to Jessica's help.

"Whimsical theme, the color choice has to depict that. Flower arrangement, also undecided." This is far from last-minute touches, and the wedding is just a month away. I wouldn't be surprised if the wedding planner quit herself.

Luckily I have experience working with irate brides. My phone rings and I absentmindedly reach for it and pick it up. "Hello?"

"Good evening, Miss Ortiz." I nearly drop my phone.

"Jake?" I pull the phone away from my ear and stare at the unknown number.

"I'd appreciate it if you refer to me more formally when we have official business." I roll my eyes at his arrogance.

“Yes, Mr. Hunt. How may I help you?” I say, just a little too cheery that I’m sure he can detect the sarcasm in my voice.

A bit of silence, then, “We will be having a meeting with the bride and groom tomorrow at 10 a.m. concerning flower arrangements.”

“Okay, sir. I’ll get right on it.” I go to hang up but luckily hear his voice. *He is still talking?*

“Also, Miss Ortiz, we have strict rules concerning office romance which I adhere to and expect my employees to do the same. Do we have an understanding?”

That you are an asshole who takes pleasure in the humiliation of others? “Yes, sir.”

The line goes dead and I roll my eyes. Grabbing the file I look through the information on the bride again. “Flower arrangements, flower arrangements. What kind of flowers would please you?”

CHAPTER 4

JAKE

I stare at my watch. Its 9:30 and she is still not here. My scowl deepens. Harry and Cecilia arrived a minute ago. This is completely unprofessional. To top it off, Cecilia is in a mood and this somehow translated into Harry being on edge.

By 9:45 I'm about to call the meeting off when she comes bursting into the room like a hurricane. "I made it!" she exclaims and I make a sound at the back of my throat.

She removes a large sling bag brimming with flowers on her shoulder and drops it on the table. "Good morning." She offers the couple a warm smile.

"Miss Ortiz, did it occur to you how highly unprofessional it is for your clients to arrive before you, and you come rushing in and exclaiming with no regard for the people present."

Her smile falls as her eyes spark, but Harry stops her reply. "It's okay." He returns her smile and gestures at her bag. "So, what do you have for us?"

She perks up immediately under Harry's attention and I make a noise at the back of my throat again. Moving to the front of the room with her load, she smiles at the couple. "So, the flower arrangements. I believe the proper flower not only provides the perfect ambience but also gives meaning to the event." She reaches into her bag and pulls out a bouquet of white flowers. "Chrysanthemums, significant for innocence and loyalty. Their broad leaves also make them the perfect

background flower to layer other colorful flowers on top. And it goes with your color scheme.”

Cecilia narrows her eyes. “Yes, but the second color is still undecided.”

Bella’s smile remains undaunted. “And the first thing I thought was let’s splash as many colors of that white as possible. But then I thought,” she puts her hand to her chin and then snaps her fingers.

“More is less which brings me to my other flowers.” She pulls out two more bouquets, one colored lavender and the other colored red. “Introducing African Violets and Poppies!” she exclaims a little too cheerfully.

“Poppies?” Harry and I say together.

“Do you know what Poppies stand for Miss Ortiz?” I ask her.

“I did my research, sir.” I don’t miss the venom in her voice.

“Poppies are an enduring symbol of the remembrance of the First World War and I am aware that you come from a long line of war veterans, Mr. Levine, all the way to the First World War.”

Harry points at himself, bewildered. “Oh, that’s true.”

“Let’s give some respect to our heroes, shall we?” Harry nods enthusiastically.

“The next bouquet here is called African Violet. This beauty signifies a long-lasting relationship which I bless your marriage with.” She smiles at the couple again. Then she proceeds to take some African Violets and Poppies and mix them into the Chrysanthemums. She smiles at her handy work and delivers it to Cecilia. Cecilia takes it and stares at the bouquet mesmerized. She actually likes it. Bella returns to her bag and pulls out another bouquet.

“These are called Lily of the valley, another unvoiced blessing on your marriage. I think this would go perfect with your dress and did you know this is what princess Kate carried

on her royal wedding day?” There are sparkles in Cecilia’s eyes. She actually managed to win her over and Harry looks more than pleased at his bride’s happiness.

“So, what do you say? Is that a yes on the flower arrangements?” Cecilia nods eagerly and I make another sound at the back of my throat.

After getting the approval from his bride, Harry hoots, “Perfect! Now we can move on.”

They both get up and Harry clasps my hand and whispers to me, “How the hell did you find a wedding planner on such short notice and a competent one at that?”

I only offer a smile. Even I didn’t know she was competent. I look at her; she is smiling broadly and talking animatedly with Cecilia. Her smile makes me smile. She is cute.

“Interested, aren’t ya,” Harry says beside me. “She’s beautiful, competent, and smart sounds like your type of woman.”

“She is my sister’s best friend and she is way younger than me,” I tell him. But I feel the words are more for me than him.

“You and your boundaries,” he teases me. “You’re so strict. I’m sure you’ve drained fun out of you completely. You probably only see in black and white.”

Rolling my eyes, I ignore him. True, Bella surprisingly ticked all my boxes but I could never. A few years ago she was a simple teenager, and now a full grown adult like me. I couldn’t possibly...could I? Of course not!

She glances at me from her conversation with Cecilia and I flash back to the night, the way she looked at me when she...

I quickly grab a bottle of water to distract myself and pull my gaze away from her. What the hell was that?

“What’s wrong? You good?” Harry asks, looking at me with concern.

“I’m fine,” I grumble. But now he is staring at me like I suddenly grew two heads.

He looks at Bella then back at me. “You seem more than fine,” he looks down at my trousers and I follow his gaze. Shit!

“Seems like your body already crossed that boundary for you.” The tone of his voice is a little too happy for my liking.

I practically run out of there.



IN MY OFFICE I clench and unclench my fist. What the hell was that?! Getting a boner right in the middle of a meeting!

I clench my fist tighter at what I did in the toilet to get rid of the boner. It involved a vivid memory of the other night.

“Pull yourself together. Do better!” I snap at myself. Remembering the way she had looked at me a few minutes ago infuriates me even more. “She’s a kid, Jake. Remember that.” I start pacing around my office, mumbling to myself everything I used to dislike about her.

Used to, she is all grown up now.

“Shut up,” I practically growl at myself.

A knock at my door snaps me back to reality. Returning to my chair, I arrange myself properly and grab a file before saying, “Come in.”

A brunette head pops into my room and I almost groan. I should’ve never employed her.

“You left so suddenly I couldn’t give you my proposal on the wedding.” She walks in and I notice how well her pantsuit hugs her hips. They sway as she walks closer. Shaking my head I try to center my thoughts.

“What proposal?”

“I have some other ideas that I’d like you to check for the wedding.” She drops the file on my table and turns to leave.

“Miss Ortiz,” I call to her retreating figure. “While you were successful today, your methods were a bit unethical.

Appealing to the groom's history or the bride's vanity will not always work. Because if you had done your research properly you would know that Harry's long history of veterans did not technically start at the First World War but the second. And next time, try to show up before your client."

I could see her jaw ticking as she nods at me. "Yes, sir. I'll take note." She turns to leave again.

"Also, we have another meeting with the staff in an hour."

"For what?"

I raise my eyebrow at her. "We need people to execute whatever ideas you come up with." I turn to the file as a way of dismissing her and a few seconds later I hear the door click shut. I half expected a bang with the way she looked at me.

An hour later I am seated in the same meeting room and surrounded by my staff members. Bella is seated on the other end of the table.

Clearing my throat to get their attention, I stare at my staff. Most of them have been around since the very start when the resort opened two years ago. "We have a new addition to the family," I announce, gesturing at Bella. "Since we started hosting events at the resort we have either outsourced or let our client bring in their event planner. But in a recent turn of events," which involved Harry's incessant pleading, "I have decided to introduce a new department which will be in charge of planning and organizing any event hosted by the resort. But because this is a new department and we are yet to get the necessary staff, I'm going to need everyone to help on the organizing of this wedding happening next month." That receives some murmurs. "I'm going to need all hands on deck and while I am fully aware of the extra workload, I promise that this is only temporary and I will make it worth your while."

I turn my full attention to Bella. "On that note, I'd like to introduce Miss Bella Ortiz, our new event planner and head of the new department." Her head shoots up and she gives me a suspicious look. I say, "Please give her your full cooperation to ensure the success of this wedding. Miss Ortiz, any words?"

The surprise is evident on her face and she literally jumps out of her chair.

“Um, hi. It’s very nice to meet you all and I look forward to working with you.” She sits down immediately. Rolling my eyes at her poor introduction, I open the file she gave me.

“Miss Ortiz has already set the ball rolling and dropped some ideas for the upcoming wedding. Miss Ortiz, if you will.” She startles again and I almost laugh at how wide her eyes get every time she is startled.

“I’m supposed to present now?” She asks and I raise my brow.

“No better time than the present.”

“But I’m not prepared.”

“I’d like to believe you came up with this yesterday.” I raise the file. “But if you are in need of assistance,” I stretch the file out to her. Tristan who is beside me takes the file and passes it to her. She clutches the file to her chest as she takes the floor. Gone was the confident woman of an hour ago and I almost feel sorry for her but one thing about working with me is you must always know how to think on your feet.

She starts to speak then stops, clears her throat and tries to smile. “Miss Ortiz, any day now.”

“Right, right.” She opens the file. “From my conversation with the bride, I figured out that most of the ideas of the former wedding planner haven’t been set in stone like the venue for the wedding.” She glances at me.

“That’s supposed to be held in the main hall,” I tell her, ignoring her heated gaze. I had actually suggested holding it at the beach but Cecilia had shut it down.

“Yes, but when I proposed the idea of an outdoor wedding to really sell the whole whimsical, fairytale story, she was amenable.”

Of course she is already talking to the bride before me.

“An outdoor wedding will be more difficult to organize. We have to set up canopies because, god forbid, it rains. Most

of our outdoor events are evening events.”

She looks at me and I growl lowly. “You didn’t.”

“The bride is also amenable to a sunset wedding.”

“And the guests? Last I checked there were over two hundred guests.”

“But according to the bride, invitations are yet to be sent out. In my years of organizing, tailoring your plans to what the client really wants, not what people expect, has always yielded good results.”

I’m going to wring her neck.

When I don’t reply, she continues. “I’m thinking fairy lights to light up a pathway to the wedding and lamps as a source of light, more eco friendly and inexpensive. I really want to give, not just the couple, but every single one of the guests a fairytale experience.”

“This is hogwash,” I mumble.

“Did you say something, sir?” She turns to me. I know a set-up when I see one; I can already see the staff members nodding at her words. Her hogwash is selling fast. I wave my hand at her to continue.

“We will also be working with a lot of flowers as the bride is in love with them...” I zone her out as I watch my employees. They have already accepted her! My lips lift in a sneer when I turn to Tristan and see him smiling at her and nodding. *What do you even know about decorations?*

But deep down I know, my issues are not with her ideas. I want so badly for her to be incompetent it’s almost cynical. If she were incompetent, I could go back to disliking her and this sudden attraction I feel for her would be gone. I want to go back to sneering at her words and actions like I used to ten years ago. Not notice how prominent her dimples become when she smiles, or the spark she has in her eyes as she explains the basics of the wedding plans to the staff. I also notice the gaze of the men in the room every time she sways her hips. She ends the meeting with triumph and everyone leaves.

I walk up to her before she can exit. “I hope your game is as big as your talk. Delegating is no easy feat.” Now *I just sound petty*.

She fixes me with another heated gaze. “With all due respect sir, do you have a problem with me?”

Narrowing my eyes at the venom in those words I reply, “I would just be disappointed if this ends up coming out subpar.

CHAPTER 5

BELLA

“*I* would just be disappointed if this ends up coming out sub par.”

I cock my head at his words before giving him the brightest smile I can muster. “Fingers crossed.” I stomp out of the room before he can reply. Of all the self-centered, arrogant assholes in the world, Jake takes the cake hands down.

I am still stomping when a hand grabs me. It’s Tristan. He gives me a bright smile. “You were amazing in there. You really got the whole staff excited about the wedding.”

I give him a small smile. The rush from the presentations and Jake’s consistent attacks are already wearing off and I can feel exhaustion wrapping around me like a blanket.

Tristan takes note of my condition and smiles sympathetically. “How about I treat you to lunch?”

At the restaurant I let Tristan have the full force of my frustration. I go on an irate rant about our asshole boss. “It’s like he has a personal vendetta against me, really.”

Tristan offers me a sympathetic smile. “It did seem like he was out for your blood today, but it’s just the way he operates. I’ve never known the boss to go easy on anyone, especially new employees.” He pats my hand. “You’ll get used to it.”

I remove my hand from his grasp. “I don’t want to get used to it. I want out.”

“Already?” he laughs.

You have no idea. I wanted out the minute I saw him at the restaurant yesterday.



FOR THE NEXT week I do my best to avoid Jake. And luckily, Cecilia's constant bridal meltdown is enough distraction.

Ever since my presentation on the flowers, she fell in love with the fairytale story. Now she wants everything to have a touch of whimsical. It took a lot of convincing on my part to stop her from getting a seamstress to add the lavender color of the African Violet and red of the Poppies on her wedding gown, though at this rate I might just have to cross-check the wedding gown a day before the wedding.

In today's episode of bridal meltdown, she is freaking out over the fact that none of the cakes taste whimsical enough.

"What about a banana and chocolate flavored cake," she says beside me, and the cake artist stares at her in confusion. "Maybe different is whimsical."

"Pretty sure it doesn't work like that, ma'am," the artist replies and her face falls.

I quietly munch on my red velvet cake as I watch the two of them. Cecilia's cousin and bridesmaid, Rita, sighs beside me. "Why don't we just throw in all the flavors in the world and call it a whimsical masterpiece."

"Why don't we take a break?" I say quickly, before Cecilia gets any ideas.

We head to the ice cream shop down the road.

"Can I get a bottle of water instead? I'm sick of sugar," Rita says and the attendant screws her face up in confusion.

In the end, Cecilia and her cousin order vanilla ice cream. Me being a sweet tooth, I take my time to look through the list of available ice creams. "What's rum and raisins?"

"One of our signature ice creams," the attendant replies.

“Does it have literal rum and raisins?” She nods and I stroke my chin. “Okay, I’ll take it.”

We take our seat as we wait for our order. Cecilia collapses into her chair with a heavy sigh. “This is frustrating.”

“You don’t say,” her cousin replies sarcastically.

“I understand the frustrations of today but we can’t give up just yet.” I pat Cecilia’s sunken shoulder. “We’ll just try another day.”

She looks at me sullenly. “I know I’m not the easiest person to work with. It’s the perfectionist in me; if I don’t get it right, my day will be ruined. I’m really sorry for the trouble I’ve caused.” She looks at the two of us.

Her cousin, who is in the middle of rolling her eyes, looks at her sympathetically. “It’s okay. I’ll just get back at you when I get married.” They both smile at each other and I breathe a sigh of relief. Tension successfully diffused.

Our orders arrive just in time and I immediately take a bite of my ice cream. “You guys have to try this. It tastes amazing.”

They look at me skeptically, but each take a scoop. Their expressions morph into one surprise then shifts to satisfaction.

“I want more of that,” Cecilia says, reaching for another scoop and so does Rita.

“I think I’ve just found my new favorite ice cream,” Rita exclaims.

“It tastes almost...almost...”

“Whimsical,” they say together and realization dawns on them. Twenty minutes later, we are back at the cake shop with another order of ice cream, because we couldn’t get enough of the first. The girls are excitedly explaining what they want the cake to look and taste like.

I return to work happy and satisfied. That is until I meet Jake in my office. “Where have you been?”

I frown at his tone. “With Cecilia. We went cake tasting.”

“I wasn’t notified you left the office.” *Maybe because I am avoiding you.*

“Tristan was aware.” An unreadable expression passes over his face at my words.

“I came to talk to you about the budget you submitted for the wedding. It’s too expensive. Cut it down.”

“How!” I exclaim, but quickly back track at his expression. “Cutting down the budget will ruin my plans.”

“Well, you should have thought of this before making those plans. This department is supposed to bring in profit for the resort, not deficit.”

Well you should have thought of that before giving your friend a very generous discount. “We are making profit.”

“It’s not enough.” The challenge in his eyes is clear. “If you have a problem with it, by all means take it up with the couple.”

“What if I do,” I say before I can stop myself.

He walks up, invading my personal space. I have to take a step back. “If you want me to let you go so badly, just say the word.” With that, he brushes past me and walks out.



LATER THAT EVENING I’m at Jessica’s house complaining bitterly to her about her brother. “He is such a grade A asshole, no offense.”

Jessica smiles as she sets up the dining table. “None taken. Jake is just Jake. He is a perfectionist and after leaving the Navy, he just got worse. Can you pass me the plates?”

I pick the plates from the kitchen counter and help her set them on the table. “He is just arrogant and overbearing. It’s like he lives to wear and tear at my patience.”

“But you’ve got to love him,” she says and I throw her a deadpan look. She throws her hands up in defeat. “Just don’t

fight with him and give him a reason to fire you. Jake is quick in his decision to let employees go.”

“I almost wish he would fire me,” I mumble.

“Did you say something?” I shake my head at her scrutinizing gaze. I know how much Jessica had to beg to get me this job and I really appreciate it, but her brother though.

After we are done setting up for dinner, I go call the kids down. Jessica asked me to stay for dinner even though I only came to rant about her brother, and I was happy to oblige. It is far better than going home to an empty apartment and microwaved food.

The dinner is fun. Jessica scolded the kids for bad eating habits and Malcolm is laughing with glee at their antics. They make me miss my parents and I get the sudden urge to call my mom.

Ever since my father died, my mom receded into herself and every effort to bring back her past self was futile. Their love was one so pure; when my father died it was like she lost a part of herself.

After dinner, Jessica follows me to the door. “I know I’m probably going to sound like a terrible sibling, but ignore Jake.” She waves her hand. “You know he isn’t the reason you came here.”

Ignore him. Those words make me restless. How am I supposed to ignore someone who makes me uncomfortable by just staring? I think back to my first meeting with Harry and Cecilia. If looks could kill, Jake would have been my murderer. His stare was so intense I had turned to look at him and the disgust on his face said it all. This twisted feeling of attraction is definitely one sided.

I turn on my bed and groan. “Go to sleep, Bella.” With Jake sniffing around for fault in my work, I can’t afford to be late to work tomorrow. Though I would love to ruffle the posturing peacock a bit and watch him struggle to hide his emotions behind that stoic face.

I involuntarily smile at the memory of the battle I won during the meeting with his employees. He was grinding his teeth so hard I expected powder when he opened his mouth. Flipping on to my back I groan, “Get out of my head you arrogant peacock,” but I don’t sleep till much later, all the while I list the pros and cons of falling for your boss.

The next day, I resume work grouchy. I barely got any sleep because I got so lost in my head.

“Bella!” I turn around to see Tristan hurrying after me. “Where is your head at? I’ve been following you since the coffee shop.” He hands me a cup of my favorite coffee from the shop I pass everyday on my way to work. I give a smile of gratitude.

“Rough night?” He pushes.

“I couldn’t sleep so I spent half the night thinking.” I take a sip of the coffee and sigh in relief. “Thanks for this, really.”

“Care to share your troubles? What’s the problem? Boyfriend? Money?”

I scoff. “If only it was that simple. A shot of tequila would have fixed it right up.”

He laughs at that. “Maybe it’s the boss. It’s like you guys are at war or something.”

I frown. “The man is after my sanity.”

“A wise old man once said, ‘People only affect you as much as you let them.’ The way you react to the boss is on a whole other level. You guys start bickering and it’s like you’re both in your own world.”

“Bickering?” I question.

“Yeah, everyone is talking about it at this point. You guys look like you are in love or something.”

“You have a very twisted view of love.” It’s not love, attraction maybe. But not love. That’s too intense a word.

CHAPTER 6

JAKE

“...*A*nd she comes at me like a hellhound sniffing for blood. I have been with her every step of the way and she conveniently forgets that just because I couldn't go with her for the cake tasting...”

“Uh-huh...bad, I know,” I roll my eyes for the umpteenth time. Sometimes I don't know who's the dramatic one, Harry or Cecilia. As amazing as they are, if my relationship was ever this dramatic I'd rather be single.

“Hello? Are you still there?”

“You lost me the minute I picked up this call.”

I can already see his scowl. “Whatever, I called to inform you that I won't be available for the session with the florist. I've got a thing with my parents.”

I raise an eyebrow even though he can't see me. “Is Cecilia aware?”

“That's why I'm calling. Pass the message nicely, would you?” He hangs up before I can reply. I roll my eyes at his cowardice but even I am not stupid enough to pass that kind of message to Bridezilla.

I reach for the office line. “Get me Miss Ortiz.”

A few minutes later, she pops her head into my office. “You called?” She walks in and I get a full view of her. She has on a white top paired with a black skirt today. The skirt hugs her body and her swaying hips perfectly and the slit in front gives me a full view of her milky thighs. I focus my attention on her face as she walks up to my desk, but all I can

think of is how sexy she would look in nothing but those black heels.

“You called, sir?” she repeats.

Clearing my throat, I adjust myself in my seat. “We have a situation. The groom is running away from his frantic bride and won’t be available for today’s session with the florist.”

“She had a fit when he wasn’t available for the cake tasting.” Worry spreads over her face and she bites her lip.

I clear my throat again. “Any ideas on how we can avoid that?”

Her forehead creases as she thinks. “Well...we could move the session to a time more convenient for both of them.”

“Can you cancel on Cecilia like that?”

Her face is all the answer I need. “I didn’t think so. Since you have experience dealing with her, you should be able to pacify her when you tell her.”

She shoots me a deadly glare. “You are making me do the dirty work.”

I raise my eyebrow and fight to restrain a smile at my next words. “Well, I am the boss.”

She wants to challenge me. I can see her fighting to put out the fire in her eyes. “Fine, I’ll...”

My phone rings and I shamefully have to admit that my heart skips a beat when I see Cecilia’s name on the screen. Quickly picking up the call to hide my panic, I say, “Cecilia?”

“It has recently come to my knowledge that Harry will be visiting his parents today,” she scoffs. “I also won’t be available today. I have a runaway groom to fetch. If you and Bella could fill in for us I would appreciate it.” She hangs up before I can reply. *Does no one understand how phone etiquette works?!*

“Was that the bride,” Bella asks and I hesitate, reluctant to see the smug look that would take over her face at my reply.

“Looks like we are the only ones available for the session with the florist. Call for a meeting with the other staff. I want to make a few modifications to the wedding plans.”

“You are still on this case?” She raises her eyebrow at me. *Should I not be?*

“I think I stand for every business owner when I say we are very particular about how much profit our main source of income is bringing in.”

“That won’t be necessary,” she sighs. “I have already sorted for cheaper options with the decorations and though it would task the staff, I think we can pull it off.”

I settle into my chair. “Good. You will come to learn, Miss Ortiz that sometimes cheaper is better.” I watch her struggle to maintain her cool and a small smile sprouts on my face. For some weird reason, I find it cute.

I dismiss her with a wave of my hand. “I’ll inform you when the florist is here.” She throws me a dirty look which I pretend not to see before walking away.



LATER THAT DAY, I’m busy going over the resort expenses with Tristan when I get a call. It’s the florist. “I’ve been waiting,” I say immediately after I pick up the call. I do not like tardy people.

“It won’t happen again, Mr. Hunt,” she says with a cheerful Texan accent. “The shop has been real busy, but I called so you didn’t think I bailed on you.”

I grunt and hang up. She didn’t even sound remorseful.

“Who’s that?” Tristan asks.

“The florist,” I reply absentmindedly, looking through the papers in front of me. “Any update?”

“Yes, there was a heavy demand for alcohol last month but not enough to cover that large an amount.” He passes me another file. “Found this while digging. As it turns out, Jerry

the barman also works at some other run-down bar, owned by his brother. Now if I'm going to put two and two together, I can tell you where your drinks are going. I'd like to look into it first."

I glance at him before nodding. "Get back to me as soon as possible." I can tell he is already coming up with excuses for Jerry and I'm going to give him the benefit of the doubt, until proven guilty of course. Tristan has such a soft spot for the employees. It's why he is the perfect manager for me.

A heavy knock at my door makes us both look up. Bella walks in looking less than pleased. "You halved the expenses on the bridal shower?"

I raise my brow at her before turning to Tristan. "Would you excuse us, please?"

He looks at both of us before packing up the files and leaving.

Immediately after Tristan shut the door, she goes to say something but I raise my hand to halt her. "If you want to keep your job, don't ever do that again."

"I wouldn't have to if you would just give me the respect I'm due. Changing the budget is not something you just do without running it by me. I'm the wedding planner, not you!"

"You were taking too long, so I did your job for you."

"You are insufferable!" she screams. Her barrage of words is halted at the sound of my door opening. Samantha looks between Bella and me.

"Yes, Samantha?"

She clears her throat awkwardly. "Just wanted to say goodnight boss, before clocking out for the day."

I look at my watch. Time flew by fast. The florist is still not here. I grunt. "Goodnight."

Once she closes the door I turn to Bella. "I would appreciate it if you would lower your voice."

“And I would appreciate it if you let me work in peace,” she snaps back. “I get that we fucked and you want to move past it, but this is too far. You act like you have a vendetta against me.”

I shoot up from my seat at her words. “Miss Ortiz!”

“What? Are you so embarrassed by what happened? It was a mistake, but you don’t need to take it out on me. I was also drunk that day.”

“Bella, stop,” I say lowly. But she continues talking and gesticulating. Of their own free will my legs move till I am in front of her.

She glares up at me. “What?!”

I bend down and snatch her lips with mine immediately. I kiss her intensely, pouring my anger and frustration into it. “What are you doing to me?” I groan.

She looks at me stunned, then drags me down by my shirt and kisses me deeply. I growl with satisfaction.

I kiss her as if my life depends on it. She understands the assignment and pulls me closer, returning the kiss with as much fervor. I move to her neck and she moans loudly. “You like that, don’t you?”

“Yes, yes,” she says and I happily oblige her.

I pull her blouse up and drop to my knees. Starting from her belly button I leave a hot trail of kisses, pushing the skirt down to give me more access. She has red silk panties, and I get hard just by looking at them. I yank the skirt down for a better view.

She looks down at my groin before saying, “I’m wet already.”

I hesitate. “I don’t have a condom with me.” I can smell her arousal from here and it is driving me crazy.

“Do you not trust your pull-out game?” she says with a sly smile.

“Don’t ruin the mood,” I growl. My hands are already on an adventure of their own. One hand grabs her butt and squeezes. She bites her lips. I smirk at her as the other hand slips under her skirt and I watch with glee as her eyes go wide and a gasp escapes her lips.

Fisting her hand into my hair she brings my nose closer to her and I inhale deeply. “You do this to me.”

She squirms under my teasing fingers and I know she wants more. She walks backward till she is sitting on top of my table. Slowly she slides her skirt off, then proceeds to unbutton her blouse and unclip her bra and I follow suit, leaving nothing but my trousers. She is about to take off her heels when I stop her.

“Leave the shoes.” My hand finds its way back to her clit and I feel her wetness. “Seems like you are ready for me.” I slip in a finger and she moans loudly. Of her own accord, she starts riding my finger. My groin strains against my trousers and I start thrusting harder, at the third finger she cums with a scream. I watch with satisfaction as ecstasy floods her face.

Reaching for my belt, she looks at me with demure eyes. “Your turn.” She unhooks my belt and I help her pull it down, briefs and all. She bites her lips at the sight of my standing member, softly holding it, she looks up at me. “I’ll do you one better.” She pulls away from me.

The nymph! A feral growl leaves my throat at the sight in front of me. She is bent over my desk; legs spread wide giving me a full view of her. She turns back to look at me and says in a breathy voice, “Fuck me hard.”

Without hesitation, I slip my cock in and sigh at the rush of pleasure. I grab her waist and push myself further in. “Careful what you ask for.” Her eyes light up in anticipation.

I pound her hard, her moans egging me on till she falls apart on my cock. “Fuck. That was hot,” she says as she tries to catch her breath.

I scoop her in my arms and carry her to the couch. “We are just getting started.”

She gives me a sly smile. “You should lock the door first, Mr. Hunt.”

Consequences be damned. I’ll deal with that tomorrow.

CHAPTER 7

BELLA

“*W*hat do you think about this one?” Jessica holds up yet another dress for me.

“It’s going to be hard to pull that off with your,” I gesture at her stomach and she pouts. I take a seat, exhausted from standing.

Jessica and I decided to go dress shopping for the upcoming wedding. We have spent close to an hour looking through dress after dress because, for some weird reason, Jessica is trying to pull off a sexy pregnant look. No offense to my wonderful friend, but last I checked, she was not Angelina Jolie.

“Being pregnant is hard,” she whines.

“And yet you are at your third,” I tell her and she glares at me. “You know I can’t wait to welcome my godchild.”

She holds her stomach tenderly. “I can’t wait to leave the kids with you during date nights and other random times just because I can. Jake is an amazing uncle but a terrible babysitter.”

My heart skips a beat at the mention of his name. Great, now I become tense just at the mention of his name. I look at Jessica and wonder what she would say if she knew what happened last night, or the night before that. Or if she knew that last night was an intentional fuck.

“Bella? Hello, are you there?” She waves her hand in front of my face. “I swear you zone out more often than usual these days. What’s on your mind?”

Your brother. Guilt washes over me at the thought. Jessica has been such a good friend to me.

“Jessica...” I start and she looks up from the dress in her hands. “I...so the thing is...”

“What is it, honey?” She drops the dress and gives me her full attention.

“I...think I might have feelings for...for...”

“Tristan?! It’s Tristan, isn’t it?” She slaps her hands to her cheeks. “I knew it! You guys are so perfect for each other. Look at you stuttering and blushing over him!” She pinches my cheek and I slap her hand away. “So cute.”

“Yeah, but it’s complicated. Being with him feels wrong, like I’m overstepping a boundary I should not be crossing.”

“Is this about Jake’s rule against office romance?” She waves her hand. “We can get around him. You guys deserve to be happy and no uptight brother of mine should come between you.”

“But it’s wrong,” I try again. “Boundaries are there for a reason so that no one gets hurt.” I sigh at the look on her face. “I can tell you are already planning our wedding in your head, Jessica. Slow down,” *or you might marry me off to your brother.*

“Okay, I’ll slow down.” I could still see wedding bells swinging in her eyes. “Jake should get his uptight ass laid,” she grumbles.

“Laid?” I say, startled.

She grimaces at the thought. “Since his first attempt at marriage, it’s like he became a sworn celibate bachelor.” *That is very far from the truth.*

“How would you know?” I clear my throat. “That he isn’t getting any.”

“Honey, no man getting some action between the sheets can be that uptight.” *Seems like Jake is a different breed.*

“Enough about Jake’s...” *possibly existent*, “...sex life.”

“Help me pick out my dress, would you?” She gets up and continues looking through the clothing rack.

I stare at her and wonder how hurt she would be when she finds out about Jake and I. Jessica and I have been friends for as long as I can remember. She was the next-door neighbor in pigtails who had lots of sweets to share. Even when I moved to Los Angeles for college and settled there we always kept in touch. I should be making up for all the special moments in her life I missed, not banging her arrogant brother who once upon a time used to see me as a nuisance.

My relationship with Jake, unlike Jessica, was anything but good. With over ten years of difference between us, Jessica and I were like toddlers to him. Worse, I was the unbalanced toddler who was a bad influence on his sweet innocent sister and he always made sure I knew this, which irked me to pieces and caused our constant friction. It used to amuse the adults to watch a nineteen-year-old and a six-year-old have a go at each other, and lord was I a sharp-witted child with a mouth to back it up.

I smile at the memory and Jessica notices. “Thinking about him, aren’t we? She is going red!” she gushes, making me blush more.

“Stop,” I say, noticing a shop attendant smiling at my red face.

“Why? I’m happy my friend found love!”

“Love? Let’s not be too hasty.” I feel my stomach flutter.

“Maybe it’s too early to say, but you are well on your way to falling in love. You’re showing all the signs.”

Knowing I’m going to regret this, I ask, “What signs?”

She immediately sits down beside me, her expression so serious like she has an important message to pass to me. “Well, you blush at the mention of him. You are constantly zoning out because he is on your mind. And don’t think I haven’t noticed that glow.” She moves closer to me and whispers, “You’ve had sex, haven’t you?”

“I...we...” I stutter. I can feel my face burning already and slap my palm to my face in embarrassment.

“Your feelings for him are so intense you are unable to comprehend it.” She places her hand on her chin. “That’s what the stuttering indicates, but don’t worry, you have time to figure it out. In the meantime, have all the sex you want.” She winks at me and I just want to sink into the floor. She wouldn’t be smiling if she knew she was advising me to keep banging her brother, the celibate bachelor.

But was Jake really celibate before I came along? That should be the last thing on your mind, Bella! But I cannot deny how warm it makes me feel. Does that mean I love him? No!

“The conflict in you is so obvious on your face,” Jessica says, smoothing her thumb over my creased brow. I glare at her and she returns it with a smile. *You have no idea what you just let loose!*

My discomfort and scattered thoughts make me cut our shopping trip short and Jessica lets me. Before Jessica drove off, her last words to me were, “Don’t think, and just feel!”

“This is why you should never befriend married women. Suddenly they are all relationship experts,” I grumble to myself.

A hand grabs my shoulder from behind, startling me. “Bella!” Harry exclaims and I tap my chest to calm my beating heart before throwing him a dirty look.

“Did I startle you? Sorry about that.” He taps my shoulder this time but it doesn’t help because now my heart is skipping because of the man who just stepped out of the building beside us. Jake is decked in a plain white shirt and khaki pants. Who knew something so plain could look so good? The shirt hugs his muscles perfectly, and the way his biceps flex as he moves elicits thoughts too dirty to have on the road. I gulp.

“Why is a fine, young lady like you walking alone on a Saturday morning?” I restrain myself from rolling my eyes at a terrible attempt at a Western accent.

“I went dress shopping.” He looks at my empty hands. “But I couldn’t find anything I liked.”

“Oh, you are one of them.” He gives me a sly look.

“Miss Ortiz,” Jake joins us and nods his head at me in greeting. “I didn’t expect to see you here.” I take note of the bags in his hands.

“Seems like we came out for the same purpose.” I gesture at his hands.

“This fine young lady is in a pickle!” Harry exclaims and Jake throws his friend a dirty look, another horrid attempt at a Western accent. I quickly stifle my laugh but he notices and raises his brow at me.

“Luckily, I have just the solution to your problem. Follow me.” He turns around and starts walking away. I look at Jake confused, but he just rolls his eyes and follows him. Now I have to follow them too.

We walk into a dress shop and I throw Harry a confused look. He simply smiles at me before walking up to an attendant. They have a short conversation involving Harry gesticulating and the attendant glancing at me. Shortly after that, the attendant smiles at him and leaves. He returns to where Jake and I are standing. “They will see you now.”

“I’d like to know what is going on before seeing anyone,” I tell him.

He waves around the shop. “This is Cecilia’s little haven when it comes to shopping. They will get you the perfect dress, exactly the one you want.”

I’m about to protest when he cuts me off. “I already covered the payment. Take it as my way of saying thank you. You have made this wedding planning a whole lot smoother.”

“Well, who am I to say no to that?” I smile at him brightly and I hear Jake grunt behind me. *Probably has a policy against employees accepting gifts from clients.*

“Let’s go then. They probably already have dresses laid out for you.” He leads us toward the dressing room, and sure

enough, there are two ladies holding dresses in different colors. The attendant that Harry talked to walks up to me, grabs my shoulder, and assesses me.

“This is Anne. She and Cecilia have an understanding relationship and I’m sure you will come to love her too.”

Anne smiles at me. “Do you have a specific preference in mind?”

“Something simple and easy to move around in. I’m the wedding planner.” She nods in understanding and leads me to another room to change. I quickly turn around to see Jake and Harry taking the seats available. Jake looks less than pleased at being here.

The first dress is a simple black piece, an off-the-shoulder flare gown. I shake my head at my reflection. “This is not it.” Anne nods.

Five dresses later and I’ve already given up. I just want to go home.

“One last try?” Anne raises a finger and I nod, though I’m already thinking about what shoe I can pair with my brown pantsuit at home.

Anne returns with another dress. This time it’s a two-piece, a short sleeve crop top and a straight skirt with a high slit. The top and skirt material is a beautiful blend of white and lilac. I like it immediately, and when I try it on, I fall in love. Giving Anne a big smile I say, “It’s the one.”

She breathes a sigh of relief. “Thought I was going to have to give up there, and I hate giving up.”

I turn around in the dress and look at my backside through the mirror. “Harry did not overestimate you.”

“Would you like to show them your pick?” she gestures outside.

“No, that won’t be necessary,” I say, already reaching for the zipper.

They all leave me to change. I realize too late that the zipper is stuck. *Great.*

“Anne? Are you there?” When there is no reply, I slowly poke my head outside the room. Jake is dozing off on the couch and neither Harry nor Anne is anywhere in sight. “Just perfect,” I groan to myself.

Walking up to him I poke his arm but he only grunts in reply. “Wake up! You big oaf.” I shake his shoulder and this time he looks up at me. He does not look amused.

“What?” he snaps and I frown at his tone. He gives me a once over and frowns. “That’s what you went with?”

“Why are you grumpy?” I snap back, but my arms unconsciously wrap around me. “I just needed help with my zipper. Don’t worry about it. I’ll go find Harry.”

I’m almost at the door when an arm wraps around my waist and pulls me back. My back comes in contact with something solid and I immediately jerk when I realize it’s his chest.

“I’ll do it.” *Did he just growl at me?*

CHAPTER 8

JAKE

Harry and I have our suit fitting today. We arrive early at the shop so we can get it over with as soon as possible. Two hours later, I have to clench my fist so I don't backhand the tailor when a needle pricks me. My suit is too tight.

"Do you have a date for the wedding," Harry asks from his position on the three-seater in the shop.

"I have bigger things to worry about," I reply, moving my arms around in the suit to make sure it fits just right. I nod my approval at the tailor.

"Still, a date won't hurt anyone."

"Let me guess. You have someone just perfect for me."

He smiles at me. "What about that wedding planner you have the hots for?"

"An office is a professional environment." He groans, but I carry on. "It's no place for relationships."

"Someone's got to get that stick out of your ass," he sighs. "I concede, but let it be known that I tried my best." I roll my eyes at his theatrics. I look at the tailor who is still fussing around me. When does this end?

"I take it that you and Cecilia settled?"

"She can't stay mad at me," he says with a smug look. "We were all over each other in..."

"I don't need all the information," I cut him off with a grimace. Another pin pricks me and I growl at the tailor.

“All done, sir,” the tailor steps back.

“Good, now get me out of this contraption.”

After I change, I return to meet just Harry. The tailor is packing Harry’s suit and some shirts we ordered. I will have to come back for my suit.

“So, you are doing it, man. Getting hitched,” I say as I collapse into the chair beside Harry.

He smiles. “I am, and it could not be to a more perfect woman.”

“Spare me the sap. Nervous? Just say the word and I’ll hide you where Cecilia will never find you,” I joke, nudging him in the arm.

“You could hide me in another universe and that woman will still find a way to get to me,” he laughs. “Her determination is scary, yet it is the most endearing thing about her. My tigress.”

“That sounds scary, dude,” but I smile at him.

“Get yourself a woman like Cecilia.”

“Yeah, no thanks.”

“I know this will sound cliché, but I’ve never been so sure of anything in my life. I can’t wait to wed her. The thought of losing her sounds unbearable. I can’t explain it. My feelings for her are intense.”

“Okay, dial back on the crazy. You are in love, we get it.” Only Harry would make being in love sound borderline obsessive.

The tailor returns with our order and we leave. Harry suggests we stop for snacks at a coffee shop and I readily agree.

“You know, you should get back out there. Stephanie happened two years ago,” he says and I grunt. “Come on, man. You can’t tell me you stopped feeling since her. Is there no one on your mind?”

A small brunette flashes through my mind and I grunt again. "I'm too old for that. Besides, I have my hands full with the business."

"Same excuse you gave last year. You might as well become a monk at this rate."

"Doesn't sound so bad," I say absentmindedly and regret it immediately when I see Harry smile.

"Why? Are you having problems getting it up?"

I stab my cake. "Really?"

He throws his hands up in defeat. "I'm allowed to think anything at this point. How can a fine ass man like you stay single?!" he practically yells and half the café turns to look at us.

I lean towards him. "Back off."

He frowns. "Fine! Do as you please. See if I care." He practically stomps out of the café.

"You should go after him," a little girl says from her seat.

I'd rather bury him alive. I quickly pay for our food before leaving.

I step out of the café with murderous intent but am surprised to see Bella. She glares at Harry who is smiling brightly. What has he done this time?

"Miss Ortiz," I interrupt their conversation, but she barely glances at me. "I didn't expect to see you here."

She gestures at the bags in my hand. "Seems like we came out for the same purpose."

"This fine young lady is in a pickle!" Harry exclaims, startling me. *Keep pushing it and you will be eating dirt soon.*

Bella's sudden giggle startles me and I raise my brow at her. Did she find that terrible accent funny?

"Luckily, I have just the solution to your problem. Follow me," Harry says, already walking away from us. I sigh. *What now?*

He leads us to a dress shop and I know immediately what he is planning. I don't like it.

After talking to an attendant, he returns to us and dramatically says, "They will see you now."

"I'd like to know what is going on before seeing anyone," Bella tells him, folding her hands.

He waves around the shop. "This is Cecilia's little haven when it comes to shopping. They will get you the perfect dress, exactly the one you want. I already covered the payment. Take it as my way of saying thank you. You have made this wedding planning a whole lot smoother."

"Well, who am I to say no to that," she smiles at him brightly and I grunt. *Is that all it took to get her to smile?*

"Let's go then. They probably already have dresses laid out for you." He leads us toward the dressing room where three ladies are waiting.

"This is Anne. She and Cecilia have an understanding relationship and I'm sure you will come to love her too."

Anne walks up to Bella with a smile. "Do you have a specific preference in mind?"

"Something simple and easy to move around in. I'm the wedding planner." They both move to the changing room. Harry and I sit down on the available chairs.

"What are you doing?" I ask Harry immediately after they are out of sight.

He gives me a puzzled look. "Throwing a party. What does it look like? It's the least I could do for her." I'm about to reply when he raises a hand to halt me. "If it's another complaint I don't want to hear it."

"It's not professional. The groom buys the wedding planner a dress. It doesn't sound right."

"This is for you, ungrateful oaf." He points his index finger at me.

"Me?" I ask, unamused.

“Maybe you’ll change your mind if you see her in a beautiful dress. I don’t know. I’m grasping at straws here,” he huffs.

“I already told...”

“She is already in. Can’t stop it now.”

“I’ll pay for the dress,” I tell him and he throws me a curious look.

I pick up a magazine to distract myself, trying to ignore my sudden annoyance at the two of them. *Since when did they become so close? Buying her a dress like they are old-time friends.*

Thirty minutes later, they are still bringing in more dresses. It’s a store full of dresses, just pick one and get on with it. Another thirty minutes and I doze off.

“Wake up! You big oaf.” Someone grabs my shoulder.

“What?” I snap, looking up. Bella is standing in front of me in a purple dress, and the slit is too high. “That’s what you went with?”

“Why are you grumpy?” she pushes away from me and wraps her arms around herself. She frowns at me. “I just needed help with my zipper. Don’t worry about it. I’ll go find Harry.”

I’m not sure why, but the thought of Harry helping her with her zipper fires me up. Without thinking, I grab her waist and pull her back to me. Ignoring how soft she feels against me I bend my head till my mouth is close to her ear. “I’ll do it,” I growl at her.

She shivers in my arms and I smile, pleased with the reaction. With my other hand, I reach for her neck, one gentle stroke of my thumb and she shivers again. Feeling emboldened, I softly press my lips behind her ear.

“Stop,” she says softly.

“Do you want me to?” My hand around her waist drops to her visible thigh and I squeeze.

She gasps. “This is a dressing room,” her voice shakes

I chuckle. “Okay, if you say so.”

I reach for the zipper, but she starts squirming, “Stay still.” I tighten my hold on her waist.

“Let me go!” She leans forward too fast and something rips. We both freeze and I look down at her dress. *Oh, shit.*

“What did you do?” She tries to touch the torn zipper but ends up slapping me. I let her go immediately.

“If you had just stayed still.”

“Don’t put this on me. You should have let me go.” She turns around to stab her finger at my chest.

I’m about to reply when Harry walks in with Anne. They both stop when they see us and Bella is not able to turn around fast enough, giving Anne a full view of the back of the dress.

“The dress!” she exclaims.

CHAPTER 9

BELLA

“Could you give this to the boss?” I drop the file on Samantha’s desk. It’s the revised budget proposal for the wedding.

She nods absentmindedly, preoccupied with whatever she is typing. I quickly walk away before she realizes I should be dropping this directly with Jake instead.

I’ve been playing hide and seek with Jake all day. My face turns red at the memory of Saturday. I have never been more embarrassed in my life. Fortunately, Anne assured me that the dress would be fixed in time for the wedding and Jake offered to pay for everything. I place my hand on my chest, what I felt then was more than just sexual feelings. Now I’m scared of bumping into him. I couldn’t possibly look into his eyes and pretend once again.

Luckily, I have an appointment with Cecilia today so I’ll be out of the office all day. She insisted I be there for her photo session today. I’m heading out of the resort premises to hail a taxi when a loud honk startles me. I turn to give the offender a piece of my mind. It’s Jake behind the wheels.

Quickly turning around, I walk on like I didn’t notice. Sometimes when you ignore something it just naturally goes away but not Jake. The man is just too bullheaded to take a hint. He stops his car in front of me this time and rolls down the window.

“Where are you going?”

Not appreciating his demanding tone, I reply, “I have an appointment with Cecilia, you know, the client.”

Whether he notices the sass in my voice he doesn't give any indication. "Good, get in. I'm heading there too."

I hesitate. *How do I get out of this one?*

He looks at me. "Is there a problem?" I sigh and get in.

The car ride is silently awkward and I can't wait to get out.

"Do you have a preference?"

"What?" I ask dumbly and he gestures at the stereo. "Oh, no, whatever works for you."

Lewis Capaldi comes on and I raise an eyebrow. *Who would have thought?*

"Don't look at me like that. A guy can have preferences."

I wave both hands at him. "I don't judge. Just didn't peg you as the heartbreak type."

A small smile plays on his face. "You don't know me, Miss Ortiz. I'm full of surprises." I scoff.

"You disagree?"

I shrug. "It shouldn't be that hard to figure you out. Just saying."

"You probably think I'm some uptight asshole, working you to the bone," *and arrogant, bullheaded, insufferable.*

"But?" I urge him on.

He glances at me. "You are not wrong."

I blink. "That is the most arrogant thing I have ever heard."

He shrugs. "I do not aim to please."

We spend the rest of the car ride in awkward silence. I am beyond thrilled when we arrive at the studio.

I walk into the studio with Jake following closely. Harry is in a suit and having an animated conversation with the photographer and people are arranging the background set.

"Oh, thank God. Cecilia is in the dressing room over there, getting her makeup done." Harry points me in the direction of

the dressing room and I walk towards there. I walk into a rather heated argument between Cecilia and the makeup artist.

“I look like a freaking Barbie! Don’t justify yourself!”

The makeup artist rolls her eyes. “You are a very hard person to please, ma’am.”

“Okay, let’s all calm down.” I quickly step in before Cecilia becomes guilty of manslaughter. “I’ll take it from here,” I tell her and she huffs before walking out.

“Look at me.” Cecilia gestures at her face. “So much pink. I’m supposed to be pleased with this?”

Truthfully, she looks nice. Maybe just a little less.

“I tell her I want to look like a fairy and she gives me Barbie Mariposa.”

“It’s fixable. Don’t worry.” I get to work immediately. My experience dealing with irate brides also extends to sometimes helping them fix their makeup because no bride wants to look bad on her big day. An hour later, and with the help of some gold dust, I have a smiling bride again.

“You get me, Bella,” she says, smiling at her reflection. “Thank you.”

“Just get out there and take beautiful pictures with your groom.” I return the smile. I lead the way out of the dressing room. Fortunately, she has no problem with her dress, so I don’t have to fill the role of stylist too.

Harry whistles when he sees her. “My angel.” He takes her hand and kisses it. Cecilia turns red and smiles at him. They are such a beautiful couple, the craziest I have ever worked with, but beautiful nonetheless.

I spot Jake sulking in a corner and ignore him, focusing my full attention on the shoot and making sure Cecilia keeps her smile.

The shoot is going well so I start to relax. I glance over at Jake’s corner again and frown. There is a woman with him. She places her hand on his bicep as she talks to him.

I don't like it. That's the first thing that crosses my mind. The lady laughs at something he says and I scowl. Jake is many things but funny is not one of them. I try to turn my attention back to Harry and Cecilia, but I keep throwing them furtive glances. *What could they possibly be talking about?*

Jake glances over at me and our eyes lock. He raises a brow in question and I quickly look away.

"Bella," Cecilia calls me. "How about one picture together."

I smile and oblige her. Placing myself beside her, I smile at the camera when I suddenly feel Cecilia's arms wrap themselves around me just as the shutters go off.

"Let me get in on this." Harry places himself on my other side and imitates his bride. Now I look small, squashed between the two.

"Jake! Get in here," Harry beckons Jake over and I feel relief as he leaves the unknown woman and joins us in front of the camera. He stands beside Harry and I'm not sure if I imagined it but Harry gives him a look before changing positions so Jake is beside me and Harry on his other side. I shift uncomfortably and try to keep my smile in front of the camera.

The photographer looks at us confused. "Come closer, you both look awkward." Jake moves closer to me, and his hand brushes mine. "Closer." Any closer and we would merge into a single person.

"Try putting your hands around her," the photographer tells Jake.

I stiffen when his hand comes around my shoulder. I can feel my body react to his touch.

"More smiles!" the photographer yells and I give the biggest fake smile ever.

Fortunately, Harry joins us on the ride back and his constant talking fills the car, chasing away the awkwardness. But that doesn't last long because we reach Harry's destination quickly.

He leans into my side of the window after alighting from the car. “Thanks for the ride. You guys have a nice day.” He throws Jake that look again before leaving.

The car is once again filled with tense silence.

Jake suddenly sighs. “You don’t have to act so stiffly around me.”

“I don’t know what you are talking about.” I turn away from him.

He scoffs. “Don’t think I didn’t notice you staring at me today.”

“I didn’t know delusional was one of your qualities.”

He smirks. “Fine, let’s act clueless. We can all be immature adults rather than use our words.”

“That’s rich coming from you,” I fire back.

He doesn’t reply and we return to the resort in silence. I quickly reach for the door, eager to put space between us. Then I hear him.

“Not so fast,” he grabs my arm. “The florist is waiting for us. I got a message from Samantha a few minutes ago.”

Crap.

I let him lead the way to his office. The florist is a petite blonde woman in a summer dress. She is sitting in Jake’s office when we arrive and gets up to greet us.

“Hi, nice to meet you.” She smiles at me, but I notice how her smile becomes suggestive when she turns her attention to Jake.

“Sorry about canceling on you the other day.” She waves her hand. “So much to do for little me.”

Jake narrows his eyes at her. “You didn’t cancel. You had me waiting in the office for hours.”

Her eyes go round and she places her hand on her mouth. “But I did. I sent a message to your secretary when I couldn’t

reach you. Oh, dear me. Were you waiting for me for that long?”

Jake clears his throat awkwardly and I smirk. *He was not waiting.*

“Let’s get started.” He takes his seat behind his desk, and the woman and I take the two seats in front of him. “So what do you have for us?”

“Well, I was hoping you would tell me.” The smile she gives him is too bright to be professional. I’m surprised Jake hasn’t told her off. He doesn’t seem to hesitate when it comes to me.

“Tell you?” I break whatever trance she is in, staring at Jake like that.

She turns to me. “The arrangements. You only told me what flowers you want but nothing about the arrangements. Isn’t that what this meeting is about?”

I go red with embarrassment. I was going to do that, but I had been distracted. I glance at Jake and he looks away, equally embarrassed.

She looks between our embarrassed faces. “You haven’t decided on the arrangements. Then why am I here?”

“Do you have suggestions?” I ask, trying to salvage the situation.

She looks at me confused. “Well, I do have a few ideas.” She reaches for her bag and brings out a tab. I smile at her, thankful that I was able to save things.

The situation has not been saved. Jake and I cannot agree on a flower arrangement, mostly because he is being a miserable asshole. He wants to go with the one that is cheaper to arrange and I just want to give Cecilia a great day!

“Since you are so insistent on this Miss Ortiz, maybe I’ll just take the money from your salary,” he snaps at me after minutes of going back and forth.

“If you want that department to make you any money then you should be ready to spend. Picking the cheaper option in

every instance will not speak well for other potential clients. I thought a businessman like you would know this, Mr. Hunt.” He glares at me.

His phone rings and his eyes light up when he looks at the screen. “Jessica, you called just in time. What kind of flower arrangements did you use for your wedding?”

“That’s very unprofessional, Mr. Hunt,” I tell him with a smirk. He huffs indignantly before getting up. He walks out of the office, slamming the door behind him.

“Interesting man,” the florist says and my mouth unconsciously lifts in a snare. “You guys have quite the explosive chemistry.” She makes a miniature bomb and mimes it blowing up. She laughs cheerfully, only stopping when she realizes I’m not laughing too.

“Maybe you should come back tomorrow.” I put on a fake smile. “I’ll have your arrangements ready by then.”

I keep the smile on as she grabs her tab and walks out of the office. “Insufferable,” I murmur and wait for Jake to return. I don’t have to wait too long.

He opens the door with a scowl. “Where is the florist?”

I put on my brightest smile. “She had to leave quickly. I promised to get her the arrangements first thing tomorrow morning. Was Jessica any help?”

The look he throws at me is all the answer I need. “Well I have to go now. It’s past office hours and I am quite tired. See you tomorrow, boss.” I slam the door behind me.

I’m not stupid. I know what that was back there. I had acted like a jealous lover with the florist and at the studio. I can’t keep lying to myself. Whatever this thing is with Jake, it’s not just sexual attraction.

CHAPTER 10

JAKE

“Mr. Hunt, sir, are you with us?”

“Yes, yes.” I sit up in my chair. “Go on, what were you saying?”

Tristan gives me a curious look. “We need to upgrade our spa services.”

“What do you suggest?”

The woman beside him immediately launches into her presentation, but my mind is already elsewhere. It’s with a brunette that’s far too sharp-mouthed for her own good.

I can’t stop thinking of the florist’s words today. I had bumped into her on my way into the resort this morning. She was flushed and hurrying out and didn’t see me till her head connected with my chest.

“What’s the rush,” I say, steadying her.

“Sorry, didn’t see you there.” She places a hand on the part of her head that contacted my chest.

“What happened yesterday? I returned and you were gone,” I ask her.

She narrows her eyes at me. “Your girlfriend happened and she made me come over this morning just so she could run rings around me before finally giving me what I need. If you have such a jealous lover, why would you hire her? How do you relate with your female clients?” She shoulders past me.

It has bugged me all day. Bella, acting like a jealous lover. The woman acts like it would bring her great satisfaction if I

was six feet under. And why does the idea of Bella being jealous please me?

The meeting is over, but I am still deep in thought over Bella. There is a knock on my door and Samantha walks in. I can't help but notice my disappointment that it wasn't Bella.

"Miss Ortiz dropped this off while you were in a meeting." She drops the file on my table and I open it. Attached to it is a small note.

I found one that works for both of us because I'm tired of fighting you, boss.

I smile at the note. Only Bella would find a way to throw sarcasm in my face, even in a note. I look up to see Samantha smiling at me. "Is there something else, Samantha?"

"Nope, not at all." She still has a smile on her face as she walks backward out of the office. "Just happy to see you smiling, boss."

Shaking my head, I drop the file and try to focus on work. But she refuses to get out of my head. I keep thinking about the scowl when she kept glancing at me at the studio. *Was she jealous then too?* The woman had been some random member of the photography crew who thought she could get lucky. I couldn't even concentrate on a word she was saying because Bella's stare was making me uncomfortable. *Everything about that woman drives me crazy!*

There is another knock on my door and I look up as Jessica waddles into my office, her stomach is getting bigger but she still insists on moving around like she is in her first trimester.

"What is it," I snap before I can stop myself. She narrows her eyes at me and I wince.

"I can't come to see my CEO Brother in his fancy office anymore?" She turns around.

"I'm sorry," I quickly say, knowing she will probably bring this up later. "I have a lot on my mind."

She turns around and waddles to one of the seats in front of me. "Expecting someone else?" she asks. *I was hoping it*

was someone else.

My thought surprises me. When did I become a masochist?

“I was in the neighborhood and thought we could grab a bite together.” She gives me a bright smile.

She takes me to an ice cream shop and immediately waddles to the counter with glee. “I’ll get two scoops of chocolate and one scoop of mint,” I hear her say as I reach the counter. The attendant looks at me inquisitively. “Nothing for him. He doesn’t like ice cream,” Jessica replies for me, throwing me a look of disgust.

I help her with the ice cream as we find a place to sit. “Does Malcolm know you are here?” I ask her immediately after we sit down and she freezes. “I knew it.”

“Come on, I’ve been good for a whole week. I deserve a prize.”

Jessica has an unhealthy obsession with ice cream whenever she is pregnant and it has been a thorn in her husband’s side trying to get his wife to live a healthy lifestyle for the baby’s sake. I have half the mind to call Malcolm, but Jessica always manages to touch my soft spot.

She happily digs into the ice cream once I concede. “So how is working with Bella? She seems to have a complaint per week of you.”

“Your friend is driving me nuts,” *in more ways than one*, “but she gets the job done, so I’m not in a hurry to let her go.”

She smiles at that. “Bella is hard-working, and if you ease up on the pressure she would perform wonderfully.”

But I don’t want to ease up because then I would be accepting the good qualities, and next thing you know I just might see her in a different light from ten years ago and fall for her. But I don’t say any of that. Instead, I just grunt.

“This is the same reason you guys never got along years ago. You could never see the good in her,” Jessica pushes. “Come on, give her a chance. You would love her.”

Love. Am I falling for Bella? No, that’s just ridiculous.

“Last I checked, I’m supposed to be hanging out with my sister,” I attempt to change the topic.

“This comes with the package.” She points the spoon at her. “And I wouldn’t have to do this if you weren’t so hard on her. Your rules are choking her.”

“The same rules that all my employees before her obey?” I raise my brow and she sighs.

“She needs a win, Jake. These past few months have been hard on her.”

The thought of Bella hurting makes me uncomfortable, but I still reply, “I’ll think about it.”

Jessica continues talking, but I am in a world of my own. I’m not sure what I feel for Bella, but it is scary. I must be deranged. We are like thirteen years apart and she is best friends with my junior sister. That pretty much qualifies her as a sister to me.

You had no problem with that the other night, or the night before that.

I cut short Jessica’s visit by feigning busy. She makes me pay for the ice cream because, for some weirdly intense reason, Malcolm has been monitoring her credit card record and would lose it if he sees even a cake shop pop up in her transaction.

Sometimes I look at the couples around me and feel relief that I am single.

I bury myself in my work back at the resort as a distraction. I repeat it the next day and the next. I keep myself busy or out of the resort so I don’t see Bella. On my third day of avoiding her, I’m walking out of the resort when I catch sight of her laughing with Jessica. She also catches sight of me and determination fills her eyes. Leaving Jessica, she heads straight for me.

“Boss.” She plants herself in front of me, blocking my path.

I grunt, not from irritation but because of how strong the urge to reach out and touch her is. Am I this far gone?

“I’m yet to get a reply on the report I dropped off for you two days ago.” She raises her brow at me.

I had forgotten about that. It must be somewhere in my office, buried under other files.

“Go ahead with it,” I tell her.

She looks stunned. “Just like that?” Her brown eyes narrow in suspicion and her lips squeeze together. I can tell what she is thinking already.

“Go ahead and do your job, Miss Ortiz, or would you rather I act like I have a vendetta against you? I remember you had a lot of words to say to me the last time you were in my office.”

She goes red at the memory of that night and I curse under my breath. I quickly shoulder past her and walk out of the resort. Harry is waiting for me in the car park.

“My man,” he clasps my hand. “Let’s get right into it.”

He is here to check on the progress of the wedding plans.

“Few weeks left to my wedding day, man,” he exhales. “Do the jitters come in now or later?”

“You’ll get over it,” I tell him dismissively.

We walk through the beach and I map out how the event will look.

“Shouldn’t Bella be here?” he asks me.

“She is unavailable,” I tell him dismissively. He throws me a curious look, but I ignore him.

“Did you guys fight? Wait, you don’t fight with your employees, you aggravate them till they explode. So did you fire her or did she quit?” He strokes his chin thoughtfully. “Damn, you lost a good one there.”

“Can we talk about something else,” I snap at him and he gives me an incredulous look.

“Fine, let’s talk about love.” I groan and he smiles. “Come on, humor me. You’ve got to find love, man or you will be an uptight asshole for life.”

“I was fortunate to find love as you know.” He places his hand on his chest with pride; “Cecilia and I just clicked. The first time I met her in that infirmary it was love at first sight and now here we are.” He gestures at the beach.

Harry and Cecilia met in the Navy. She had been working as a nurse in the infirmary and was the hot topic among the guys then. Yet Harry somehow managed to outshine every guy and won Cecilia’s heart. Even I was shocked.

“How did you know it was love though? Not some infatuation or disaster about to happen,” I ask and he smiles. He is enjoying this.

“I remember I couldn’t get her out of my mind. I noticed every little thing she did, even how her dimple deepens when she smiles or laughs.” He touches his hand. “I remember the first time she touched me I had shivers. It was beautiful, man. Everything she did was beautiful. She held a syringe and it looked amazing.”

“You have it bad, man. Borderline deranged love actually.” I tap his shoulder.

“Wait till you get there,” he tells me.

I was there. Two years ago I had let myself get fooled into believing in the façade of love. Stephanie shattered me more than anyone ever had.

“What if being with this person means crossing a boundary?” I ask again.

He strokes his chin. “Ever heard of YOLO? You Only Live Once.”

“Your point?” Even though I already know.

“If we all lived within the lines mapped out for us in life, we would never soar. We would all be birds with clipped wings.”

“Very smart,” I say sarcastically.

“If I had stayed within my lane, Cecilia and I would have never fallen in love. Think of it, she was a full ten. She had bigger; better options but she chose me.”

“I wonder why,” I say dryly.

“I didn’t let anyone intimidate me and went after the woman of my heart. Sometimes the bigger person doesn’t always win.”

“Very motivational.”

He pats me on the shoulder. “Anytime.”

CHAPTER 11

BELLA

“Something is off with Jake,” I say out of nowhere, stopping whatever Jessica is saying.

She looks at me. “What do you mean?” We are returning to the resort from our lunch date.

“He is just not being himself. He hasn’t intruded in my work and seems to keep to himself these past few days.”

“And that is bad how?” Jessica asks, confused.

“It’s just not like him,” I try to explain, but she just looks at me confused. “You won’t get it,” I say defeated.

“Maybe he is finally giving you the space you always wanted. He must have realized your competence,” Jessica tries but that doesn’t sit well with me.

“That sounds too good to be true,” I say. Truthfully, whether or not it’s fake I should be happy about the space from Jake, but there is this empty feeling in my stomach. I miss him.

“Well, now is your chance to ask him.” She gestures somewhere and I turn to see Jake walking out of his office. He looks over the same time I do and we lock eyes. He immediately looks away and my eyes narrow. That is not like Jake at all.

Leaving Jessica, I walk towards him and stand in front of him, blocking his path. He grunts in irritation.

“Boss,” I say.

“I’m yet to get a reply on the report I dropped for you two days ago,” I raise my brow at him.

He appears to think about it. “Go ahead with it,” he says finally, and I am stunned.

“Just like that?” I exclaim and he looks at me. I narrow my eyes in suspicion.

“Go ahead and do your job, Miss Ortiz, or would you rather I act like I have a vendetta against you. I remember you had a lot of words to say to me the last time you were in my office.”

I go red at the memory of that night but before I can say anything he shoulders past me and walks out of the resort. *What was that about?*

I turn around to look at his retreating figure. That was an indirect dismissal, right?

Jessica joins me. “How was your chat?”

“He is avoiding me. I just know it,” I say more to myself than her.

So I plan, and even though reason screams profanities at me, I plan how to ambush my boss. I wait till closing hours when almost all the staff has left.

Knowing Samantha would be among the last people to leave, I bid my time before packing my things and locking up my office.

I meet her leaving his office. She looks at the empty file in my hand and asks, “Last minute work?”

I smile. “Something like that.”

“Good luck. Boss seems grumpy as hell today.”

I wait till she is out of sight before knocking and walk in without waiting for a response.

He is deep in thought and does not look up as he says, “What is it Samantha?”

“I have a bone to pick with you.”

I have never seen Jake's eyes go as wild as that. But it is only for a second. It's almost like I imagined it.

"Miss Ortiz," he clears his throat. "It's past office hours."

I walk up to him. "No, you don't get to dismiss me like that." He raises a brow at me and his nonchalance irks me. I throw all caution to the wind.

"Who is she?" I slap both hands on his desk and lean in. "Is that how you treat your female staff? Use them for a good fuck and toss them aside." There is so much venom in my voice. I don't think I have ever been this jealous.

His eyes narrow at me, but they quickly drop to my chest. The gown I wore today is low cut and I am very aware of what his view looks like.

"Miss Ortiz," he growls.

"I'm not leaving till I get my answers." I push my boobs together and feel them strain against my gown.

Jake pushes himself away from his desk, away from me and gets up. "Leave my office, Bella."

He used my first name. Now we are getting somewhere. "Not until you tell me why you have been avoiding me."

"I don't know what you are talking about. I don't think I've ever given you enough attention to suddenly feel entitled to my time."

Ignoring his hurtful words, I snap at him, "Don't play coy with me."

He gives me a look and I suddenly feel small. "Who is delusional now?" He walks over to his office door and opens it, gesturing for me to leave.

I see red and launch myself at him but instead of hitting him I kiss him passionately. But he pulls me off him faster than my heart can break. *So there is another woman.* Shame washes over me and I touch my chest, trying to pull my gown up to cover my cleavage. I grab my bag and turn to leave.

I am already out the door when he yanks me into his arms. “Fuck,” he growls and I feel a slight ache below at the hunger in his eyes. He kisses me with more passion than I did before.

“Lock the door,” I say between kisses and hear a click.

We pull at each other’s clothes. I yank his tie down and pop the buttons of his shirt. He looks down at his ruined shirt and looks up at me with raw passion. “You’ll pay for that.” The ache gets worse. *I can’t wait.*

“You have a knack for making me upset,” I say, my hands roaming down his body. I stop just above his waist line.

“Should I show you what other skills I have?” Jake asks and he carries me to his table. I smirk at the memory of what we did on this table. His hand slips under my gown and he tugs at my panties. I lift my hips to help him pull it off, all the time maintaining eye contact with him. The hunger in his eyes mirroring my own.

He pushes my gown up past my waist and pushes my legs apart before stepping in between them, bending down he nips my ear bud before saying, “I want nothing more than to feel you cum around me.” His hand climbs up my thigh till it’s just at my entrance. “My fingers, my tongue, and cock. But...I don’t want a single sound from you.”

I gulp. I am about to refuse when he drags a finger along my clit. I gasp and he growls, “I said no sound.”

He pushes two fingers all the way in and I throw my head back. “Easy,” he growls. “Take off your clothes.” He reaches behind me and helps me with the zipper. I immediately lift the gown above my head and discard it somewhere I’m not sure of. My bra follows shortly after. Jake steps back and stares at me before growling. “Not a sound.”

He lowers his head and captures my nipple in his mouth and I have to bite my lip hard so I don’t scream. He bites and tugs at it as his hand yanks my other nipple. I squeeze my thighs together but Jake’s other hand is still between them. He continues to suck and bite my breast as his fingers thrust

into me. My eyes bulge. The sensation of him on my breast and clit throws me to seventh heaven.

He inserts a third finger and I barely bite back my moan. "Jake, I'm going to cum," but he doesn't stop. He pumps faster and the buildup in my lower abdomen becomes more intense. As I cum, Jake inserts his tongue in my mouth, stealing my moan. Our tongues battle for dominance as I ride out my climax on his finger.

He places his fingers coated with my essence in my mouth and I suck on them greedily, my tongue expertly covering every inch of his finger. He pinches my breast. "I don't think I've given these enough attention."

With one hand grabbing my breast he lowers himself till he is facing my entrance. Slowly he licks my wet walls and I grab his hair to steady myself as my arousal starts again. His tongue works as much magic as his hand on my breast. He fondles and pinches my nipple while his tongue expertly brings me closer to another climax. I wrap my thighs around his neck and ride his tongue like my life depends on it. "Oh fuck, fuck, yes!" I squeeze my thighs tighter around his neck as I feel myself cum all over his face. He laps up everything hungrily and I fall back on the table from exhaustion.

I suddenly feel something thick enter me and I shoot up. Jake meets my eyes with a challenge in his and I whimper, "I'm tired." He pulls back till he is almost out of me and slams back into me, hard. I squeak but I can feel myself tighten around him. My body is responding without my consent.

Jake doesn't do anything for a while and I groan in frustration. I try to move on my way but he stills me with his hands on my waist. There is a glint in his eyes, lifting me up he carries me with his erection still in me to his chair. He slowly sits down and I end up straddling him.

Cupping my chin, he locks my face with his. "Ride me!" The authority in his voice makes me squirt and Jake growls deeply. Lifting me up so my entrance is barely brushing his tip he places me there for a second before slamming me down with such force I see stars.

“Harder!” he yells and I bounce faster, my breasts slapping his face. “Harder!” He slaps my butt cheeks and grabs it. Fuck! I move faster. He suddenly grabs one breast in his mouth and I moan.

“Quiet!” He yells and I see red at the authority in his voice. Stopping my movement, I lift myself a bit so I am able to grab his nuts.

I squeeze and he groans. “Don’t tell me what to do,” I say breathily. I slow down my thrust and he slaps my butt cheeks, but I only squeeze harder. Feeling in control I slowly move on his thick hard member, taking joy in the frustration in his eyes. Fondling his nuts I make a downwards motion with my waist and Jake moans loudly.

“I just spelt the letter J, can you make it through the letter B?” Bending my waist and shifting my bum I have Jake moaning and cursing loudly. My walls keep clenching around him and it takes everything in me not to cum.

“Fuck Bella, please!” he yells and I pick up speed. “Faster, faster, please!” He explodes inside me and we both ride out the climax together. I drop my head on his shoulder, exhausted.

“Fuck, Bella that was amazing,” he says into my ear. “But we are far from done.” I feel him twitch inside me.

CHAPTER 12

JAKE

Old air blows and Bella shivers. I wrap my arms tighter around her, rubbing her back to chase away the cold. She is positioned on top of me and I have spent the past minute watching her peaceful face. She looks beautiful.

She slowly opens her eyes and those beautiful brown orbs stare into mine. Up close they look lighter than they did yesterday when they were filled with desire. Realization dawns on her and she notices our naked state and the position we are in. She flushes and moves to get off me, but I tighten my hold on her waist, keeping her in place.

“Don’t move.” I wrap my other hand around her waist too, to emphasize my point. “It’s still very early.”

She drops her head shyly and starts drawing circles on my chest with her finger. “As nice as this is, what is the catch? Another week of complete silence, or passive aggressive judgment?”

I don’t know. That’s what comes to my mind but rather than say that I bury my face in the crook of her neck. “You talk too much.” I just want to enjoy the moment and this right here feels perfect.

“Nice deflecting.” She pokes my chest and I retaliate by pinching her bum. Her smile widens and I smirk. Her eyes look so calm and beautiful and I wish they would always be like this. Those eyes are currently focused on me and knowing what’s running through her head, I raise my brow at her. “Something on my face?” she asks. “What now? Do we just lay here till Samantha catches us?”

“Doesn’t sound so bad,” I say seriously and laugh at her horrified expression. “I just want to stay like this for a while before I deal with the bustle of today,” I reply truthfully.

I know I would regret this later but reason completely left me last night and is yet to return. She lays her head on my chest and I hum in contentment.

After a beat of silence I call, “Bella.”

“Hmm?”

“Why did you leave Los Angeles?”

“Why are you so uptight?” she fires back and I smile.

“Touché,” I tell her. “But I have a simple reply for that. It’s because it gets the job done. The nice guy never gets the results.”

She narrows her eyes at me. I liked when her face was peaceful without any crease a few minutes ago. “Another arrogant reply. And don’t you dare say you don’t aim to please.” Her words halt my shrug. I love how cheeky she is.

I chuckle before replying. “Truthfully, it’s because being in control keeps me sane.”

“What do you mean?”

I smile at her and slightly nibble her nose. “You have a really cute nose.”

“And you have a knack for deflecting,” she tells me, though she is blushing. “You don’t seem to enjoy opening up to people.” I shrug. Letting people in has never been my strongest suit.

She suddenly sighs and starts talking. “I left Los Angeles because of my ex, my now married ex.” My arms tighten around her waist possessively.

“We met six years ago; I was fresh out of college and eager to work. We’d actually started out like you and I.” He frowns. “I mean boss and employee. He owned the event planning agency and I was the quirky, innocent girl who wanted to prove herself. We started dating a few months after I started

working with him and it was blissful, at first, then we started having our falling out. We had a lot of falling outs, breaking up and getting back together and I was stupid enough to think that if I just hang on long enough he would see me and love me wholeheartedly.” She scrunches her nose up at the memory. “Early last year we had another falling out and I’m waiting for him to come back begging but instead, I found out through office gossip that he is dating some other girl. Some conglomerate daughter. And six months later they announce their wedding. I quit after that.”

She embarrassingly peeks at me through her lashes and I want to capture this moment forever. She looks so beautiful. “It’s a pathetic story, I know. Stupid me,” she says and I make a noise at the back of my throat.

Without thinking I cup her cheek, staring into her eyes intensely. “Round eyes that captivate me.” My fingers move to her lips of their own free will. “Lips that draw me in while throwing every vile word your crazy head can think of at me.” I finally tap her nose playfully and she giggles. “Cute nose and best of all she is one of the smartest most dedicated women I know. I’m sorry if I have been so hard on you,” I tell her honestly. I suddenly feel protective of her and rub her back in a desperate attempt to comfort her.

Her smile widens again. I like that I’m the cause of these smiles. “Are those compliments, Mr. Hunt?”

I go pink at her words. “I would deny you if you ever breathe a word of this to anyone,” I growl lowly into her ear and feel her shiver with satisfaction.

“I’m still waiting for your story. Any time now.”

I sigh and look at her. I’m not sure if I want to let her in when tomorrow looks so uncertain. Soon we will go back to avoiding each other and bickering once again. But I don’t want to kill the hope in those beautiful eyes.

“I’ve been at life’s whims for as long as I can remember,” I start slowly. “I lost my dad at a young age and when my mom remarried; my stepfather didn’t exactly make me feel like a welcome addition to the family. He wasn’t a drunk, wife

beating asshole, though I would have preferred that. One of the reasons I joined the military is to get away from my family, terrible as it sounds.”

Jessica is the product of my mother and stepfather’s marriage and while I love my sister to pieces, her father is my least favorite person. Right at the bottom. Despite my mother’s attempt, he always made sure to let me know I did not belong in his perfect, picturesque family. So I rebelled. I got into so much trouble he was definitely on the verge of kicking me out of his house, but I beat him to it by joining the army immediately after getting out of the juvenile institution.

She looks at me with rapt attention and I sigh. I really don’t want this moment to end. “I hold life on such a tight leash because I’m afraid if I let go it would screw me over worse than it already has.”

She cups my cheek and strokes it with her thumb, and then she moves her hand to my hair and starts massaging my scalp. I hum in appreciation, closing my eyes. “Ever thought of starting your own agency?” I say out of the blue and her hand stops.

“That’s a lot of money.” I open my eyes to see her looking at me unsure.

“There are loans you could take or you can find investors,” I start but she places her finger on my lips, halting my words. She pecks my lips and smiles.

“Who is deflecting now?” I ask her, raising my brow at her. She looks away. “We will talk about it,” I tell her with finality and the slightest frown crosses her face. She definitely has something to say about my tone.

“What about you? No exes?” She attempts to change the topic.

I oblige her. “None that were ever consequential.”

She snuggles closer to me and I feel myself twitch as her breast rubs against my chest. My hold tightens around her waist.

“I do have the dream of starting my own agency, but I guess I’m just scared. Leading has never been my strongest suit and the thought of failing scares the shit out of me.” She doesn’t look at me as she talks.

“I was scared shitless when I threw every single dime I had into this resort but that didn’t stop me from doing it. I can show you the ropes as you start up.”

“You sure are one heck of a courageous guy.” Her sarcasm doesn’t escape me and I let her lift herself off my chest. She sits on the couch and starts scanning the office for her clothes.

I quickly get up and hold her hand. “What’s really going on?”

She pulls her hand from mine. “Maybe diving headlong into things is how you do things Jake, but for some people we can’t just throw caution to the wind.” I refrain from pointing out our current situation. “Some of us are not worth the risk,” she says the final part quietly but I heard it. My vision darkens. *Who hurt her?* This is not the spirited woman I used to know ten years ago.

“Did he do this?” I ask before I can stop myself and take her chin in my hands so she would look at me. “Did your ex put out the fire in you? Because the Bella I knew never used to care what direction the wind was blowing. She always did what was on her mind.”

She yanks her face from my hold. “Stop acting like you care.” She looks at the clock on my wall and smiles sadly. “An hour until the resort opens. We will be going back to our default settings soon.”

Her words strike me, but I ignore it. Attacking her would only make the situation worse. “Fine, I’ll drop it.” I raise my hands in surrender.

I turn around to look for my clothes too. I pick up my shirt and grimace at the missing buttons. *Maybe I should keep spare shirts in the office just in case.* That is, if this ever happens again.

I hear her sigh behind me and it takes every ounce of strength in me to stop myself from turning around and wrapping her tightly in my arms.

“I feel like I’m not enough most of the time.” I definitely turn around at those words. “And according to the therapist I was seeing in Los Angeles, that is what happens when the most important people in your life abandon you.” She bends down and picks up her gown before continuing. “My dad gets terminal cancer and rather than fight it, he chooses to let it eat away at him. I watched my father slowly deteriorate and die and like that’s not traumatic enough, my mom completely shuts down on me and has to be taken away to get special treatment.” She walks past me and picks up her panties. “Being used by an ex doesn’t even scratch the surface when it comes to my baggage.”

Completely ignoring the fact that we are both butt naked, I take her hands. “I’m sorry. I got ahead of myself.” I bring her hand to my lips and kiss it. “But you should know that you fascinate me, Bella. Your beauty can’t even compare to how smart you are. It was actually quite intimidating back then; you were this six year old with the mind of an eighty year old woman and with the mouth to let everyone know about it.” I kiss inside her palm and she flushes red.

Looking at the clock, I say, “I have about fifty minutes to worship every part of you and I’m going to make every minute count.” She blushes more at my words but I can see her bare nipples already responding. I growl deeply and reach for her.

CHAPTER 13

BELLA

Jake helps me zip my dress and I feel his hand linger on my back. “Careful or we’ll never leave here,” I tell him.

I turn around and touch his shirt; it hangs loose without the buttons. “What are you going to do about this?”

“I’ll figure something out,” he says, reaching for my bag and shoe. He looks around for the second pair and finds them under one of the chairs. “Found it!” he exclaims and returns them to me but my hands reach for something else. With his shirt open, Jake’s ripped body is open for my viewing and touching. “Careful or we’ll never leave here,” he echoes my words.

I smile, even though I can feel him withdrawing into himself again. I give him a smile of gratitude as I take my bag. I am at the door when I stop. It just feels awkward to leave it at this. “It was nice talking with you,” I try at a final remark. He looks up from arranging the files on his desk and gives me a smile and nod.

That stung, bad. But I shoulder it and leave his office trying to keep my head up. I crash into Samantha on my way out of the resort. Because of the crash, her belongings fall and I quickly bend down to help her. “I’m so sorry,” I say and stop short. Among her things is a packed shirt.

I pick it up. “Something for the husband?” I joke.

She flushes. “Running some weird errand for the boss.” She takes the shirt from me before walking off. I continue on

my way home, knowing I don't have long to freshen up and come back to work.



“THIS LIGHT WON'T WORK. It's a sunset event. As much as we want to focus on aesthetics, we need proper light.” I drop the lights into the box.

“Miss Ortiz,” Ian, one of the staff, calls for my attention. He walks over to me. “I got the materials you asked for.” He produces a bundle to me and I frown.

“This is not what I asked for. This material is too thick and it would ruin everything. And I asked for white. This is off white.” Ian flinches like I slapped him and I feel the glances of the other staff around. Then I realized how loud I was.

“Sorry about that,” Ian grumbles and leaves before I can apologize. *Crap.*

“Hey, how about a lunch break?” Tristan pops up beside me and I nearly drop the clipboard in my hand. I glare at him and he raises his hand in surrender with a smile.

I sigh; maybe that's what I need. I've been running on caffeine all day. “Lead the way.”

We head to our favorite burger joint and Tristan treats me to my usual. I bite into the food and sigh in contentment. Just what I needed. After I finish eating, I sink into my chair and pat my stomach with satisfaction. “Thank you, Tristan. I really needed that.”

He smiles at me. “No problem. It was either this or you eat one of the staff's heads,” he laughs.

I only smile back. Food is far from the reason why I am in a bad mood and though I tried to distract myself with work, my anger is sipping out. I wince when I remember what I did to Ian.

“Was I that bad?” I ask Tristan.

“If it’s bad in the sense that Ian probably hates you now, then it’s bad. But there is no need to worry; Ian is not one to hold a grudge.” Then he leans in. “Now tell me, what’s really going on?”

“I guess I’m just having a bad day.” I reach for my drink. He narrows his eyes at me. “What?”

“Forgive my language Bella, but are you fucking the boss?”

I spit out the drink, coughing loudly. He doesn’t move from his position. “Where did that come from?” I ask, aghast.

“If your heated chemistry wasn’t a dead giveaway, the noise I heard from his office last night was enough confirmation.” My face becomes hot and his face falls at the confirmation. Disappointment paints his features.

He rubs his forehead. “Truthfully, I was hurt because I thought I had a chance with you.” He shrugs and smiles at me. “What will be, will be.”

The smile does not hide the hurt in his eyes and I want to reach out and hug him, but I doubt he would appreciate that. “I’m sorry,” is all I can say and I immediately regret it. Of all the stupid things to say in this situation, I manage to pick the worst.

“Don’t be. You guys obviously feel strongly about each other. Anyone with eyes can see that.” I cough again.

“There is nothing going on between Jake and I,” I quickly say.

He raises a brow. “That’s not what it sounded like last night.”

I look down at the table as I murmur. “Last night was just another mistake.”

“Another mistake? Bella, is this some kind of affair?”

Realizing my mistake, I wave my hands at him. “No, no. Jake and I have a more complicated relationship. I can’t explain it.”

He kneads his forehead and groans. "I know I'm going to regret this later, maybe even feel pathetic. But go ahead, Bella. Explain the unexplainable."

And I do, grateful for having someone I can finally unburden this load I have been carrying around. I tell him everything. And when I am done, I feel so much lighter, though a little apprehensive at how he would react.

"So you had a one night stand with the boss without knowing he was the one, and then you proceeded to have two more one night stands in his office which you tag as mistakes." He looks to me for confirmation.

I nod. "That's pretty much it in a nutshell."

"Sounds to me like you guys are in love, but you are both just too bullheaded to realize it."

"Love is too extreme a word. I prefer attraction." He gives me a deadpan look and I look away embarrassed.

"You are definitely in love with him. The only doubt is if he feels as strongly about you as you do him." Tristan insists, "You should confess to him."

"What? And give that arrogant bastard an advantage against me?" He gives me an incredulous look. "You don't know Jake like I do. He would rather chew nails than confess he actually feels something more than irritation towards me."

"Okay," he shrugs. "Go ahead, and keep shooting in the dark and getting frustrated when you miss."

My temper spikes, not because of his words but because I know he has a point. I can't continue with this back and forth between Jake and me. One minute we are at each other's throat, and the next we are having passionate sex in his office. I can't keep up.

I return to the resort apprehensive. How the hell did I land myself in this kind of situation? I spend the rest of the day buried in work in my office so I don't notice when time flies by. A knock on my door draws my attention, and I look up to see Jake standing at my door.

“Mr. Hunt, how can I help you?”

“I noticed the lights were still on in your office.” He walks in and closes the door behind him. “Thought I’d check on you.”

I look at my watch. Sure enough, it’s past office hours. “Didn’t realize what the time was saying, sir. I’ll round up my work and close soon,” I tell him and he raises his brow at my attitude. I’m not stupid. I see the hunger in his eyes, and I know what he really wants.

He walks up to me and plants himself behind my chair. He wraps his hands around my shoulders. “You are tense,” he says, massaging my shoulders and I can feel my body responding to his touch. Suddenly, I feel his warm lips on my neck and sigh. That feels so good; I didn’t realize how much I have been craving his touch.

Swiveling my chair around to face him, he smirks at me with dark eyes. “I should help you relax.” I can’t help myself. My body reacts of its own accord and my legs willingly spread for him as he bends down to their level.



“THAT WAS AMAZING.” I collapse on top of him as we both ride out the ecstasy. Somehow I ended up straddling him on my chair with my gown raised past my waist and my panties probably under my table. He squeezes my thighs in response, too spent to say anything.

I stare at his face and smile at how they have returned to a lighter shade of blue. Few minutes ago they had been darkened by hunger.

“I love you, Jake,” I suddenly blurt out and we both go still. Knowing this could go either way I continue. “I want more than this.” I gesture between us. For a second he looks at me with such longing I expect him to confess too, but he suddenly frowns.

“Don’t do that.” He pushes me off him and it feels like I’ve been slapped. I quickly get off him and put space between us. We dress in silence, neither of us wanting to say anything. I adjust my dress and find my panties under my table.

I pack my things as Tristan’s words from earlier keep ringing in my head.

“Keep shooting in the dark...”

“Do you need a ride back home?” I look up to see him waiting for me at my doorway. Before I can refuse he adds, “It’s pretty late and getting a cab home might be hard from here.”

I have no choice but to accept. The car ride is silent, unsaid words lingering between us. We soon reach my apartment complex and I reach for the door but his words stop me.

“Miss Ortiz.” First name basis is gone now, isn’t it?

I know I shouldn’t, but I stay back. “Let me guess, you already have a million and one reasons why we can’t work.” I look at him. “Did you use the ride here to put together your points?”

He grunts and I give him a sad smile. “Your biggest fear is probably Jessica and that bugged me to no end too Jake, but I can’t deny what I feel for you.”

“This, what is going on between us, should not be happening.” He starts and my face falls. “Jessica isn’t the only factor coming between us. I am your boss with over a ten year difference in our age, and the scandal could ruin my business.” He turns to me and I look away so he doesn’t see the tears brimming in my eyes. “There are too many reasons why we shouldn’t be together and it would not be a logical thing to insist on this, whatever this is between us.”

I keep my gaze out the car window. “I would appreciate it if we both avoided each other from now on, Mr. Hunt.” I immediately reach for the door and as calmly as I can muster, walk away. I walk into my apartment complex shoulders high.

CHAPTER 14

JAKE

It's been three days since that night. Three torturous days of me missing her presence. I thought it best to give her space and I have never regretted a decision as much as I do right now. My mind flashes back to that night and I am riddled by guilt. I would probably feel better if she just gave me a damn reaction. Rave and hit me, call me names, anything but this deafening silence she is giving me.

I know why I rejected her and I know it was the right thing to do, but that doesn't stop the horrible feeling in my stomach or how much I wish she was here so I can bury my face in her neck. She has the most amazing smell.

I shake my head in a lame attempt to clear my thoughts. I am in my office, staring blankly at my computer screen. Today is Harry and Cecilia's rehearsal dinner and Bella is supposed to have submitted a report on the budget for the event. I had sent her a message asking for it.

There is a knock on my door and I sit up. "Come in."

Samantha walks in and my shoulders slump. "Miss Ortiz's report on the rehearsal dinner, sir." She drops the file on my table.

"Why didn't she submit it herself?" I ask, irritated. Samantha shrugs.

I wave her away, impatiently. She seems to give me a sympathetic look before walking out of my office. The thought of her being just outside my office and not coming in aggravates me.

I leave the office early so I can get changed for the dinner. Truthfully, I do not feel like going for it and having to watch Bella ignore me all night, but as Harry's best man, I don't have much of a choice in the matter.

By the time I return to the resort, the sun is already setting. The dinner is being held at the main hall so I head there. The minute I step inside a smile plays on my face. Bella outdid herself. The place looks amazing. I don't even recognize my own hall anymore. The guests have already arrived and I can feel the excitement in the hall.

"Jake!" Harry exclaims and hugs me. What's got him so excited?

He gestures around the hall. "Look at this place! Bella outdid herself. And to top it all, my bride is stunning."

Bella walks in and I suddenly have a different opinion than him. She is in a simple black dress, which stops just above her knees; her hair is packed up in a rough bun with little ringlets framing her face. She turns around and I grunt. The back drops low, stopping on her waist. That's too low in my opinion and the thought of anyone having access to her back like that does not sit well with me at all.

Cecilia walks up to her and hugs her. She starts chatting with Bella excitedly and I smile at how she gives Cecilia her full attention. Not many people can please Cecilia and I'm proud of Bella for getting this far.

"If you were not so bullheaded this would have been a different scene," Harry says beside me and I turn to him to see him watching Bella and Cecilia too. "We'd probably both be watching our women with adoration and contentment."

Cecilia catches sight of us and waves. Harry returns it, and I notice how Bella's face falls when she looks in our direction. She says something to Cecilia and leaves.

For the rest of the night I follow Harry around, greeting people. But I notice every single thing Bella does. The way her hips sway as she walks, the slight frown on her face as she tries to make sure the evening runs smoothly.

We soon take our seats for dinner and Harry gets up to make a toast. "I'm really excited to see so many friendly faces and appreciate you making time to celebrate with my soon-to-be wife and I. I'll be marrying the absolute love of my life soon and I couldn't ask for better people to experience this moment with." He raises his glass and everyone else does too.

Throughout the dinner I don't see Bella and though I know she is working behind the scenes, I don't feel comfortable that she's doing it in that dress. Having her bare back open for the entire male staff to see or accidentally touch. She was already drawing the attention of the guys here, without the dress; I can only imagine their minds racing when they see her strutting around all night in that damn dress.

I stab my food a little too hard and hear someone wince beside me. It's Cecilia's cousin. I've forgotten her name, and she has been trying to make conversation with me all night.

"What did the food ever do to you other than look delicious," she tries at a joke and I don't laugh. I know her interest in me goes beyond just best man and bridesmaid duties.

"You keep frowning like that and you might have wrinkles on the wedding day." She takes a sip of wine from her glass, all the while maintaining eye contact through her lashes. If only she knew she was the last person on my mind.

By the end of the dinner I am so pissed, I could drive my fist through the wall. And the source of my frustration is nowhere to be found. She was in and out of the hall all through the dinner, giving all the men in the room a proper view of her shape and bare back. My temper boils as I remember the lecherous stares from the men.

Not finding her in the kitchen, I head to her office. Her office door is slightly opened and I'm about to push it further when I hear voices and stop.

"With a face like yours, I could stare all night long and not get tired," a man says and she actually laughs.

“That’s one of the lamest pick up lines I have ever heard,” she says.

“You blushed though,” he says, and I lean further.

A bit of silence then. “Maybe,” she whispers. I see red. She is blushing for some random man she just met? Without thinking, I open the door and walk in. Thankfully, she is on the other side of her table far away from the pervert.

They both turn in my direction and I watch with glee as the man’s face falls from being distracted. “Am I interrupting something?” I ask, trying to play innocent.

“No, not at all. I was just leaving,” the man says before dropping a card on Bella’s table. “Call me, I would love for you to plan my mother’s birthday.”

She smiles at him and I watch as she takes the card.

“Nice resort,” he says as he passes me in the doorway. I reply by shutting the door in his face.

I turn to Bella and she is avoiding my eyes. She picks up her bag before finally looking at me. “Yes, Mr. Hunt?” she puts on this stoic face that I’m unable to read.

“Philandering with the guests is highly unprofessional. On top of that, you cannot take contracts outside of the resort because of clashing interests. I would advise that you do not contact that man,” I explode on her and watch her temper spike with each word.

She looks ready to explode, but she takes a deep breath before saying calmly, “I understand your concern and have no intention of contacting Gregory...for work purposes.”

“But you will contact him?”

“I cannot comply with your first point because what I do in my personal time is none of your business.” She glares at me with so much venom, but I am too angry to notice.

“I didn’t realize you move on that fast, Miss Ortiz. Here I thought you were a woman with integrity.” The hurt on her face has me regretting my words immediately.

“Get out of my office,” she snaps and I hesitate, wanting to take back my words. “Get out!” she yells, and I leave defeated.



I SCRUB my face for the umpteenth time. I am in my office and blankly staring at a paper. She just would not get out of my head. I had spent the whole of last night and early this morning going over our conversation last night. And I fucked up big time.

It's just the thought of another man having her makes me livid. I realized how two-faced my actions were but I know if given another chance, I'd react the same way, maybe just without the hurtful words.

I also realized that I was in love with Bella and could not imagine spending my life without her or her spending the rest of her life with some other man.

There is a knock on my door and I look up. Samantha pops her head in. “I thought I'd remind you of your meeting sir. You have about an hour.”

I curse, and quickly get up. The meeting is scheduled to be held outside and I am grateful for that. Maybe some air would help me clear my head. I am walking out of the resort with Samantha when I see Bella with Tristan. Another thorn in my side.

They are holding cups of coffee and chatting animatedly. I don't like how she is smiling at him. They are walking towards us and she still hasn't noticed me, or maybe she doesn't want to. The events of last night flash through my head and I wince. *Maybe it's for the best if she doesn't notice me.*

“Boss,” Tristan nods his head in greeting when they near us.

She doesn't say anything. She doesn't even glance at me.

Without thinking, I stop and look back at them; her stoic face of a few minutes ago has been replaced by that bright

smile again.

“Mr. Hunt,” Samantha draws my attention back and I turn to her. “The meeting?”

Right. I start walking and she follows closely behind. We are almost at the entrance of the resort when I stop, growling lowly I turn back heading straight for Bella’s office. She is in her office with Tristan.

“Excuse us,” I tell him, but it comes out as a growl. He immediately jumps up and scuttles out of the room.

“What!” she snaps at me when I turn to her.

I open my mouth, ready with a reply. But my shoulders slump in defeat. “I’m sorry. The things I said were uncalled for,” I say and she responds with a look of surprise. “I was just really angry and jealous.” I turn around and leave before she can reply.

Samantha and I are in my car, on our way to the meeting when she sighs. “I know it’s not my place to intrude but considering what you have done for me, I can’t just sit back and watch you hurt.”

“Samantha,” I warn her and she sighs again.

“I’m sorry, forget I said anything.” Her words are bland so I can’t tell her emotions from her tone.

There is silence at first and I begin to feel guilty. “I just don’t want to talk about it,” I tell her.

“When have you ever wanted to talk about anything,” she grumbles and I glance at her in shock. “Let’s be honest, you always keep your emotions locked up and throw yourself into work as a distraction. But I’ve known you long enough now to be able to tell when something is not right with you.”

“You are intruding, Samantha.”

“Because I’m worried about you,” she snaps. “You are a good man and you deserve to be happy.”

“What do you think would give me happiness?” I decide to indulge her.

“Pushing her away is definitely not the way,” she tells me and I scoff.

I grip the steering wheel. I want her so bad, yet I can't have her.

CHAPTER 15

BELLA

“*I*’m sorry. The things I said were uncalled for. I was just really angry and jealous.”

I stare at his retreating figure in shock. What the hell was that?! I suddenly yell in frustration. Jake is driving me crazy!

There is a knock at my door and Tristan comes in. “What happened?”

“I don’t know,” I whine. “One minute he is yelling at me in jealousy, next minute he is as docile as a puppy begging for forgiveness.” I gesticulate as I talk.

Tristan strokes his chin, thinking. “I have concluded that your boss is currently going through emotional confusion.”

I look at him, perplexed. “What is that supposed to mean?”

He smiles at me. “He is slowly realizing how he feels about you. He is going to confess his feelings soon. Give it time.”

I remember his words from the other night. “I don’t want him confessing feelings,” I growl. “I’d rather chew nails.”

He gives me an incredulous look. “I found you in this office, eyes bloodshot and looking like you’d lost something precious.”

“Don’t throw it in my face,” I snap at him and he raises an eyebrow. “I did lose something, my pride. Jake can go to hell for all I care.”

“Is that last statement a reassurance for you or for me?” I glare at him and he raises his hand in surrender.

“I’m going to tell him, just watch,” I tell Tristan and he gives me a patronizing smile, nodding. “I mean it. I don’t want him in my life anymore.”

Chalking it off as bumbling rubbish, I let Tristan lead me round the resort handing out the cups of coffee I brought to the employees. It’s my own silent way of appreciating them for their efforts and apologizing for my attitude yesterday.

With Jake outside the resort I am able to breathe freely. By the end of the day, I have worked myself into a better mood. But that doesn’t last long as Samantha knocks on my door when I am packing up to leave. She walks in holding a pack and proceeds to drop it on my table.

“It’s an appreciation package from the boss for a job well done. Quick, open it,” she gushes.

I give her a perplexed look but decide to indulge her. It’s just a chocolate cake, but what catches my attention is the little note sticking out of the cake.

I FUCKED UP

Let me make up for it with cake.

“JAKE DIDN’T WRITE this note. It was you, wasn’t it?!”

She flushes, confirming my suspicion. “Well, be that as it may. I think it’s the thought that counts.”

I narrow my eyes at her. I thought she was smarter than this. She should know better than to support the devil, especially who is confused about his feelings.

“He got this himself though.” She drops a single flower that I hadn’t realized she was holding. “He picked it out himself.”

It’s the African Violet. I am forced to smile at the thoughtfulness.

“Thank you,” I tell her, packing it up.

She smiles at me and leaves. I stare at the flower and note, and my heart skips.

Pushing the pack aside I bid my time. Night time seems to always be when we have our tiffs, so I wait till after office hours, when I'm sure Samantha will have left. I smile when I see his office light is on from afar. Jake's work ethics never disappoint.

I am going to set things straight tonight.

I'm almost at the door when Samantha steps out. I freeze.

She smiles at me and gestures at the door. "I'm leaving now. He is all yours."

She leaves me standing in front of Jake's door. What was that about?

Still myself, I walk into his office without knocking but this time Jake gives me a bland look. He looks tired and I almost want to comfort him.

"Miss Ortiz," he sits up. "How can I help you? Did you need something?" His sudden care makes me uncomfortable.

"I...I," what the hell is wrong with me?

"You should sit down," he gestures at the seat in front of him.

"No, I'm fine. I'll just stay here."

He raises a brow. "Is something wrong?"

I take a deep breath. "I thought about it and you are right. There is nothing going on between us and nothing should happen between us. So this is me taking matters into my own hands." I walk up to his table and drop the paper. "That's my resignation letter. This isn't going to be Daxton all over again." He doesn't give me a reaction and I take that as an acceptance. I turn around and leave.

I walk back to my office and pick up my bag. I look around the office. There is no personal artifact to hold onto here.

I walk out absentmindedly. I should probably tell Jessica about this and just go ahead and let her know what has been going on between Jake and I. I feel apprehensive just wondering what her reaction would be.

I let my legs lead the way and find myself on the beach. I smile slightly. This was where it all started. I had somehow managed to fall for my arch nemesis and boss here. I sit on the sand, not caring about my skirt and sigh deeply. It's a wonder how I somehow manage to be so unlucky in love, and end up falling so deeply in love with men who don't want me.

I suddenly scream into the wind. I stop, and then scream again, letting my frustration and tears go.

“Fuck you, Jake! Fuck you, Daxton! Screw you all!” The rushing wind swallows my words but I keep screaming, “I am more than enough you fuckers. Y'all are just too blind to see it and as a matter of fact not worthy enough!”

I let my pain wash over me in waves. I keep screaming as I search for relief, and when that doesn't work I start beating the sand with my fist. Imagining it as Jake's hair, I grab the sand and throw it around. “You think you are the only one with dashing black hair? I've seen better!”

“That is not how you speak about your boss,” I hear someone growl behind me and whip around to see Jake glowering at me.

“Fortunately, I quit a few minutes ago. And now I can happily say fuck you, Jake! You are an asshole with a heart as hard as stone and I hope you never find someone better than me!”

He stalks towards me and I am forced to take a step back as he steps right up to my face. The way he looks at me, in the most menacing manner possible, I half expect him to hit me. He looks away, closing his eyes before talking. His voice is oddly calm for someone who looked ready to kill just now.

“One, you cannot quit without a proper notice, Miss Ortiz. Two, you are in the middle of organizing an event and cannot abandon an unfinished project. These were all stated as your

terms of working in your employment letter, but if you insist on leaving then we will meet in court.”

“Fuck you, Jake!” I hit his chest in frustration. He doesn’t stop me and I pummel him.

When I am out of breath, I let my head fall on his chest from exhaustion. I’m too tired to even cry and I am reduced to sniffles.

Jake’s hands suddenly come around me and he starts rubbing soothing circles on my back. “Your constant change of mood is giving me whiplash,” I tell him and he chuckles.

“I intend to act on my threat, Miss Ortiz, but not for the reason you think.” He lifts my chin so I am looking at him. “I want you by my side at all times and will absolutely lose it if you leave me.”

I frown in confusion. “I thought you couldn’t wait to get rid of me.”

He sighs. “I’m scared, Bella. I’m scared of getting hurt again. But I’m more scared of losing you.”

“What are you saying, Jake?” I want to hear him say it.

He grips my face in his palm. “Bella, I want to give us a try. You are the best thing that has happened to me in years.”

He dips his head and captures my lips in a passionate kiss. The shock makes me breathless. Unlike before, this kiss is slow and I savor every moment.

He pulls back and looks at me with so much adoration. “Please don’t leave me. I would lose my mind.”

CHAPTER 16

JAKE

*J*raise a brow. “Is something wrong?”

She takes a deep breath. “I thought about it and you are right. There is nothing going on between us and nothing should happen between us. So this is me taking matters into my own hands.” She walks up to my table and drops the paper. “That’s my resignation letter. This isn’t going to be Daxton all over again.”

I silently stare at her as she turns around and leaves. She is leaving me and I can’t do anything about it. *Can’t do or won’t do?*

Exclaiming in frustration, I run after her. I check her office, but she isn’t there, so I rush to the entrance of the resort. She couldn’t have gotten that far. I call her, but it goes straight to voicemail.

“Bella, don’t leave me. I’m coming for you.” I hop into my car and race to her apartment. Thanks to the employee file, I know her address and I don’t have to spend time looking for her door. But when I get there, the door is locked and no one answers. *Where could she have possibly gone?*

I drive around town, but I am still unable to find her. I reluctantly give up after a while of driving and calling without any result. I return to the resort, defeated.

Feeling forlorn, I walk towards the beach. As I get close, I hear yelling and pick up my pace. Relief and curiosity flood me. Relief at the fact that I found Bella, and curiosity at her choice of words.

“Fuck you, Jake! Fuck you, Daxton! Screw you all! I am more than enough you fuckers. Y’all are just too blind to see it and as a matter of fact not worthy enough!”

I raise my brow. Is she this broken over me? The thought makes me uncomfortable and angry. And since she is the only one present, I take it out on her.

“That is not how you speak about your boss,” I growl behind her.

“Fortunately, I quit a few minutes ago,” she snaps back at me, “And now I can happily say fuck you, Jake! You are an asshole with a heart as hard as stone and I hope you never find someone better than me!”

I cannot find someone better because I pick you. But I don’t say that. Instead, I stalk towards her and place myself directly in front of her. Dirty thoughts on how to punish her ring through my mind and I have to look away or I might act on them.

“One, you cannot quit without a proper notice, Miss Ortiz. Two, you are in the middle of organizing an event and cannot abandon an unfinished project. These were all stated as your terms of working in your employment letter, but if you insist on leaving then we will meet in court.” Her eyes blaze at the threat.

“Fuck you, Jake!” She hits my chest and I don’t stop her till she is out of breath. Her head falls on my chest from exhaustion as she silently snuffles.

My hand slowly comes around her and I start rubbing soothing circles on her back. “Your constant change of mood is giving me whiplash,” she says and I chuckle.

“I intend to act on my threat, Miss Ortiz, but not for the reason you think.” I lift her chin and look into her eyes, my anger immediately fades away. “I want you by my side at all times and will absolutely lose it if you leave me,” I say without hesitation.

She frowns. “I thought you couldn’t wait to get rid of me.”

“I’m scared, Bella. I’m scared of getting hurt again. But I’m more scared of losing you.” I can feel reason banging against my words in my head but I’m past being logical. Logic won’t get me through my nights of regrets.

“What are you saying, Jake?” She raises her brow at me.

I grip her face in my palm. She is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. “Bella, I love you. You are the best thing that has happened to me in years.” I emphasize every word before kissing her. Slowly, I savor her taste. Telling her with my actions what my words cannot express. She moans into my mouth and I grip her tighter, deepening the kiss.

I pull back so I can look at her. “Please don’t leave me. I would lose my mind.”



I STARE at my watch for the umpteenth time and groan. Where is she?

I am waiting for Bella, my girlfriend. The thought of it brings a smile to my face. I thought I was too old for a girlfriend.

We have been dating for only a week now, but it has been the happiest week of my life. I felt it best to keep our relationship under wraps so as to avoid office gossip and though she does not fully accept it, she agreed to it. Besides, we are still in the honeymoon phase and I want to enjoy it to the fullest.

Samantha figured out about our relationship without me telling her and has been giving me weird smiles since then. Maybe it’s my sudden cheerful mood that gave me away. Even the other staff have commented on how happy I look. Tristan has said nothing other than give me weird looks he thinks I don’t notice.

Bella finally comes out of the resort but is busy typing on her phone. She barely glances at me when she reaches me. I

smile at her. Only Bella would pick a fight in a relationship that is only one week old.

“Are you going to just stare at me or open the door?” She gestures at the car door and I oblige her, opening the car door with a mock bow. I drive out of the resort, letting Bella take her time with her phone. I know it’s an act to show that she is still angry and where I would normally find that annoying, it is beyond cute and I can’t stop smiling at how adorable she looks pouting at her phone.

“I was thinking we could get something fancy. There is this new restaurant a friend of mine just opened and I would love to check it out,” I finally break the silence. “You’ve been working so hard lately and I think you deserve a treat to calm you down.”

With Harry and Cecilia’s wedding just two days away, she has been on her toes to make sure everything is perfect for the bride.

She scoffs. “I’ve been so busy, yet I still find time to call you.”

Bella is angry because I forgot to call her last night. She had called to check on me and because I was swamped with work I had promised to call her back when I was done but forgot. I was too tired and had gone straight to bed that night.

I had explained it all to her, and her reply was, “If you start forgetting to call me at the start of the relationship, how are you going to be in the future.”

I had been thrilled about the fact that she saw a future with us and had not taken her anger seriously till she came to work today and sulked in her office all day. I do not appreciate people bringing their personal issues into the office environment, but it had been so cute watching her avoid me all day.

“How can I make it up to you?” I ask her, already running out of options.

“Why don’t we order in?” she asks, and I quickly glance at her. *Is she serious?*

Since we started dating, Bella has refused to come over to my place and refused to let me sleep over too. Something about not wanting our relationship to be all about sex, seeing as it all started with sex. I just want to be as close to her as possible.

“My place or yours,” I say, not one to miss an opportunity.

She shrugs. “You choose.”

I head straight for my place.

“Fancy,” Bella says as I drive into my apartment complex’s car park. We take the elevator to the penthouse and Bella looks at me. “I didn’t know you stay in a penthouse.”

I shrug. “There is a lot you don’t know about me.” I drop my keys on the table and loose the knot of my tie. “But we are going to change that.” I walk up to her and pull her close to me by her waist. I lean down to kiss her when she places her hand between us.

“We haven’t ordered out and I need a bath. So please show me to your bathroom and while I bathe, I want you to order Chinese take-out. Maybe then I will consider forgiving you.”

I smile. “Whatever you say, ma’am.” I’ve got it bad. She could be cursing me out and I would still think she looks adorable. I lead her to the bathroom and place a shirt and pair of shorts on the bed for her. Then I do as she said and order Chinese take-out.

By the time she comes out of the bathroom, the food has arrived and I have a movie ready. Knowing how bullheaded Bella can be, I have accepted that I won’t be getting any action tonight. But just in case, I made sure the movie we are to watch is a romance story with enough sex scenes.

She steps out in my clothes and I am thrown back to our first night together.

She sits down beside me on the floor where I have laid out a blanket and I put my arms around her, bringing her close to me. She smells like me, I notice as I bury my face in her neck.

“I’m hungry,” she says, pulling away from me to grab the food.

“So, you choose food over me,” I joke with her and she gives me a look before slurping on noodles.

“Anytime, any day,” she says, with her mouth full.

I turn to the television and start the movie. It unfortunately does not have the desired effect because Bella dozes off barely fifteen minutes into the movie. And with no one to watch with me, I lose interest in the movie and turn it off. I carry Bella to my room where I contentedly lay down with her as she reacts to my touch and cuddles up to me. Life seems almost perfect now, like nothing could go wrong.



I WAKE up the next day, giddy from having spent the night with her. I call Samantha to tell her I might not be coming into work today, my not coming being heavily dependent on whether my starved ass gets any action today. I know that most of the preparation for the wedding has been finalized so it won’t harm anyone if Bella also takes the day off.

“Will Miss Ortiz also not be coming in today?” she asks and I can already see the smirk on her face.

“Seems like it. Something about the stress getting to her,” I reply and hear her scoff. I decide to make her breakfast in bed for a start. I am in the kitchen preparing pancakes because that is the only food where I can boast of my skilled expertise.

I return to my room with a stack of pancakes and orange juice. I don’t have much in my kitchen since I rarely cook. Dropping the food by her side, I kiss her on the cheek and she sighs in her sleep.

“You are late for work, Miss Ortiz,” I whisper into her ear and her eyes flutter open. She gives me a confused look.

“What?” She looks adorable.

“You are excused. Don’t worry; the boss is a very understanding man.” I bring the food closer to her and watch joy replace the sleep in her eyes.

She sits up and drags the food closer to her before giving me a weird look. “You shouldn’t talk about yourself like that. You are far from an understanding boss.”

“You wound me, Miss Ortiz,” I tell her and she scoffs, taking a bite of the pancake and moaning in satisfaction. “You like it?” She nods happily and I smile.

She suddenly perks up. “I can’t take a day off. Harry and Cecilia’s wedding is the day after tomorrow.”

“And you have worked so hard in preparation for the day. A day off won’t harm you.” She considers it and shrugs, going back to her food.

“Anything happens, I’m telling Cecilia it was your fault.” She points her fork at me. I smile in acceptance, though I hope nothing goes wrong. Coming face to face with that raging Bridezilla is the last thing I want to experience.

“So what do you want to do today? You have my full attention for the entire day,” I tell her and she narrows her eyes at me.

“If this is your way of making up for the other night,” she intensifies her glare and leans towards my face, “you are forgiven.” She leans away and gives me a bright smile before going back to her food. I laugh at her comical attempt.

“So what do you want to do?” I ask again.

“I would really love it if we could just stay indoors.” She looks at me for approval and I nod.

“For today, whatever you say goes.”

Bella spends most of the morning sleeping in. I had no idea anyone could sleep this long. I use the time she is sleeping to go through some pending files I had not had the time to look at.

“Don’t tell me you are working,” I hear her say beside me and I turn towards her. She rubs her eyes and glares at me

from her position on the bed. “You need a new hobby.”

I bend down and kiss her forehead. “Good afternoon, sleepy head.” I emphasize the time of the day and she rolls her eyes.

“Let’s watch a movie or something. Anything to get you away from those papers.” She gets off the bed and stretches. “But first I’ve got to freshen up.” She takes a whiff of her breath and grimaces.

“There is an extra toothbrush and every other thing in the bathroom,” I tell her and she heads in that direction. “We could continue the movie we started yesterday,” I say hopefully. We had not even gotten to the good part before she dozed off.

“Not happening,” she says as she opens the bathroom door. “I know that movie. Don’t think I don’t know what you were trying to do, Mr. Hunt.”

We end up watching some rom-com that has Bella laughing and me cringing at the stupid things people do for love. She likes the movie so much we end up watching part two. I already wanted out at the start of part one.

After the movie, I look outside to see the sun setting. “How about a midnight stroll? I know this really good barbeque joint.”

She gives me a perplexed look. “You always came off as the obsessive healthy eater to me.”

“I can give a full speech on the dangers of openly grilled meat, but I seem to remember you used to have quite the thing for them.”

“I still do.” She gives me a bright smile.

At the restaurant, Bella’s face lights up and she happily orders their spiciest meat available. I order a cup of water.

“You used to have this exact same look on your face on barbeque day.” I smile at the memory.

“And you used to have a look of disdain on your face whenever I scarfed down more than my portion of meat.”

I shrug as her order arrives, but she is not paying attention to me again. With a mixture of horror and adoration, I watch my petite girlfriend finish something that would make me turn red from just a bite. She washes it all down with a cup of milk and smiles at me. “Been a while since I did that. Thank you.”

“Whatever makes you happy,” I say with another shrug.

She eyes my glass of water. “Aren’t you hungry?”

“I am, but meat is not what I want to eat.” I give her a suggestive look and she flushes.

“How about mac and cheese? I’ll cook,” she says quickly, and I laugh.

“Okay, Bella. If that’s all you are offering.” She narrows her eyes at me and I raise my brow at her in challenge.

She suddenly perks up. “What about lasagna? I know this bad ass recipe. You’d love it. I promise.”

We head to the grocery store from the restaurant and Bella has me pushing the cart while she picks out the ingredients. “We should get ice cream too for dessert.” She gives me a bright smile as she drops a tub of ice cream in the cart. That is definitely for her.

I pick up two more tubs. “Just in case,” I say and she quickly turns around, but not before I catch the blush on her face. She continues to shop for the ingredients and I continue to drop little hints of invitation into the cart. I even pick up some tampons and some ladies not far from us giggle.

We return to my place and she gets to work in the kitchen while I am contented to sit at the counter and watch her bustle around the place like it’s hers.

Once she places the lasagna into the oven, she stretches. “I could really go for a bath and some ice-cream right now.”

“Why don’t you freshen up and I’ll handle the ice cream.” She gives me a smile of gratitude before heading in the direction of my room.

I take the tub out of the freezer and grab a bowl, when I suddenly freeze. The soft sound of my door clicking shut,

alerting me to an intruder. I am not expecting anybody and only a few people whom I can count on one hand know the code to my house. Slowly reaching for a knife, I creep towards the living room door as I listen for footsteps. This person is being careful to walk silently.

Carefully turning at the entrance to my living room, I lift my hand above my head, ready to attack when the knife clatters down at the sight of the person in front of me. Is that, Stephanie?

She eyes my weapon before waving. "Hello, Jake. Long time, no see."

CHAPTER 17

BELLA

As I step out of the bathroom, I hear voices and give the bedroom door a curious look. Jake never said anything about anyone coming over.

I quickly dress and walk out of the bedroom. I follow the sound to the living room.

“It’s been quite a while. You look good,” I hear a woman’s voice and pick up speed. She does not sound like Jessica or any other female I might know. I walk into quite a peculiar scene, a woman dressed in a plain white pantsuit and shockingly red lipstick is standing some distance away from Jake and he on his part looks ready to kill.

Her eyes dart to me immediately. I walk in and narrow. “Hello.” She smiles at me and I respond with a raised brow. She turns to Jake. “Last I heard, you were single. This must be new.”

“You should leave,” Jake growls and I look up at the ferocity in his voice. *What the hell is going on?*

The woman surprisingly holds her own against Jake’s glare, matching it with one of her own. “I didn’t come to see you. I came because of Marilyn. Her health is getting worse.”

I look between Jake and the woman. The way Jake stiffens at the mention of that name makes me uncomfortable. Who is this woman that can elicit such powerful reactions from Jake?

“You promised you would take care of her like she is your own. Yet you are too busy to come and see her,” she tells him with as much venom as Jake’s words earlier.

“You could have dropped a message,” Jake says.

“I wanted to see you,” she replies casually. “But it seems you are quite the busy man.” She eyes me from head to toe and I suddenly feel self-conscious in Jake’s clothes.

Jake sighs and bends down to pick up a knife off the floor. “I’ll see you at my office tomorrow. In the meantime, get out of my house, Stephanie.”

My eyes widen slightly at the mention of her name. I’ve heard that name in the same sentence as Jake’s floating around at the resort. I look at her. She is the infamous Stephanie.

Stephanie scoffs. “She must be important for you to kick me out.” She picks up her bag and turns to the door. “I’ll see you at your office, sir, so we can discuss your sick daughter.” I hear the sarcasm in her voice and see Jake flinch at her words. I can feel myself getting jealous. I have never been able to affect Jake as much as this woman did in a few minutes with just her words.

Jake returns to the kitchen quietly and I follow him. He drops the knife on the counter with a sigh. I almost want to drop it because of how torn he looks. But I need answers. “Care to explain what just happened?” I raise my brow at him.

“No.” His words hit me like a ton of bricks. He is shutting me out. His expression is guarded and his body tense.

Jake picks up a bowl next to the ice cream tub, but it slips from his grip and shatters on the floor. He curses and bends down to pick up the pieces and curses again. He straightens himself, gripping his hand and I see blood.

I quickly grab his hand and guide him to the bathroom and he lets me. I put his hand under running water to clear the blood. He winces but doesn’t say anything. Reaching for the first aid bag in the drawer, I access the damage first. “It’s not that deep,” I mumble to myself then open the bag.

I clean the wound in silence, both of us lost in our thoughts. I want to know how important this woman is to Jake

and why Jake never told me he has a daughter. Though, in his defense, we did just start dating a week ago.

“I can tell your mind is running a mile a minute.” He lifts my chin so he can stare at me. “What do you want to know?”

Not wanting to overwhelm him with questions, I start with the most important one. “You never told me you had a daughter.”

“Because I don’t.” His voice is tense. “Marilyn isn’t mine, though I love her like she is my own. She is Stephanie’s child with a former comrade of mine who died.”

“But she is your ex,” I say and immediately regret how stupid my question is. I hide my blushing face by bending my head to focus on cleaning his wound. I press down a little too hard and he winces.

“Pedro was in the navy like me and died in action. Stephanie was his wife and Marilyn their daughter. When he died, I took up the responsibility of taking care of them because of my loyalty to my friend. Along the way, Stephanie and I fell in love so I asked her to marry me which she accepted. That blissful happiness didn’t last though because a day before our wedding, Stephanie walked out on me with only a note, telling me she wasn’t ready to move on from Pedro.”

“Then why are you still in contact with her and taking care of her daughter,” I say as I place a small bandage on the cleaned wound. “Because I still owe it to Pedro, and I know Stephanie does not make enough to handle all of Marilyn’s health bills. She has severe asthma.”

I hum in understanding. “It sure seems like to me she is very interested in you now.”

He chuckles. “You have nothing to worry about.” He cups my chin with his undamaged hand and pulls my face up to look at him. “I only have eyes for you.”

As much as his words make my heart flutter, I can’t shake the bad feeling in my stomach.



I RESUME WORK the next day, apprehensive. No matter what Jake says, I know Stephanie still affects him. It was so obvious yesterday. After our talk in the bathroom, we tried to eat dinner together, but Jake was so out of it. He was distant. I had to leave when my insecurity started kicking in. Even when he called to check on me, I felt uncomfortable and kept our conversation brief.

I head for Tristan's office, wanting his advice on the new development. I open the door and stop. Stephanie is sitting opposite him, laughing at something he said.

"Bella," Tristan says when he sees me. His eyes dart to Stephanie before turning back to me. "Did you need something?"

"You work here?" Stephanie says before I can reply to Tristan. She chuckles. "This is rich. I thought Jake had such unbending rules."

"I guess he liked me enough to break his own rules," I tell her, narrowing my eyes at her tone. I do not like this woman. She poses a threat to Jake and I, and she seems to know that. She smirks at my words.

She gets up and walks towards me, still standing at the door. "I'm going to Jake now," she says, and I am forced to step aside.

I slam the door shut at her retreating back and turn to glare at Tristan. I know he didn't do anything wrong, but I am angry.

"That was intense. What was that?" he exclaims.

"The old met the new," I say as I sit down in the chair she just vacated. I narrow my eyes at him. "Why didn't you tell me about her or her child?"

"Because it wasn't my story to tell," he says, like it should be obvious and my anger deflates. I know he is right. I should be asking Jake that question or Jessica. She would know everything.

Getting up, I leave Tristan's office and head for mine. I'm trying hard to restrain myself from barging into Jake's office.

I am trying to distract myself with work when there is a knock on my door. Without waiting for a reply, Stephanie walks in. She looks around the office. "This is nice, perks of dating the boss."

I stare at her as she takes the seat in front of me. She gives me a sly smile. "We got off on the wrong foot." She stretches her hand towards me. "I'm Stephanie, Jake's ex."

I take her hand and try at a smile. "I got a little ahead of myself. Sorry about that. I'm Bella."

"Jake's current girlfriend," she completes for me, and I smile at her. "This is nice. Whoever said the ex and the current could never get along." *If you keep calling me his current I doubt we will.* But I just offer her another smile.

"I hear you are the head of the new department, event management?" she asks and I nod in affirmation. "Getting a promotion on your first day, that's nice. Jake is more of a work for it kinda guy. It's quite surprising the things he let you get away with."

"I assure you my position was duly earned."

She gives me a patronizing smile and nods. "I'm sure you did. You are quite young though. Let me guess. You are probably still in your twenties."

I raise my brow at her words.

"I'm right, aren't I? Oh, that's quite young. Bagging a managerial position in your twenties, Jake is so nice."

I'm a bitch when I want to be, so I can tell when someone is in bitch mode. "Jake is one to give honor to whom it is due, so I guess he saw something in me he didn't see in anyone else. I'm going to have to cut you short, Stephanie. I have a lot to deal with." I gesture at my table which has papers scattered around it.

She smiles at me. "I'll leave you to it then." She gets up and walks out, closing the door behind her. My smile drops the

minute she walks out. I immediately call Jessica. “Hey, want to meet for lunch?”

We meet at a café. It is a bit far from the resort but I came because I really need to talk to her.

“I have something to get off my chest, Jessica,” I start and she looks up from her cake. She is making me pay for it because apparently Malcolm would know she had sweets if she pays for it herself.

“Go on, honey,” she urges me, stuffing her face with cake.

I exhale. “Were Jake and his ex really that in love before she broke it off?” I ask.

She gives me a perplexed look. “Well he was really in love with her, that much I know and it broke him when she left.”

“You never mentioned he still takes care of her daughter.” It almost sounds like I am accusing her.

Her eyes widen in shock. “I didn’t know that.” Of course Jake would not mention that to anyone.

“Why the sudden questions about Jake and Stephanie?”

I look down at the table. “Because I am in love with him.” She is silent for a while and I look up slightly. “Jessica?”

“What about Tristan? We had an entire conversation about him.”

“I wasn’t talking about Tristan then,” I say quietly and go back to staring at the table.

“Oh,” she says as realization dawns on her. “They do say there is a thin line between hate and love.” I look up at her words.

“I love you, Jessica. I really do. But I also love Jake.”

“It’s that deep already?”

“We haven’t gotten around to saying it yet, but I know what I feel for him.”

She stares at me like I have grown two heads before exclaiming, “When did this all start!?”

I tell her everything, starting from the very beginning. I watch her eyes get wider as I tell everything Jake and I did. “I know I should have said something but I was ashamed, then scared of your reaction.”

She reaches out and grabs my hand. “Truthfully, Bella, I find it a bit weird that you are into my brother, but I am more interested in your happiness than anything.”

“Really?” I ask her, unsure.

She smiles. “Sure. If it’s my bullheaded brother who turns you on and it sounds like he does that a lot, then by all means.”

I smile at her. “I’m glad I got that off my chest. Every time I saw you, my guilt intensified.”

“You should feel guilty for keeping this from me for so long. But why were you asking about Stephanie?”

So I start another story and she listens with rapt attention. “The jealous ex has come to drive a wedge between the lovers. Sounds like the perfect romance story.”

“It’s more than jealousy, Jessica. She just rubs me the wrong way.”

She gives me a look. “If Jake loves you, he will stick with only you. And quite frankly, I think he is better off without her.”

“I was there, Jessica. She still affects him and it scares me. What’s more, it looks like she might be interested in rekindling something. Our relationship just started and there is already a reason to break up.”

“Has Jake given you any reason to doubt his feelings for you?”

“Other than his reaction?”

“Don’t be like that. You would react the same way if Daxton decides to walk back into your life.” I look away because she is right. “What about this, instead of trying to find reasons to doubt him, look for reasons to trust him. “I assure you, when Jake sets his heart on someone it’s always forever.”

Her words give me assurance, but it's not enough.



AFTER OFFICE HOURS, I head for Jake's office. I meet Samantha at her desk. "Working late today?" I ask her, and she rolls her eyes.

She glares at Jake's door. "The boss insisted."

I smile at her before opening Jake's door. He is going through a file and looks up at me, his face morphs into a smile immediately and I feel a sense of satisfaction knowing I can make him react that way.

I walk to the back of his chair and wrap my hand around him while bringing my mouth close to his ear so I can nibble on them. "You should take a break, Mr. Hunt," I whisper into his ear. "Want me to help you with that?" He smiles at my words and swivels his chair around so he is facing me.

I lower myself to the floor and rub his crotch through his trousers. He reacts immediately and I smile. "Try not to moan. Samantha is right outside the door." He raises his brow and I start to unhook his belt.

"Does this have anything to do with Stephanie?" he asks, but I don't reply, busy pulling his trousers lower so I can access him. "So it does." He grabs my hand, stopping its movement.

"I remember someone being insistent that we lay off the sex for a while." He stares at me and I look away. "Are you jealous, Bella?"

I scoff. "Of your saucy ex, don't be ridiculous."

He pulls me up and places me on his lap. "There is nothing to be jealous of. Stephanie is in the past and you are my present."

I roll my eyes at his corny words. "Is that supposed to be comforting? I've heard better." I push my hands through his hair and hear him groan in satisfaction. "I don't like her."

He chuckles. “She is a bit rough around the edges, but she is actually quite nice.”

“Don’t defend her,” I snap.

“Or what?” He challenges me, and I pull away to glare at him. He returns it with a smile. “Are you going to withhold sex from me? You’re already doing that and its pure torture.”

“It’s for the best for our relationship,” I say indignantly. “So stop acting like a horny teenager.” He replies by burying his face in my clothed breasts. “It’s not happening, Mr. Hunt.”

He groans into my chest and the vibration makes me shiver. “You were just about to...nevermind. I’ll just suffer in silence.” He gives me the saddest look he can muster which makes me laugh because it does not fit him at all.

CHAPTER 18

JAKE

I stare at Harry and he stares back at me. I start talking but slam my mouth shut again.

He gives me a curious look. “Jake, if you don’t want to say it then don’t.”

“No, no. I need to talk to you about Bella.” He sits up at that.

“What about Bella?”

“I think I am in love with her, Harry. These feelings go deeper than attraction.”

He smiles at that. “Finally! Here I was thinking you were hopeless.”

“It’s scary, Harry. I don’t want to feel what I felt with Stephanie again and it doesn’t help that she is back like a living reminder on why I shouldn’t give my heart out.” His eyes go wide at the Stephanie part.

“Stephanie is back?” he asks, and I nod. “Oh, shit! But you and Bella just started your relationship.” I nod again.

“And she is feeling threatened and jealous, and I am struggling trying to reassure her but it seems like I also need reassurance myself because this thing I feel for her scares the hell out of me.”

“Why?” He gives me a confused look. “Love is one of the most beautiful things anyone can ever experience. And even if it doesn’t work out in the end, you should always treasure those beautiful moments.”

I give him a look. “What are you, the love doctor?”

He raises his shoulders. “I might as well be because you are very sick love wise. Locking your heart up like that. You should let the poor thing breathe.” He smiles at me. “You were so adamant that nothing could happen between you two and yet here you are.” He gestures at me and I narrow my eyes at him.

“The beautiful thing about love is that it happens when we least expect it, even to the toughest of us. So stop trying to control your life and just live.” His phone dings, announcing that a message has come in and he picks it up before getting up. “I have to go now. Cecilia is freaking out about something. We will talk more on this and on the fact that she was the one you had a one night stand with.”

I look up at him surprised and he returns it with a look of his own. “I know you, Jake. It’s really not that hard to figure out. Also, stay away from Stephanie. She sounds like bad news”

He leaves me at the café with my thoughts. I really like Bella that much I know. But being in love with her is a whole different level of feelings I don’t want to explore. I realized how much I loved her the night she quit. It scared me shitless, the thought of never seeing her again.

I return to the resort. Stephanie had been here this morning, asking for more money because Marilyn needs surgery. I noticed how inquisitive she was about Bella and her subtle advances at me, but it surprises me to say that I felt nothing for her. Once upon a time this woman used to drive me crazy with want, but in that moment, I wanted her as far away from me as possible.

I haven’t seen Bella all day and I am not sure what to say to her, so I keep my distance. It’s past office hours, and I still have a lot to do so I make Samantha stay past her closing hours so I have an extra hand.

I have my head deep in a file when my door opens. Samantha has never walked into my office without knocking. I look up to see Bella walking towards my desk and smile. She

goes around it and places herself behind my chair and wraps her hand around me while nibbling on my ear. “You should take a break, Mr. Hunt,” she whispers. “Want me to help you with that?” I swivel my chair around so I am facing her. She has this determined look on her face and I feel myself react. She looks so beautiful right now.

She lowers herself to the floor and rubs my crotch through my trousers. I feel myself rise and she smiles with satisfaction. “Try not to moan. Samantha is right outside the door.” She starts to unhook my belt.

Something crosses my mind and I ask, “Does this have anything to do with Stephanie?” She doesn’t reply, focusing instead on pulling at my trousers. “So it does,” I confirm and grab her hand before she continues.

“I remember someone being insistent that we lay off the sex for a while.” I give her an inquisitive look and she looks away. “Are you jealous, Bella?” I persist when I don’t get a response.

She scoffs and I raise my brow. “Of your saucy ex? Don’t be ridiculous.”

That definitely sounds like jealousy. Pulling her up, I place her on my lap. “There is nothing to be jealous of. Stephanie is in the past and you are my present.”

She rolls her eyes, but I see a small smile playing on her lips. “Is that supposed to be comforting? I’ve heard better.” She links her hand with my hair and the feeling is so satisfying it makes me groan.

“I don’t like her.” There it is. She is starting to open up.

I try to pacify her. “She is a bit rough around the edges but she is actually quite nice.”

“Don’t defend her,” she suddenly snaps and I narrow my eyes at her

“Or what?” I challenge her and she glares at me. It’s so adorable it makes me smile. “Are you going to withhold sex from me? You’re already doing that and its pure torture.” I try at a joke but she doesn’t laugh.

“It’s for the best for our relationship,” she says. “So stop acting like a horny teenager.” I respond by burying my face in her clothed breasts. “It’s not happening, Mr. Hunt,” I hear her say and groan.

“You were just about to...never mind. I’ll just suffer in silence.” Knowing what I was about to say might not go down well with her. I just settle for a sad look and it makes her laugh.

Since I can’t go home yet, she stays with me while I work and soon dozes off on my couch. I stare at her with adoration. She looks too peaceful to wake up, so I carry her to the car myself. Samantha raises a brow when she sees me but doesn’t say anything. She’s probably just thrilled that she can finally leave.

I drive us home and tuck her into bed before joining her. She shifts closer to me and I tighten my arms around her waist.

I’m in love with this woman, more than she would ever realize.

After some minutes of silence, I hear her whisper. “I love you, Jake. Please don’t leave me.” She is so quiet I barely hear her.

I love you too; Bella and I would be shattered if you left me. But I don’t say anything and her breathing soon becomes leveled again, indicating she has slept off.



IT’S the wedding day and I wake up to shuffling sounds in the room. I look at my bedside clock. It’s six a.m.

“It’s too early, Bella. Come back to bed,” I say, yawning.

She throws me a look. “I’m the event planner, remember? I have to be there earlier than everyone else.”

Oh, that’s right. I shrug and go back to bed. Something suddenly hits me and I reluctantly open my eye to see Bella staring at me with disappointment. *What now?*

“Goodbye, Jake,” she says and I give her a confused look. *What does she want now?*

“Goodbye?” I reply and kiss her briefly, and then I snuggle back into bed. I hear her huff and then my door slams shut. But I am too sleepy to give a reaction.

Hours later, when I am fully awake and preparing to head to the resort is when I realize how much I fucked up, she wanted me to drive her to work. I sigh. Something else to make up for. Maybe I’ll get her flowers this time, but she might see it as me not making any effort. Maybe I’ll add an apology poem to it.

I drive to the resort and call Harry. He and Cecilia had lodged in the rooms at the resort. He picks up my call immediately. “I’m freaking out, man. This is too real.”

“I’m almost there. Give me a few minutes.” I tell him and hang up. I expected the wedding jitters to hit soon, but I really hope Harry’s dramatic self does not take it overboard. The minute I open the door to his room, he launches himself at me and grips my shirt.

“Get me out of here,” he says with half-crazed eyes and I roll mine. Like I said, dramatic.

Slowly taking his hands off my shirt I say, “You need to calm down. It’s just jitters.”

He shakes his head. “No, this is a sign. She has so many better options. Why me?” He turns to me and I shrug. “She is going to realize that I am not worth her time and ditch me for someone better. What do I do?”

“Deal with your massive insecurity before you climb the altar?” I suggest and he glares at me. “What were you expecting, a pep talk?”

“You are the worst friend.”

“I never aim to please,” I tell him.

He sits on the bed and sighs. “After today, I will be a married man. I’ll have to wear a ring around and refuse

advances from girls. I won't even be able to look at asses on Instagram without my conscience pricking me, damn."

"Should have thought of all that before buying that ring, bro." I tap his shoulder and he pushes my hand off him.

"Maybe strangling you will make me feel better." He glares at me. "I have a lot of pent-up energy as it stands."

I shake my head. "Save it for your wedding night," I reply and he swings at me but misses because I jump off the bed at the right time.

Laughing, I tell him, "You have nothing to worry about. It's you guys, Harry and Cecilia, the crazy duo." He throws a pillow at me and I dodge it. At the rate I'm going, Harry will be aiming for my neck soon.

He drops himself on the bed and sighs. "I feel a bit better. Thanks." He sits up. "What about Bella?"

"Busy preparing your wedding," I tell him and he nods. "She is probably mad at me though," I tell and he gives me a curious look. So I tell him what happened early this morning.

He gives me a sympathetic look. "You poor thing. You are making rookie mistakes. Of course she wanted you to drive her."

"I'll make it up to her," I say.

"It better be a good one," he says and I suddenly feel my flowers and poem idea is not good enough.

"Well, I still have a resort to run. See you at the wedding." I leave him and head for my office. I greet Samantha who is typing at her desk.

"Your suit has arrived, Mr. Hunt," she tells me and I nod. "Also, Miss Stephanie is waiting in your office." I turn to look at her.

"You just let her walk into my office?" I ask her and she looks away.

"She was already causing a scene, sir."

Deciding to deal with that later, I open the door and walk in. Sure enough, Stephanie is on my couch when I enter. She perks up at my presence.

“Jake!” she exclaims excitedly. “I’ve been waiting for you.” She follows me as I walk to my desk and takes the seat in front of me. “Marilyn’s surgery is happening the day after tomorrow and I wanted to thank you before I leave.

I nod my head, but she continues. “I know how much I hurt you, Jake, and I really appreciate the fact that you still take care of me and my daughter.”

I hum distractedly, my attention already taken by a document. Samantha must have dropped it on my desk this morning. I hear sniffing and look up. Stephanie is wiping her eyes.

“I fucked up when I left you, Jake. I know that now, but then I was so scared and I felt like I was betraying Pedro.” The tears are pouring in torrent now.

Quickly reaching for some tissues, I give her some to wipe her tears. “What’s done is done, Stephanie. At least we aren’t enemies.”

“But we can’t be lovers,” she says, and I narrow my eyes at her words. She laughs dryly. “I hope she makes you happier than I ever did.” She gets up and I follow suit. “I bumped into Harry and squeezed out an invitation from him. Don’t be mad at him. I had wanted to spend more time here so I can fight for you, but I can see now that there is nothing to fight for.”

She looks so heartbroken and I feel moved because that was my exact look a few years ago. I come around my table and give her a hug and let her sob into my shirt while patting her back comfortingly. When she finally calms down I pull away to look at her.

I am surprised when I am met with a kiss instead. I hear my door open just as she tries to deepen the kiss. Pulling away from her, I turn to see Bella staring at both of us in shock. The look slowly morphs into hurt and she storms out of my office.

CHAPTER 19

BELLA

I am angry with Jake. How insensitive can he be? He didn't even pick up on my obvious hint. Maybe he picked up on it, but pretended not to notice.

I know driving me to work can be interpreted in different ways, but I had just wanted my boyfriend beside me today. The designing team is working efficiently so I leave them to it. I have a boyfriend to apologize to.

I head to his office and greet Samantha on the way there. She gives me a wide-eyed look and I raise my brow in question. Ignoring her weird reaction, I open Jake's door and walk in, and my breath is suddenly stolen from me because of the scene in front.

Jake pulls away from Stephanie's embrace and looks at me. I see red immediately. I storm out of the office.

"Bella! Bella, wait," I hear him call me and quickly wipe at the errant tear that won't stop coming.

"I can explain," he starts and I roll my eyes.

"There is nothing to explain. I know you wouldn't do that to me."

He sighs in relief. "Then why are you crying?" He tries to wipe my tears but I pull away.

"You want to know what is really painful? The fact that I can't fight for you because no one knows we are dating. You would rather hide me than let anyone know about us." I walk away before he can reply.

I busy myself, helping set up so I can have something to do. It's either that or I go back and squeeze the light out of Stephanie. I am so mad right now, but I am madder at Jake.

The guests start to arrive by three p.m. and I quickly head for the public bathroom to change. My dress was sent a few days ago. Without much time on my hands, I quickly change and opt for minimal makeup and pack my hair into a bun. I need to think practical so I can easily move around throughout the wedding.

After that, I go to check on the bride. As expected, she is berating an already irritated makeup artist. "Bella, thank God you are here. I need help with my makeup." Withholding a sigh, I walk in. After dismissing the makeup artist, I set to work on her face. Then I help her get into her dress.

"Nervous?" I ask and she shakes her head.

"Why would I be? It's not like I'm marrying a complete stranger. It's just the nerves getting to me." She talks more to herself than me.

I grip her hand. "You can talk to me Cecilia. There is no one here." She suddenly tightens her hold on my own hand.

"I'm scared, Bella. This is forever. What if we aren't ready or he realizes he doesn't love me as much and we have a divorce that scars our children for life whom we have to shuttle between ourselves? Next thing I know, I have this rebellious daughter who blames me for all her problems."

"Okay, let's take a breath." I guide her to the bed and sit her down. "Wow, you've thought so far ahead.

She looks at her hand. "I am the product of a messy divorce, Bella. My parents won't even look at each other. I don't want that for Harry and I."

"And you won't. You and Harry have such a beautiful love it's the envy of all who look upon it," I tell her and she smiles a little. "Besides, if he rejects you, he would have more than just you to deal with. The entire resort employees for one thing will gang up against him because we have seen how beautiful your guys' love is."

She sniffles beside me. “Thank you, Bella.”

“If you would excuse me, I have to make sure your wedding goes as planned.” I leave her and hurry out of the room.

The exchanging of vows will be at the beach right as the sun is setting. I already have the photographer poised to take pictures, and the reception will be held inside the main hall because the beach gets cold at night.

I look at my watch and count down five seconds before cueing in the pianist. The groom and his best man walk in as the music starts playing. I know Jake is trying to get my attention so I make sure not to look his way. I don't have time for him right now.

I turn around to go and check on Cecilia and see her walking towards me with her entourage. I smile at her. She looks more determined now. She grips me in a tight hug. “Thank you so much, Bella.”

I hug her back. Someone clears his throat behind me and I turn to see Cecilia's father smiling at us. She hugs him too and he takes her in his arms warmly. There are tears brimming in his eyes. It's a crying fest.

Cecilia and Harry exchange their vows and seal it with a kiss in front of the setting sun. I hoot loudly, cheering them on. The event moves on smoothly into the reception. Using the flowers picked out by the bride, I leave a trail for the guests to follow that leads them back to the main hall where a huge portrait of Harry and Cecilia together greets them at the door.

The guests are happy, and the couple is happy. My work here is done. The couples are having their first dance together when I suddenly feel someone's hands on my waist. I jump, startled and turn around to see Jake.

“Care to dance?” he asks me and I look at him incredulously.

“There are people here. What are you doing?” I ask him, confused, but his hand remains possessively on my waist.

“I’m setting the record straight,” is all he mumbles before leading me to the dance floor.

Harry smiles at us as we join them on the dance floor. Jake plants both hands firmly on my waist. “Don’t look at them. Look at me.” He slowly leads the dance and I follow. My heart is beating and I try not to look at anybody’s face. I catch Tristan’s encouraging smile though, and I quickly bury my face in Jake’s neck so I don’t see anyone else.

The song slowly comes to an end and Jake looks at me with so much adoration. “You are the most beautiful, hardworking, and selfless woman I have ever met, Miss Bella Ortiz. And I love you more than I have ever loved anything or anyone in my life.”

His words bring tears to my eyes and I quickly kiss him before anyone notices them. Jake returns the kiss with passion and I have to pull away before we get carried away.

Harry suddenly hoots, startling me. “That’s what I am talking about.” Next thing I know, there is clapping and hooting from the employees. Their smiles make me smile.

After our little show, others join us on the dance floor. I take a break after a while because other than slow dancing, Jake is a terrible dancer. I’ll give him credit for effort though. People walk up to me to gush about how cute Jake and I were and some employees tell me how they already had a hunch and were so happy for me.

Stephanie suddenly stands in front of me and I glare at her. She rolls her eyes before offering her hand for me to shake. “The best man won. I wish you and Jake a happy life together.”

Unsure of what to reply to that, I take the hand she is offering. She turns around and leaves immediately afterward. I stare at her retreating back and suddenly run after her.

I catch her outside the hall. “Stephanie,” I call and she turns around. “I hope Marilyn gets better. Actually, I would love to know how her treatment goes.”

She smiles at me. “I’ll keep you posted.”

She walks away just as a small hand grabs me from the back. “Oh my gosh, I am so happy for you,” Jessica gushes, grabbing my cheek. There are tears in her eyes. “The event was beautiful, and that dance. My God! You had me crying buckets. It’s just so beautiful.” She starts to cry again and Malcolm leads her away.

“There is the future Mrs. Hunt,” I hear someone say and turn to see Tristan smiling at me.

“Let’s not get ahead of ourselves,” I tell him and he waves it off.

“Ah, it’s just a matter of time. Boss will be on his knees, begging you to marry him.”

“I didn’t realize they were planning a proposal for me already,” Jake says behind him and Tristan’s eyes go wide.

“Boss! I didn’t realize you were there.” He slowly walks away.

Jake walks up to me and wraps his arms around me. “Miss Ortiz.”

“Are you going to keep calling me that?” I ask him.

“Yes,” he says with finality and I choose not to argue, for now.

“You really announced us in there.”

“Did you not like it?” He actually looks worried so I place my hands on his cheek.

“I loved it Jake, and I love you even more.”

He bends down immediately and kisses me. A flash of light makes us pull apart.

The photographer smiles at us. “That’s one for the books.”

CHAPTER 20

JAKE

“*R*ed! I want it red, not this light shade. Get me blood red if you have to.” The guy winces and I feel for him. Being on the receiving end of my sister’s temper is not a good experience.

“Yikes! Malcom must have it hard,” Harry says beside me and I give him an incredulous look.

“You are one to talk. You dropped your pregnant wife with her father and ran away,” I accuse him and he looks away.

“I went on a business trip,” he corrects me. “And no one told me a pregnant wife would be far worse than Bridezilla. The things I have suffered for Cecilia.” He shakes his head in pity.

It’s been three months since I told Bella I loved her and I have made sure to remind her every single day since then. I like to think it’s the reason we have lasted this long but she doesn’t seem to share my sentiments. Now I am about to let her know that I love her so much I want to spend the rest of my life with her. I grip the ring case in my hand and exhale.

Harry notices and says, “She will say yes. She doesn’t have much of a choice. You are asking her in front of not just family and friends but employees too.” Harry gestures around the hall and I wince.

“Is this a bad idea? Maybe I should just cancel the whole thing and do it during one of our dinners,” I think out loud.

Harry scoffs. “It’s too late for that.” He gestures at Jessica who is shouting at another unsuspecting employee.

I had made the mistake of telling Jessica about my plan to propose to Bella and she took it upon herself to plan the whole thing. It was out of my hands before I even bought the ring.

“I fucked up,” I groan and Harry laughs.

“Man, won’t it be funny if she ends up rejecting you, in front of all these people?” He laughs and I glare at him. “Lighten up, it’s just a joke.” He hits my arm and I have to control myself so I don’t hit him back.

Bella and I have had such a blissful relationship the past three months and I can’t wait to make her mine. As possessive as it sounds, I want to place the ring on her finger as a show of my ownership over her so other guys will back off. I mean younger guys.

She has assured me multiple times that she is not interested in anyone but me, but I will feel extremely better after she becomes Mrs. Hunt. My thoughts make me smile. Never thought I would see the day when a woman would make me this happy. Even Stephanie didn’t make me this happy.

Speaking of Stephanie, she and Bella have formed a weird bond that makes me apprehensive. I’m not sure what to make of it.

“More petals,” Jessica yells and I wince again. That woman should not be here assaulting my employees like that. But Malcolm had begged me to do anything to get her out of the house, something about postpartum depression.

“What part of more petals do you not understand?” she yells and Tristan immediately pulls her aside. Good or I would have to step in and throw my sister out.

Tristan and Bella remained friends, though I don’t understand why. When she told me he had been interested in her, I was ready to kick the threat out, but once again, Bella assured me there was nothing to worry about. I still don’t like the guy but I will tolerate him for the sake of his work ethic and Bella.

They continue to decorate the main hall and I walk around aimlessly, gearing myself up to ask the woman I love to spend

the rest of her life with me.

Bella is currently out on another cake tasting with another irate bride and probably won't be back till hours later, more than enough time to set up the surprise.

Thanks to Harry and Cecilia's successful wedding, our event management department has been handling multiple events. And my girlfriend has handled them like a professional, and all of our clients have had nothing but good reviews. This is the second wedding Bella would be handling at the resort and I know she is up to the task, though I hear this bride is much worse than my sister and Cecilia put together. I have high hopes for Bella.

"Finally taking the big step," I hear someone say and turn to see Samantha smiling at me. "I thought you'd never get around to it. I had my money on you proposing sooner."

"It's very comforting to know my employees have taken such an interest in my relationship," I say dryly and she replies with a bright smile. She hands me a file. "What is this?"

"Event management returns for last month, impressive number." She raises her brow at me. "Still want to go ahead with it?"

"Of course." I look through the file and smile. I've been considering helping Bella set up her own event management agency, as an affiliate to the resort of course. She hasn't been very responsive whenever I bring it up but I know she is more than capable. She just needs the right push. This would be part of the surprise.

"She is coming!" someone yells and my heart skips. Everyone scurries around frantically and someone switches off the light.

"Tristan! Where is Tristan," I say into the darkness.

"I'm here," I hear him say and someone switches on the light.

"Why are you hiding? You are supposed to lead her here."

“Right.” Realization dawns on him and he hurries out of the hall.

The light goes off again and I stand in the middle of the dark hall, my heart beating fast. A million thoughts race through my mind as I wait for the door to open. After what seems like forever, the door finally opens, but not the way I expect it to.

It is thrown open and Bella yells, “Jaxon Hunt! Why have you not been picking up my calls?! You had me so worried I had to cut short my appointment.”

I go red at her words. “Who turned off the lights,” she yells again. And the lights suddenly come on with me staring wide-eyed at my angry bride. Petals fall around me and she gives me a skeptical look. She is not amused.

She walks up to me. “Of course, I will marry you. Who else is going to love me as much as you do?”

“I...what...I haven’t even asked yet,” I exclaim and she rolls her eyes.

“I am an event planner, Jake. I know a proposal when I see one.” She looks around. “Great work on the design though.”

“I did it.” My sister materializes beside me and I make a sound at the back of my throat. This is not going how I planned it.

“Congratulations honey. Welcome to the family.” Jessica pulls Bella into a tight hug. Everyone comes out of hiding and starts clapping, shouting their congratulations.

I make another sound at the back of my throat as she smiles at everyone. “You guys were in on it? Thank you so much.” She covers her face with her hands as tears flood her eyes. That reaction is supposed to be for me.

She suddenly looks at me and smiles. “When are you going to put the ring on my finger, Mr. Hunt?” She is enjoying the fact that she ruined my surprise.

“You didn’t even let me get on my knees,” I tell her, frowning.

“You can do that later in my office,” she whispers and my mood magically lifts. I slide the ring onto her finger and everyone hoots and claps.

I bend down and grab her mouth in a passionate kiss and the hooting gets louder. *She is mine.*

The End.

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