



BAD BOY
BILLIONAIRES

THE
BILLIONAIRE'S
RIVAL

SILVIA VIOLET

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BAD BOY BILLIONAIRES

BOOK 2

SILVIA VIOLET



The Billionaire's Rival

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FORD

I'd been determined to beat Jasper when I stepped on the tennis court today. I didn't care that he was undefeated in our league. I was just as good of a player as he was, but whenever I stood across from him on the court, he distracted me with his perfect body.

Why were all the men I wanted either straight or world-class assholes—or in Jay's case, both? And why the hell had he worn his light blue polo, the one that matched his eyes perfectly? It was like he knew what that did to me.

I was usually good at hiding my feelings. I couldn't have survived law school, much less the courtroom drama I'd experienced, if I hadn't been able to keep my face impassive. But men like Jay were my kryptonite. Damn gorgeous bastards. They got me all worked up.

My friends teased me endlessly. They said I turned into a lovesick eighteen-year-old every time I got near a man I was crushing on, and with Jay, I was even worse than usual. I fucking hated it, and now here I was about to lose another match to him.

I had to get the next point to have a chance at winning. It was my serve. I could do this. I bounced the ball with my racket and tried to get myself in the zone, but just as I tossed the ball, Jay lifted his shirt to wipe his sweaty face, exposing his perfect abs.

My brain went offline. My racket barely tapped the ball, and it went right into the net.

Jay grinned as the ball rolled to the fence. “One more chance.”

I retrieved the ball and served again, but my concentration was shot, it landed out of bounds.

“Seems like I win again.” Jay’s smug smile made me want to throw my racket and run. He knew how good his torso looked. He’d fucking lifted his shirt on purpose.

He might insist he was straight as an arrow. He might have ruthlessly turned down a drunken proposition from me when he first joined the tennis league, but he never hesitated to flirt with me if it gave him an advantage.

“Best two out of three?” I asked as we both approached the net.

He shook his head as he clasped my hand for an end-of-game handshake. It was all I could do to ignore the heat of his skin and the enticing smell of his sweat. “I have to catch up on some work.”

Jay hadn’t grown up with money like most members of our club, and he liked to pretend he was superior because of his work ethic.

“You’re working on a Saturday evening?” I asked.

“This job isn’t a nine-to-five. Some of us have to actually work instead of having everything handed to us.”

The bitterness in his tone was stronger than usual. He’d ragged me about my easy life plenty of times, but he’d never sounded so angry. I hated how much it hurt. What was up with him today? It wasn’t like he was hurting for money. He couldn’t be a member of the club if he was.

“Are you that dedicated to your job? Or do you not have the stamina to keep up with me?”

I realized what I’d said too late to change the wording. Jay raised his brows as he gave me an assessing look. “Stamina is not a problem for me.”

I doubted it was. As much as I wanted to hate him, if he was willing, I’d let him fuck the hell out of me so I could test the theory.

“Why don’t you use the extra time to work on your tennis game?” Jay said. “Maybe then, you won’t need extra games to beat me.”

I frowned, even letting my lip poke out in a pout—I wasn’t above flirting either. “I need a partner to practice.”

“You could use the wall.”

It did not feel like we were talking about tennis anymore. It was cruel of him to tease me like this while insisting he didn’t like dick. Perverse bastard that I am, I ate it up anyway. And come on, there was always hope, wasn’t there?

No. My friend Miles’s disapproving voice echoed in my head. He’d told me to cancel today’s game when I’d told him I was playing against Jay, even though Miles had known I would never do that.

When Jay had first joined the tennis team, I’d hardly been able to take my eyes off him. I’d flirted with him, and he’d clearly enjoyed the attention. I had no reason to believe he was gay, but I’d decided to proposition him anyway. When he’d turned me down, he’d made it very clear that he had no interest in men and acted disgusted when I asked why he’d flirted back. That should have been enough to make me ignore him, but I had a thing for torturing myself.

I gave Jay the closest thing I could to a coquettish smile. “I could do a lot of things, but I’d rather bust your ass in this next match.”

Jay raised his brows. “Would you?”

“Yes.”

“Fine. Let’s go.”

I grinned. “What happened to all the work you need to do?”

“I’ll get it done eventually. It will be worth it to annihilate you.”

Why did he say that in a voice that dripped sex? He was playing me, and I was letting him.

As we each walked away from the net, an old-fashioned phone ringtone blared out from his phone. “What the hell is your phone doing at full volume? Are you seventy-five?”

Jay flipped me off as he jogged to the side of the court where he’d left his bag. “I’ve got to take this.”

“Convenient. Also, why that ringtone?”

“Later.” His response was clipped, but he didn’t look annoyed, he looked shaken. I couldn’t tell much about the conversation from his side. It was mostly filled with platitudes and agreeing to whatever was being asked of him, but I got the feeling he wasn’t talking to a client.

When he ended the call, his expression was pinched, his jaw tight. “I’ve got to go.”

I huffed. “You really know how to jerk a guy around.”

“That was my grandmother’s care center. She’s...not doing well.”

Wow. I felt like an ass. “I’m sorry to hear that. We’ll have this rematch another day.”

He gave me a curt nod as he gathered his things and walked off the court.

I watched him go as I puzzled over what I’d just learned. I’d always imagined that whenever he wasn’t gloating over his tennis skills, he was either working or chasing women. I hadn’t really considered that he was a regular person with family and problems and a grandmother whose ringtone was the phone sound she would have grown up with.

I shook my head, trying to force those thoughts away. The last thing I needed to do was humanize Jay. He needed to stay in the realm of untouchable, embarrassing fantasies.

If I was smart, I’d never ask about the rematch. I was smart as hell when it came to most things, but with Jay...I’d be asking him to play me again as soon as I had the chance.

JAY

After visiting with her for as long as the nurses would allow, I hugged my grandmother goodbye and prayed it wouldn't be the last time I saw her. She'd been in an assisted living facility for over a year, but after she'd come down with pneumonia, she'd been moved to the full-time nursing care unit. It was taking far longer for her to fully recover than expected. I couldn't remember ever seeing her so weak.

At least I knew Gran was getting the best possible care. People like Ford could mock me all they wanted for the long hours I put in, but my job was the reason we'd had our choice of facilities for her to go to rather than scrambling to find the least expensive option.

My grandmother had cared for me and my sister, Emily, while our father had literally worked himself to death trying to make a better life for us. My mother had run off with another man when I was a kid, and I hadn't had contact with her in years. I'd lost my father just after graduating from undergrad, but even though he hadn't been around to see me graduate from law school with top honors, I knew he would have been thrilled to see where I was now. My grandmother and my sister were the only real family I had left, and Emily lived in Aspen, so I didn't get to see her often. She'd moved there with a boyfriend who was long gone now, but she had her own friends, a business she'd built herself, and she loved the town.

By the time I got home, I was exhausted. The last thing I wanted to do was open up a new case file—I hadn't been lying when I told Ford I had work to do tonight. Sadly, my only

option for procrastination was calling my sister and letting her know she should probably book a trip to see Gran as soon as she could, just in case she took a turn for the worse.

I'd managed to hold back tears when I'd listened to Gran's doctors explain how precarious her situation was, but I wasn't sure I could keep from crying if Emily broke down, and I was certain she would. I hadn't cried since Dad died, and I didn't intend to start now. Gran was doing well enough that I could wait until tomorrow to call Emily. She was a morning person so that would be better for her than hitting her with the news when she was worn out from a day of running her bookstore and café.

I started a pot of coffee. Copious amounts of caffeine would be necessary if I was going to wade through the case file.

While the coffee brewed, I opened my laptop and checked my email. It was a damn good thing I did. I had a message from Laura, one of the senior partners, informing me she was passing along a case, one I'd desperately wanted because the client was suing Miles Montgomery. A win against Montgomery Enterprises would essentially guarantee me a promotion. The case I'd planned on reviewing had been reassigned, and I needed to be ready to meet with my new client on Monday.

It looked like I was going to spend the rest of the weekend working.

I logged into our office portal, opened the file Laura had sent, and started to scan through the information. When I saw the name of the opposing counsel, I froze. I should have known who it would be, but I hadn't thought about it until I saw his name there in black and white.

Ford Wainwright. Moderately good tennis player, wizard-level lawyer with all the time in the world to focus on this case. A case I could not lose.

Facing him in court would be hell. He was articulate, memorized minutiae like it was nothing, and somehow managed to charm every judge he stood in front of. I was

damn good, and I had a chance against him, but while I'd never admit it, the chance was slim.

I was going to have to convince him it was in his client's best interest to settle out of court. That was not going to be easy, considering his client was also his best friend and a man who got everything he wanted handed to him.

Maybe you should just convince your client to drop the lawsuit.

No way. I never lost.

You're going to end up in court.

Then I'd have to beat Ford. Whatever happened, I wasn't going to lose, not to someone who'd had it so fucking easy his whole life. I'd busted my ass to get this far, and I wanted the promotion winning this case would guarantee.

There was one way I could get to Ford. I'd fucked with his concentration on the tennis court by flirting with him, giving him a little of what he obviously wanted but was never going to have. I pushed away feelings of shame as I remembered how I'd treated him when he'd asked me if I wanted to go home with him after a tennis match.

I'd pretended to be shocked, but I wasn't. I'd known he was into me, and I'd deliberately flirted back to throw him off his game. I told him I was straight and had no interest in changing that. When he called me out for flirting with him, I denied it and told him I couldn't imagine being turned on by a man and certainly not by him. I'd seen the hurt in his eyes before he covered it up. Damn, I'd been such a dick.

I thought he'd try to get me thrown out of the tennis club, but instead, he simply treated me like I was beneath him. He acted aloof and superior most of the time, but I had quickly realized he still wanted me, even after I'd been so callous. All I had to do to have him tongue-tied and blushing was use some innuendos or take off my shirt. Why not use every advantage I had to win this lawsuit? It wasn't like he wouldn't do the same.

And as long as I was careful and no one at the office noticed, flirting would be a hell of a lot more fun than negotiating tedious aspects of the law.

You like flirting with him.

I like what it gets me—like an easy win on the tennis court.

Then why did your cock react to seeing him sitting there all sweaty and relaxed when you came out of the locker room?

That was just adrenaline. I was wired up from the match and the anxiety of the call about Gran.

I wasn't gay. I'd never been gay. I could admit Ford was an attractive man if you were into the tweedy professor look, but for God's sake the man wore sweater-vests and argyle. Even if I was gay, he would *not* be my type.

Even thinking about it was ridiculous. I liked women. If I didn't have this damn case to deal with, I'd be out picking up one now. I could use a good, hard fuck to get my mind off thoughts of losing Gran and having to go head-to-head with Ford.

Why did that suddenly sound suggestive?

Is that something a straight man would think?

Fuck. I needed to get it together.

I was clearly in need of sleep, or I wouldn't be thinking like this. I had to focus on my new case. I needed to act like a professional on Monday. I couldn't risk having my client request someone else because she didn't think I was competent.

If I could secure the promotion to junior partner, I'd be set. I could help Emily buy the space next door to her café so she could expand, and I wouldn't have to worry about job security.

You'll also be stuck with tedious ass cases and horrible coworkers for decades. Is that really what you want?

What choice did I have?

I needed the promotion, and to get it I had to win this case—one way or another.

FORD

“**S**hit! Fuck! Shit!” I yelled.

“Well that is one way to greet the day.”

I jumped at the sound of Miles’s voice. I hadn’t heard him enter my office, which wasn’t surprising since he never bothered to knock.

I scowled at him. “If I started fucking my assistant in here, would that get you to respect a closed door?” Miles had fallen hard for his assistant Ben, and it was well known they used his office for more than business.

Miles walked to my door and looked out at Marjorie, my assistant. She was a beautiful older lesbian, and I was no more her type than she was mine.

“Do you need something Mr. Montgomery?” she asked.

“Not right now.” He turned back to me and raised his brows.

“You know what I mean.”

He huffed. “You are in quite a mood today.”

“We can’t all be pampered by a sweet man like Ben first thing in the morning.”

Miles smiled. “Very true. I’d have to kill you if you tried.”

“Did you know Lisa Jenkins has been assigned a new attorney?”

“No, but since you’re the best, that shouldn’t be an issue no matter who is representing her.”

“Remind me why we filed this lawsuit. Do you really need another warehouse?”

“It’s the perfect location. She agreed to sell it to me, and now she’s trying to back out of the deal. Why wouldn’t I sue to protect my business dealings.”

I sighed. “The new attorney is Jasper Rollins.”

Miles’s mouth dropped open. “Tennis Jasper?”

“Yes.”

“I-want-him-even-though-he’s-straight-and-an-asshole Jasper?”

I glared at him. “Maybe you need a new attorney as well.”

“You’re the one who said—”

“Yes, he’s an asshole, and yes, I want to fuck him. Hence my terrible mood.”

“You’ll be fine. If I’d thought your dick was going to affect your work, I would never have asked you to be my attorney.”

“Believe me, we will still win. Jay might beat me at tennis, but he’s never going to beat me in court.”

“You said you would get a settlement so we didn’t have the circus of—”

“Jay isn’t going to want to settle with me. He was going to make the whole process a nightmare.”

“Then figure out how to—”

“Miles, I need a friend right now, not an asshole CEO.”

Miles blew out a breath and ran a hand over his hair. “Shit. Don’t tell Ben I’m fucking up the friend thing again.”

I raised my brows.

“He says I’m overly domineering with my friends.”

“Yes, and?”

Miles frowned. “So you agree?”

“Of course I agree. You’ve been like that since I met you when we were fourteen.”

“I know I’m a little—”

“A little?”

His scowl made me laugh. “Look, I know you could handle this lawsuit if her fucking attorney was Satan himself.”

“That would be easier. I don’t want to fuck Satan.” I also doubted I’d get half as flustered in *his* presence.

Miles rolled his eyes. “You know what I mean.”

“I do, and I’m not saying I can’t win. Didn’t you hear me before? I’ve got this. I just don’t want to deal with the smug asshole.”

“You’re the one who said we should play this one by the book. If that’s changed, and you’d like me to call in some favors....”

“Miles, we stepped far enough over the line when we dealt with Ben’s family. We can win this one through proper legal channels.”

Miles hesitated for a moment, making me think there was something he wasn’t tell me. “I’m happy to try other tactics if working with Jasper is going to bring you too much grief.”

“I appreciate that you would use your criminal contacts to save me from annoyance—”

He held up a hand. “It’s more than annoyance. You haven’t been this irritable in a long time.”

“He beat me at tennis yesterday.”

Miles shook his head. “This isn’t about tennis.”

I really wished it was. “Jasper was bitching about me not having to work for anything again, and the problem is, he’s right.”

“The fuck he is.”

I could always count on Miles to defend me, even from myself. “Miles.”

“No. You lost your parents when you were in middle school, then you, a gay boy, came to a school fully of bullies where nothing was punished as fiercely as empathy and kindness.”

I laughed. “Our old school was very *Lord of the Flies*.”

“Yes, it was.”

“But I had you, Carter, and Worth, so it was fine.”

“You graduated top of your class from Harvard Law, that took work.”

“True, but it was just for me. I don’t actually need a job.”

Miles scowled. “That doesn’t mean you don’t work hard.”

“Jay didn’t grow up with money. I don’t know his exact circumstances, but he’s—”

“Jealous? Bitter?”

“Can you blame him?”

Miles sighed. “No, I can’t. So you’re calling him Jay now?”

“That’s what everyone calls him.”

“Not you, until now.”

“That has nothing to do with my point. He has a right to resent me and anyone else who was given the easy path to success. Neither of us really knows what it would be like to not be able to buy whatever we wanted.”

“Ben’s trying to help me understand what it’s like to live in the real world. I’m working on it, but speaking of money, we could always—”

“We are not bribing him to lose the case. He has plenty of money now. Besides, even if I wanted to play it that way, his ego would never let him do it.”

“But the law is on my side, and I’m not going to give an inch. Why would his firm take the case when he’s going to lose anyway?”

“They don’t know you.”

Miles frowned. “There’s no way they don’t know who I am.”

“I mean they don’t really know you, like how unwilling you are to ever change your mind.”

“Then of course they’ll lose because they don’t even know how to do their research. It sounds like Jasper should be the one offering his ass, because he’s sure as hell going to get fucked if he can’t get her to settle.”

I was really glad I hadn’t just taken a sip of my coffee. “Miles. That’s—”

He grinned at me, and I couldn’t hold back a laugh. The thought of Jay bending over for me or better yet getting on his knees was so hot it would almost be worth it to....

Miles narrowed his eyes. “What evil thoughts are you entertaining?”

I sighed. “As fun as it might be, I won’t sell you out for a taste of him. It wouldn’t last long enough to be worth it.”

“Aww. I knew you were a friend I could always count on.”

This time we laughed so hard we were in tears. “I’ll win the case, piss him off, and never play tennis with him again, which is exactly how it should be.”

Miles studied me for a moment, then shook his head. “Bullshit. Maybe I need to see what my contacts can do to disband your tennis league.”

“I don’t think even your most nefarious contacts want to go up against the club’s board.”

Miles shuddered. “Probably not. You know my mother used to be on that board.”

“And there’s not a hardened criminal she couldn’t scare away.”

Miles glanced at his watch. “I’ve got a meeting. Talk to me later, we should discuss strategy.”

I didn’t even bother to remind him that legal strategy was my job, and he didn’t have to be involved in everything, but I did call out to him before he reached the door.

He turned to face me. “Yes?”

“Can you honestly tell me you didn’t get pampered this morning?”

“I guess you could say I did. He—”

I held up my hand. “No details. Please. I hear enough.”

“You cannot hear what goes on in my office.”

“No, but what goes on after a conference room empties out is audible enough.”

JAY

After calling Emily and helping her arrange a flight for Monday morning, I spent all day Sunday researching the lawsuit Montgomery Enterprises had filed against Ms. Jenkins, my client. After reading the transcript of her meeting with Laura, where she ranted about how horrible and unreasonable Miles Montgomery was, I was exhausted. Thankfully, some detective work a friend owed me had given me an idea, a highly unprofessional one that I would never try if I didn't have a connection to the plaintiff's attorney.

I could have called Ford, but if I was going to have a real chance of negotiating, I needed to meet him in person. Fortunately, I'd overheard him tell one of the other players in our league that he wouldn't be at the team meetup on Sunday evening because he was going to a prestigious club in town, so I knew exactly where to find him.

I didn't have the status at Vincent's that Ford likely did, but when I arrived, despite the place being full, I was ushered right through when I said I was with his party. He was seated upstairs in the VIP section. As I approached, I steeled myself for the confrontation, remembering that no matter how aloof he might act, I needed to ooze charm.

Ford and his two companions turned toward me as I approached their table. His eyes widened for a fraction of a second before his face went unnaturally blank.

"Hello, Ford." I kept my voice low and smooth. "I understand we're going to be working together on a case."

“Working against each other,” he said, his voice icy.

The man to his left tensed. He looked ex-military. Was he a bodyguard? Surely Ford didn’t need protection in a place like this.

“I’m hoping we can draw up a settlement that’s agreeable to both our clients rather than dragging this out. Do you have a moment to talk?”

Ford studied me, and before he spoke, the blond man on his left smiled broadly and said, “If he doesn’t, I do.”

Military guy glared at the blond man and shook his head.

“What?” the man asked.

Ford gave him a glare as well, then turned back to me. “Jasper Rollins, these are my friends Carter Armentrout and Worth Chamberlain.”

The blond was Worth, and his previously lascivious look turned to haughty assessment. “Jasper, it’s so nice to meet you.”

Carter gave me a curt nod.

At least now I knew for sure he talked about me to his friends.

Ford rose from the table. “You can have a moment; that’s all.”

He was wearing one of his sweater-vests. It was a deep brown that matched his eyes. His tweed coat had been discarded onto the bench where he’d been seated, and he’d rolled back his cuffs. He looked like he’d just been styled for a slutty professor photo shoot.

I glanced around at all the occupied tables.

“Let’s go somewhere private,” I suggested. I didn’t intend to have this conversation in front of his friends, who were glaring at us like they thought I might kidnap him. Of course if that would get me what I wanted....

“There’s nowhere private here. You should have made an appointment with me.”

“I was thinking of the private rooms in the back.”

Ford's eyes widened. "That's...no."

"I know you like to pretend to be all rigid and proper, but don't act like you're some kind of saint."

"I never said that. I'm hardly a saint."

I bet he wasn't. I bet he was one of the quiet, buttoned-up types who turned into an animal in bed.

Holy fuck, where had that thought come from? I didn't want to know anything about how Ford acted in bed. "Then what's wrong with meeting back there?"

"Those rooms aren't for meetings."

"I know what they're for. I also know we'll have privacy there."

"Jay, you can arrange for a meeting with me during business hours tomorrow. I'm going back to my—"

I grabbed his arm, my grip tight enough that he'd have to make a scene to get free. I knew he wouldn't do that, but I hadn't been prepared for him to like me manhandling him. He sucked in his breath sharply and for just a moment, I saw a hungry look on his face.

Damn, I liked how easily I could turn him on.

Not because I was gay. Because it showed I had power over him, power I could use to my advantage in business, not for pleasure.

I smiled at him, hoping he knew I'd noticed his reaction. "Don't tell me you're afraid to be alone with me."

"This is improper. We shouldn't discuss the case socially."

"This is a business meeting. They don't all have to take place in the office."

FORD

Because I'm an idiot, I followed Jay downstairs, then through a door marked "Private" that led to a hallway where several rooms were located. The rooms were only available to certain guests. The guard at the door nodded to us, and we walked in.

I was hoping all the rooms would be occupied, but luck wasn't with me. Jay found us a room halfway down the hall. We stepped inside, and he locked the door behind us.

If I made a bargain with him, would he fuck me in here? Did I actually have the nerve to find out? No, I'd only had one drink so far. I'd need a hell of a lot more before I lost my mind to that extent.

Thankfully, the room didn't have a bed, just a comfortable looking sofa. I'd never actually used these rooms. I wasn't a prude like Jay tried to imply, I'd had my share of hookups, but they were never particularly satisfying. I saw no reason to have one here. Vincent's was a place I came to hang out with my friends.

Now, here I was in a hookup room with a man who was only interested in getting me to make a stupid decision that would fuck up my relationship with Miles and my professional reputation. That was not going to happen.

Jay sat on the couch and looked up at me. "Don't you want to join me?"

I shook my head.

“I’m not going to bite you.”

I huffed. “I’m well aware of that.”

Jay smiled. “Are you really going to make me negotiate while you loom over me?”

“I’m hardly looming.” Jay was at least four inches taller than me, so even with me standing I wasn’t that far above him. “Say what you came to say, and we can continue this discussion tomorrow.”

Jay sighed. “This isn’t working, is it?”

“What?”

“This room. It’s making you nervous.”

I glared at him. “I’m not nervous. I’m annoyed. I was having a nice evening, and you interrupted it.”

“How about I order you a drink?”

“Absolutely not.” The last thing I needed was to get drunk around him. “This is supposed to be a professional meeting. We don’t need to add alcohol to it.”

“Tell that to the senior partners at my firm.”

I couldn’t help but smile. “Are they fans of the three-martini lunch?”

“Definitely. Please sit down so we can talk.”

His insistence was making me wary. “What is so urgent about this discussion?”

“Nothing. I just thought it would be nicer to talk like this than in a stuffy office.”

“I keep my office at a nice temperature. We can meet there.”

Jay raised his brows. “You know what I mean.”

“I do, but that’s where these discussions belong.”

“Tell that to the senior partners as well.”

I didn’t even want to think about where the men and women at his firm were willing to take their discussions. “Just because you work for assholes who—”

Jay held up a hand. “Why don’t we get out of here and go somewhere less crowded and more comfortable?”

“I’m not going to your house.”

He laughed. “Of course not, I meant a bar down the street. It’s where I go when I want to drink and not be bothered.”

“You? Drinking alone? Surely not.”

“It happens.”

I sighed. “Let me grab my coat and tell my friends.”

Both Carter and Worth let me know I was making a stupid decision. They were right, but I needed to find out what Jay’s game was. He was up to something, and I was too stubborn to let that go—and too pathetic not to go with him if there was even the smallest chance he wasn’t so straight after all.

No matter what happened. I would absolutely not sleep with him, though. I was going to figure out his angle, then go home and get some rest. Tomorrow, I’d figure out how to wreck his plans.

Jay and I got our things from the coat check. He only had a light jacket, and once we were on the street, he shivered and wrapped his arms around himself. “If you’d been nicer to me, I would have knit you a warm hat.”

He turned to me, eyes wide. “You knit?”

“I do. Is there a problem with that?”

“No. No problem.” He pressed his lips together to keep from laughing.

“I made the vest I’m wearing.” Why did I feel the need to justify my skills?

“Really? You’re good.”

“I am.” Knowing I’d impressed him made me feel much warmer than it should have.

When we got to the bar, I hated how much I liked it. It wasn’t at all what I’d expected. It had a subdued, cozy vibe and old-

fashioned looking booths with faux leather upholstery. Jay got us each a beer and we settled into a corner booth.

I reminded myself that I shouldn't get comfortable, and one beer was enough on top of what I'd already drunk at Vincent's. "So, what is your proposal?"

Jay looked nervous, and I braced myself for what he would say.

"If your client drops the suit, I can clear the way for the shipping contracts Montgomery needs approved."

"How the hell do you know about that?"

"I do my research. I am actually good at my job."

Miles had some contracts that needed government approval. He'd been bitching about them for weeks. "What kind of contacts do you have?"

"That's confidential."

"It's also illegal and I could report your bribery attempt to the bar association."

"You could, but you won't."

"How do you know that?"

"Montgomery isn't exactly one to care about following the letter of the law."

"I don't know what you've heard, but all of Montgomery's operations are legal." I was openly lying, but Jay would never be able to prove it.

He sniffed. "I just bet they are. Wouldn't you like to at least hear more details of our offer?"

"No, this conversation compromises—"

Jay laid his hand over mine, and I froze.

"Jasper, what are you doing?"

"Relax."

"Around you? Never."

He gave me a pouty face, one that I was sure worked very well when he was looking for a hookup. “I thought we were friends.”

“‘Frenemies’ maybe.”

“You’re really not interested in making this trade?”

“No. Miles wants the warehouse, and he’s going to get it.”

Jay blew out a long breath. “Fine. I’ll have to come up with something else.”

“Something other than bribery?”

“It was worth a try.”

I couldn’t help but smile. I would have done the same in his position. “I suppose that’s true.”

“Another beer?”

I hadn’t even realized I’d already nearly drained mine. Being around Jay made me nervous, and when I was nervous, I always drank too much, too fast.

I should say no. “Sure.”

“Be right back.”

He took our empty pint glasses and headed toward the bar.

I should have left then. It would have been wise, but I watched Jay’s well-rounded ass as he walked away.

When he returned to the table, he said. “Your turn.”

“My turn for what?”

“A proposal for a compromise.”

I shook my head. “My client doesn’t compromise.”

“Does he have to be such a jackass?”

I nodded. “He’s really good at it.”

We both laughed then.

“So, have you always dressed like you teach at an Ivy League school?”

I narrowed my eyes, not sure whether he was trying to piss me off or just asking.

“It works for you,” he said. “I’m just curious.”

“I have. I was the only one who didn’t hate the way we had to dress at boarding school, coats and ties every day.”

“I guess that didn’t help you fit in.”

I shook my head. “Hell no. If it hadn’t been for Miles, Worth, and Carter, I don’t know if I would have survived, and I mean that literally.”

“That bad, huh?”

“Yeah, the kids there were vicious.”

“That sucks.”

“I bet you were popular in high school.”

Jay frowned. “Not really. I did too well in class, and I didn’t play football.”

I gave him an appreciative look. “I bet you could have.”

He winked at me. “Thanks.”

“Quit flirting. It’s not going to help you win the case.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

“Fine. High school was okay, but I was glad to be done and move on.”

We kept talking like this was a date, not an attempt to bribe the opposition in a court case. When we’d finished our second beers, Jay ordered us a bottle of whiskey. I didn’t even try to protest.

After we’d started to make a dent in the bottle and I was starting to get concerned that the bar had begun to rotate like a carousel, Jay said, “Do you want to add some food to all this alcohol?”

I tilted my head to the side as I considered his question. The way the room tilted with me made me realize I was well on my

way to drunk. “What did you have in mind?”

“They have amazing cheesecake here.”

“Cheesecake, huh?”

“It’s my favorite dessert.”

“Get us a piece.”

“To share?”

“Sure.” I knew as I responded that it was a bad idea, but Jay was already moving toward the bar, swaying a bit like he was nearly as drunk as I was.

When he returned with cheesecake covered in strawberry topping, I grabbed a fork from him and dug in like I hadn’t eaten all day.

“Looks like you love cheesecake too.”

“So good,” I said, not bothering to swallow first. My grandmother would faint at my deplorable manners.

“You’re cute when you relax like that.”

“Told you not to flirt.”

He scooped up a bite of cheesecake and lifted his fork to my mouth. I stared at it for a moment and then gave in, opening my mouth and dramatically taking the bite from the fork, flicking my tongue across the tines as I pulled the cake into my mouth.

Jay’s eyes were wide as they focused on my mouth.

I forked up a bite and offered it to him, but he took the fork from my hand to eat.

“A little much for you?” I asked.

Jay sputtered. “I...that was...let’s just eat.”

He’d liked watching me. Did he want more? I would give him whatever he wanted. That thought should have sobered me enough to get the hell out of there, but it didn’t.

I didn’t even think about leaving until I realized we’d nearly finished the whiskey.

JAY

Ford slapped his hands on the table and started to stand, then realized he was in a booth and flopped back down on the seat. “That didn’t work.”

I tried to hold back my laugh, but I couldn’t. We both ended up laughing so hard, we were slumped over the table. When we’d finally recovered, Ford said, “I’ve got to go home. I’ve got work tomorrow. Have to...sleep first.”

I didn’t want this night to end. I was genuinely enjoying spending time with him, but he was drunk as hell, and I wasn’t much better. We both needed to head home. “I’ll get you a cab.”

He frowned. “What about you? You need to get home.”

“I don’t live far from here. I’ll walk.”

“We can share a cab.”

“I don’t think that’s a good idea.” Not with the way I was feeling. My flirting with him had started to seem far too real.

I grinned at him, and he started laughing. Shit, he was really drunk. “I’m a good boy. I won’t seduce you in the cab.”

Once we were outside, Ford tipped his face up and looked at me with a goofy smile, all I could think about was how beautiful he was. That had to be the whiskey talking. I needed to go back into the bar and find a hot woman who was just as horny as I was. That would solve the problem.

“Whatcha thinking about Jay? You look worried. I thought we were having fun.”

“We were. We are, but you need to get home and get to bed.”

“I’m a little bit drunk.”

I laughed. “More than a little.”

“No, not soooo much.”

I succeeded in flagging down a cab and steered Ford toward the door. He stumbled on the curb and fell against the door. I overbalanced and ended up pressed against him with his body trapped between me and the cab. My breath caught as I looked down at him. His eyes were wide, his lips parted, and I wanted to kiss him so badly. I needed to see how it felt.

I started to lean in but thank fuck a honk from a passing car jolted me back to reality. I jumped back, barely keeping Ford upright.

We were drunk. This wasn’t the time to kiss Ford. I didn’t *want* to kiss him. I couldn’t.

I managed to reach around him, open the door, and help him into the cab.

“Where to?” the cabbie asked.

When Ford didn’t say anything, I thumped his shoulder. “Tell him your address.”

Ford managed to name his street, then looked back at me and licked his lips. “You sure you don’t want to join me?”

I wasn’t sure about anything right then, but I nodded. “Can you get yourself home okay?”

He nodded. “I’ll be fine. Just lonely.”

I stood there watching as the cab drove away, trying to ignore the way my dick had reacted to having his body pressed against mine.

FORD

“F ord? What’s wrong?” Was that Worth? I didn’t remember calling him.

“Nothing. It’s a wonderful night.”

“Are you drunk?”

“No. Definitely not. Don’t mix alcohol and lawyerling...lawler...work.”

“You’re definitely drunk. Do you know it’s 1 AM?”

I pulled the phone away from my ear to look at the time.

“Wow. I should be in bed.”

“Where are you?”

“My street, I think, but all the houses look the same. Which one is mine?”

“Shit. Just stay where you are or go to that 24-hour diner on the corner. I’ll be there as fast as I can.”

When I woke up the next day, I thought I was in hell. It was the only thing that would explain the way my head felt and the fact that there didn’t seem to be any moisture in my body.

I cracked open my eyes enough to discover I was actually in my room. What the hell had happened?

My head pounded so hard I couldn't think. It took what felt like ages before I remembered going to the bar with Jay.

Oh God, what had I done. I remembered leaving the club with him, but everything was fuzzy once we'd started drinking heavily. How had I gotten home?

He'd bought us whiskey. Was he trying to get me to spill all my secrets? Fuck, had I? I wasn't usually talkative when I was drunk, but Jay had been...nice. We'd just talked and talked and.... He'd really played me good.

I needed to get up and go to work. I stumbled to the bathroom, fighting the nausea that was making my stomach try to turn itself inside out.

I took a sip of water, trying to add moisture to the desert that was my mouth. It sloshed around in my stomach, and I had to wait before taking another sip. I reached for my toothbrush. My hand shook as I added toothpaste. The second I put the brush in my mouth, I knew I was doomed.

I managed to get on my knees in front of the toilet before I vomited up what little was in my stomach.

“Are you okay?”

I jumped, nearly falling into the shower.

Worth was standing in the bathroom doorway.

“What? How?”

“I helped you get home. Do you remember?”

I had a faint recollection of me standing in the street looking up at all the houses and talking to Worth on the phone. I cautiously shook my head.

“You must have taken a cab home, but then you couldn't seem to find your door, so you called me.”

Cab. Yeah, there'd been a cab. “I did. Jay....”

My mind was flooded with the sensation of Jay's body pressed against mine. I was leaning back against the cab. That couldn't have really happened, could it?

“Ford? What the fuck did Jasper do?”

“Nothing. Nothing at all. He put me in a cab.”

“He got you drunk. You never drink that much on a weeknight and rarely on the weekends.”

We’d had a few beers, then Jasper had ordered the whiskey, but I could have said no. He hadn’t pressured me, had he? He’d kept filling my glass, but it had been...nice. Like a date.

Oh fuck. I turned back to the toilet for another round. This time I was sure at least some of my organs had come up with my stomach contents.

“Jesus, how much did you drink?” Worth asked.

My only response was to groan. Finally, I managed to hoist myself back up to my feet.

“You should go back to sleep,” Worth said.

“No. What time is it? I should be at work.”

“I already told Miles you were sick.”

“Oh God, he’s going to ask questions. I don’t need that.”

Worth shook his head. “I’m not going to give him any details.”

“You didn’t tell him I called you last night?”

“I told him you called me because you had food poisoning.”

I didn’t deserve friends like him. “Thanks.”

“You know he’ll find out eventually.”

“Hopefully not until I’ve won this case.” I stumbled toward the stairs, and Worth sighed.

“If you’re not going to go back to sleep, you can tell me exactly what the fuck is going on with Jasper. Do I need to track him down and make it clear to him that he better not mess with you anymore?”

“You’re going to do that? Or are you going to call Carter to do that?”

Worth shrugged. “Same thing, but with less chance of messing up my shoes. They cost a fortune.”

I laughed. “True, but I don’t need either of you to go after him. That would actually make things worse. Jasper is Ms. Jenkins’ lawyer.”

“Oh shit.”

“Yeah.”

“So that’s why he showed up last night saying he wanted to talk about the case?”

I nodded, then wished I hadn’t when my head threatened to explode.

Worth frowned. “He’s up to something.”

“No doubt.”

“And he got you drunk. Are you sure you didn’t tell him something you shouldn’t?”

“I don’t think I did. It was weird. We talked about the case, and I assured him Miles would never agree to settle. Then we just...talked.”

“Is that a euphemism?”

“No. He’s straight, remember?”

Worth huffed. “I saw the way he was looking at you last night.”

“That wasn’t real. He wants me to think he might be interested because he thinks I’ll be more likely to give in to his demands.”

“You need to stay away from that son of a bitch.”

“No shit.”

“Ford, really. He’s not good for you.”

“I know. Why am I always attracted to the ones I can’t have?”

Worth grinned. “It’s too bad you can’t be like me.”

“Not learn their names and not give a damn? Just fuck them and walk away?”

“Right. Because if you could do that with Jasper....”

“You’re terrible.”

He shrugged. “Yeah. Probably. You should tell Miles about what happened last night. You and Jasper working on the same case has to be a conflict of interest.”

“If I refuse to work with anyone I know, I couldn’t do corporate law anymore.”

“It’s not that you know him, it’s that you’ve got a thing for him.”

“No, I think he’s hot, and I’d like to fuck him.”

Worth raised his brows.

“Fine. I’d like him to be straight and not be an asshole who always come up with ways to act like he’s superior to me.”

“Would you? Really? Or is that part of the fantasy for you, fucking a straight asshole?”

Why did Worth know me so well? I let out a long breath. “I’d like to think better of myself than that.”

“I’m not judging you. It’s okay to have fantasies and to act them out. I just don’t want you to get hurt.”

“It’s not okay to want to be with some guy who’s just using me.”

“If you’re using him too, then it is.”

“You know me, Worth. You know that isn’t how it would go, and there definitely is a conflict of interest in sleeping with opposing counsel.”

“Are you sure? Like what if you were married?”

“In my personal moral code, it’s an issue whether it’s a legal one or not.”

“That’s the problem. Your personal moral code is too strict.”

I flipped him off. Had Jay really been looking at me like he was interested? Why would he fake it when I wasn’t paying attention? I bit my lip to keep from asking Worth that question.

“Are you feeling any better now that you’ve got all that alcohol out of your system?” Worth’s words startled me from

my thoughts.

I considered the question for a moment. My head was still throbbing, but my stomach was less unsettled. “Maybe. A little.”

“Let me take you to brunch, some eggs and bacon and a little hair of the dog will have you fixed up in no time.”

Before he’d asked, I would have said I couldn’t even think about food, but once Worth made the suggestion, I was suddenly starving. “On one condition.”

“What?”

“We don’t talk about Jasper.”

Worth considered that for a moment. “Alright, but you’re on notice.”

“What?”

“If you keep letting him get to you, we’re going to have an intervention.”

I rolled my eyes. “I can handle myself.”

He didn’t look the least bit convinced, and honestly, I wasn’t either.

After brunch, I tried to get Worth to tell his driver to drop me off at the office, but he insisted I go home and relax. “Do you want Miles asking questions about why you came in if you’re sick?”

“Having food poisoning isn’t the same as having a virus. I’ll just say I feel better.”

Worth shook his head. “Go home and get yourself together.”

“Damn. I never thought you’d be the one saying that to me.”

He chuckled. “I have to say I’m enjoying it.”

JAY

I startled awake from a dream. It felt so real that I reached out my arm and felt the bed next to me to make sure Ford wasn't there. When I was sure I was alone, I lay there, staring at the ceiling as my head pounded. I tried to banish the dream from my mind, but it was too potent.

I'd really fucked up last night. I'd meant to flirt a little with Ford, set the groundwork for convincing him it would be better to settle out of court, maybe buy him a few drinks.

Nothing had worked like I'd planned.

He'd refused to budge at all, saying his client—aka his best friend—would never agree to a settlement unless my client met all his demands. If my client was going to agree to that, she would have given in before Montgomery officially filed his suit.

Once it was clear Ford wasn't going to negotiate with me—yet—I should have left. Instead, I'd ordered us a bottle of whiskey, and we'd talked about everything but the case. It was the best damn night I'd had in months, maybe longer.

Why did Ford have to be so fucking charming?

Remember, he was drunk.

Not at first.

I'd kept pouring for him, telling myself I wanted to get him drunk so he would spill some secrets. But really, I just hadn't wanted him to leave. I never talked to anyone who was just a friend, not that Ford was my friend, no matter what I'd said to

him. I only talked to people about work or had just enough conversation to get down to fucking, except for when I talked to my Gran, my sister, and a man who hated me. How pathetic was that?

You haven't done a damn thing to make him like you.

I don't really like him either. I just...need him to lose this case.

You're just lonely and apparently bisexual.

No that's not...even if I want to be friends with him, I don't want....

To fuck him? To hold him down and shove your dick inside him? To make him beg?

No! I'd love to force him to admit I was as good as he was at more than tennis—not that he even admitted to that—but I don't want to sleep with him.

A flash hit me from my dream: Ford, his body pinned against my car like it had been against the cab last night. His lips soft under mine, the stubble on his face scratching me as I kissed him. His dick hard against my stomach as I ground into him, making him groan. "More, Jay, I need more."

Fuck. I was sweating, my hands were shaking. It was just a dream. It wasn't real.

That was when I realized my boxers were stuck to me and the bed under me was wet. What the hell? I'd had a fucking wet dream for the first time in a decade, and it was about a man.

I couldn't be that confused, could I? Had I been harboring some secret love for men all along?

No. I'd never thought about a man like I did Ford. I had to have some weird obsession with him because he was so fucking perfect. He had everything anyone could want. He was beautiful and smart and—

Shit. That wasn't helping. This was not the time to challenge everything I knew about myself. I needed to focus on work and on Gran.

But thinking about Gran only made me depressed, and thinking about work only led me to thinking about Ford.

Why the hell did he have to be the one representing Montgomery? And why hadn't I thought about it before agreeing to take the case, not that I really could have refused. This was another fucking test from the senior partners. Like I hadn't been through plenty already.

I'd barely managed to drag myself out of bed when my doorbell rang. What the fuck was someone doing here this early? And how had they gotten all the way up to my apartment?

I shucked my dirty boxers and pulled on some sweats and a T-shirt. When I looked through the peephole, I saw Emily.

She must have managed to rebook herself on an earlier flight. I opened the door and ushered her in. After we hugged, she took a step back and gave me a concerned once-over. "You don't look so good."

"Thanks."

"Are you hungover?"

I might as well fess up. "Yes, dammit. I went out with Ford last night."

"Ford? The guy from the tennis league? The one you like?"

"I don't like him."

She raised her brows. "I think you do."

"What the fuck, Emily? I'm not gay."

Her eyes went wide. "Oh. So you *like* him, like him."

"What?" Panic rushed through me. Why had I said that?

"I thought you admired him, but you really like him."

"No, I don't. Didn't you hear what I just said."

"I heard what your words said, but..." she smiled. "You're the one who went and brought up being gay."

"But I'm not. I don't like men like that."

“Why not?”

“What do you mean why not?” Had she already thought I was?

“Are you afraid to like men?”

“No, I just don’t. I’m just not wired that way. I never....”

“Until now.”

I dropped onto the couch and put my head in my hands.

Emily sat beside me and ran a hand up and down my back.

“So you like him. There’s nothing wrong with that.”

“That’s not what Dad would have said, or Gran.”

“Give Gran more credit than that.”

I sighed. “I don’t need to worry about it, because nothing is going on with Ford.”

“Because you’ve been an asshole to him?”

“No. Yes, but—”

“So stop doing that.”

I meant to insist that I wasn’t interested in making Ford like me, but what came out was, “I don’t know how.”

“Jesus, you’re not twelve years old. You don’t have to show you like him by being mean to him. What do you do when you like a woman?”

“Ask her to if she wants to go back to my place.”

“And then....”

“You know what happens then.”

She wrinkled her nose. “Right. No details on that, but what about after?”

“There is no after. She leaves and that’s that.”

Emily rolled her eyes. “How can you be so relationship challenged? No wonder you don’t know how to approach Ford.”

“There’s not going to be any approaching, and why aren’t you a little more surprised by this?”

“Because you’ve told me so much about him. I’ve never known you to be that interested in anyone.”

“What? I don’t talk about him a lot.”

She ignored me. “You’ve been flirting with him, haven’t you? To try and get your way.”

I wished she’d gone straight to see Gran, I did not need this interrogation. “How did you know?”

“I know you. That’s your go-to.”

“Not with men.”

She shrugged. “You know he’s gay, so that’s your tactic, right?”

“Maybe.”

“Then let him know it’s real.”

“He’s the counsel for the defense. He’s not going to buy it, and he could get me charged with misconduct. I’m trying to get a promotion.”

She studied me for a moment, seeming to carefully consider her words. “Do you really need more money and more stress?”

“No, but you do—the money, not the stress.”

“Jay, I appreciate you wanting to help me, but I can get a business loan or keep going without the extra space. You don’t even like your job. Don’t take on even more for me.”

“Not an option.”

“Then work nicely with Ford on this lawsuit, and once it’s over, tell him how you feel.”

I shook my head. “That’s not how this business works. I have to win. I’m not going to do that by being nice.”

“If what you want is a compromise....”

I held up a hand. “Miles Montgomery doesn’t compromise.”

Her eyes widened. “That’s who he’s representing? The nation’s former most eligible billionaire.”

“Not just that. They’re best friends.”

“No way.”

“Rumor has it Ford is just as rich as he is.”

“Then why the hell is he working?” Emily asked.

“He handles business for Miles to give himself something to do.”

“He also plays tennis with you.”

I blew out a long breath. “Why the hell did I get involved in this stupid tennis league?”

“Because you enjoy it, and you need to do something besides work.”

“If I’d never met Ford...”

“You would have missed out on learning something about yourself.”

“I don’t even know if—”

Emily glared at me. “Look me in the eyes and tell me you’re not interested in him.”

“Just go see Gran.”

She sighed. “You’re going to fuck this up, aren’t you?”

“I’m going to do what I need to do to win this suit and get my promotion.”

“Jay, please think about what’s really important to you.”

“I already have.” Knowing I could support myself and my family was my top priority.

“We’re going to talk about this again.”

I knew there was no point arguing with her. She’d gotten her teeth into it now, and she wasn’t going to let it go.

“Come see Gran with me.”

I glanced at my watch. “I should already be in the office.”

“At seven thirty?”

“If I don’t appear dedicated—”

“Your grandmother could be dying. I think it’s okay if you go in a few hours late. I really don’t want to go by myself.”

I reached out and took her hand. She was right. Going in late wasn’t going to make or break things. I wasn’t going to make her go alone. I knew how hard it would be for her to see Gran doing so poorly. “Okay, I’ll go with you.”

“Thanks, Jay, and seriously you need to—”

“No more. Not today.”

She nodded, and I could tell from her expression she understood I was serious.

If only I could get Ford out of my head as easily as I could end a conversation about him. Throughout the morning, I was reminded of him constantly.

Gran wished she felt well enough to knit, and I immediately thought about learning that Ford knitted. He probably expected me to tease him, but in truth, I admired his ability.

Emily offered to read to Gran, and that made me think about how much Ford loved books. The first time we’d met, he’d tried to convince me to read some absurdly pretentious book he was reading. The way he dressed, he looked like he belonged in some nineteenth century manor library filled with books.

He was definitely not my type. Except, somehow, apparently, he was.

Emily could only be in New York for a day, so she stayed with Gran when I left for the office. I talked to Ms. Jenkins to see if she was willing to compromise. I needed her to come out of this happy, but if she would make some concessions, I could at least approach Ford with an offer.

After a long discussion, I managed to convince her to offer Montgomery a different warehouse that was higher in value. Once the meeting ended, I called Ford. I wondered if he would even answer after last night, but I assumed he was too much of a professional not to. He took his work seriously. He seemed to take most everything seriously.

I was such an asshole. I was going to make him think I'd changed my mind about my interest in him, but what else could I do? I needed this win.

You'll lose any chance you might have with him if you do that.

Then that was how it had to be. Besides, I wasn't really going to date him, was I? If anything, I'd have a fling, that's all. Even if I did suddenly want dick, I could have a perfectly enjoyable hookup with someone else.

When Ford answered my call, I said. "I've got a new offer to propose. Let's have dinner."

"Are you serious?"

"Yes. I have a good proposal for a way to resolve this suit."

"We tried things your way last night. Let's set up a meeting like two professionals."

"A dinner meeting is a perfectly reasonable professional engagement."

"No more whiskey."

I grinned. "I wouldn't dream of it."

"No alcohol at all, at least not for me."

I hoped I'd be able to convince him otherwise when we met, but if I had to do this with him sober, so be it. "I'm not going to force you to drink. I'd just like you to hear me out, and I'm sure you need dinner."

I waited through several moments of silence before he said, "Fine. Text me a time and a restaurant, and I'll be there."

FORD

I hoped none of my friends would call to see if I'd recovered from my "illness." I didn't want to admit that I was going to dinner with Jay. Worth had said he wouldn't tell Miles what had happened the night before, but Miles had a way of finding out things he had no business knowing. Worth might not tell him directly, but if Miles sensed something was up, he'd get Carter to investigate. I'd be lucky if I didn't show up to work in the morning to find the three of them sitting in my office, ready to tear me apart for getting drunk with the enemy.

Tonight wasn't going to go like that. Tonight I was going to make it clear that I wasn't negotiating, and I wasn't settling. I knew how easily we could win this case, and Ms. Jenkins could either give Miles what he wanted, or we could go to court.

I knew how badly Jay needed this win, but I was not going to feel sorry for him. Not when he'd been such a fucking ass to me and not when he was trying to use his charm once again to get me to give him to what he wanted.

He didn't want to be friends, and he sure as hell didn't want to be lovers. I had to remind myself of that. Nothing I did was going to change reality.

Pasta, the restaurant Jay had chosen, was only a few blocks away from my place. At least if I needed to leave quickly, I wouldn't have to wait on a ride.

When I arrived, Jay was at the bar. I watched him for a moment. Even from behind, I would've known he was

devastatingly handsome. Why the fuck did he still have an effect on me when I knew what he was like? My dick was just never going to learn.

As I walked toward him, he turned around like he'd sensed me. He flipped his hair off his face and gave me a sexy smile. It was all fake. He was just a damn good actor, no matter how real anything had felt the night before.

He rose and gestured toward the dining room. "Our table is ready."

I just nodded and followed him, not sure I trusted my voice. Once again, I would swear he had chosen everything he was wearing to make me want him even more. His blue sweater was the same color as the polo I loved, and his gray pants cupped his ass, showing it off to perfection. How did he know what I liked?

As soon as we sat down, a server approached the table to take our drink orders. I asked for a seltzer with lime. Jay ordered a gin and tonic. I nearly told the waiter I'd changed my mind and would have the same as Jay, but I fought the urge. A drink might calm the butterflies in my stomach and make it easier to eat sitting across from Jay, but I would not let him fog my brain again.

"You said you had a proposal for me," I said as soon as the server left the table. "Let's hear it."

"You know," Jay said. "I enjoyed talking to you last night."

"You enjoyed getting me drunk last night."

He glanced away. Was that hurt I'd seen in his eyes? I shouldn't worry about it. If I'd hurt him, it was no more than he deserved.

"You're rather amusing when you're drunk, but just so you know, you didn't spill anything important, not that I remember at least."

"Thank you so much for letting me know." I meant to keep my tone sarcastic, but I ended up sounding much too sincere. Jay looked away again. He was confusing the hell out of me.

“We’re here for business,” I said. “So let’s talk business.”

“I want you to hear me out before you comment.”

The waiter arrived with our drinks. Jay ordered the calamari as an appetizer, and the server disappeared once more.

“I spoke with my client today. I know Miles wants to take possession of the warehouse.”

I nodded. “That’s right.”

“Why does he need that particular property?”

Exactly what I had been asking myself. “Because it’s the one he signed a contract for.”

“What if he could have a larger property of equal or higher value for the same price?”

I shook my head. “That was not in the contract.”

“My client has access to other properties.”

“But my client is not interested in that access. He’s interested in ownership of the property for which he’s already signed a purchase agreement.”

“He signed an initial offer, that is not the same as having possession. There has been no closing.”

“Your client has no legally legitimate reason not to do as promised in the initial contract. She is obligated to sell this property to my client.”

“If what your client needs is a warehouse for storage, and he can be provided with one that will fit his needs, then—”

“That’s not going to work for us.”

“And why not?”

That was a question I couldn’t fully answer. I knew Miles was trying to shut out a competing business of a shady nature, but he wouldn’t give me the details. All I knew was that the people Jay’s client was working for had no concern for whom they hurt with their business. Miles only dabbled in illegal sales, and what he did harmed no one except other businessmen who were nearly as rich as he was.

“There must be a reason,” Jay insisted.

“The reason is as simple as this. That is the warehouse my client wants, and that is the one he signed a contract for.”

“Surely one warehouse in the same area is as good as another.”

“Not if you’re Miles Montgomery. He always gets what he wants.”

Jay huffed.

The calamari arrived a moment later, and our waiter asked if we were ready to order our entrées. Before I had a chance to answer, Jay shook his head. “We need more time.”

I almost contradicted him and said I was ready, but I hadn’t actually looked at the menu, and it had been a while since I’d been to Pasta. I supposed it wouldn’t kill me to delay a little longer.

I reached for a piece of calamari. When I looked up, Jay was watching me. He held my gaze until I raised my brows. That made him look down. It was the first time I’d ever won a challenge between us. Why did that feel so significant?

We ate in silence for a little while, then he said my name in a soft voice. If he was someone else, I would have sworn his tone was filled with longing. It was just the way I would want him to say my name in bed. I looked up at him and glared. “Don’t do that.”

“Do what?” he asked, giving me his most innocent face.

“Try to make this about seduction. You had your chance with me, and you made it very clear how you felt. You’re not interested in men. I’m here with you to do business and nothing else.”

“But last night....” His words trailed off. I wanted to know what he had been about to say, but I didn’t dare ask. I was already too close to falling under his spell, despite knowing exactly what he was trying to do.

Maybe I should talk to Miles and see if there was any way he would compromise. I needed this suit to end quickly, but Miles was never going to agree to give up the warehouse, not when

he knew what was at stake. His idea of a compromise was to ignore the law, and the last thing we needed was him leaving behind a trail of bodies. I had no sympathy for the men who wanted to keep possession of the warehouse. Only a fool would mourn them if Miles had them taken out, but the more times Miles solved his problems the illegal way, the more likely he was to get caught.

I met Jay's gaze again. "Last night was a mistake."

He reached out and placed his hand over mine. A jolt of electricity ran up my arm. His skin was warm, soft. I wanted to grab hold of his wrist, jerk him across the table, and kiss him. What would he do if I indulged myself right there in the middle of the restaurant? Would he freak out? Would we end up the subject of the next day's society gossip?

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"Ford, would you just listen to me?"

"I can listen to you talk about the case, but that's all. Stop acting like there's something going on here when you just want to win."

"Maybe we can figure out a way for us both to win." He'd dropped his voice into those low, sensual tones again.

"Are you suggesting that if I convince Miles to accept your compromise, you will sleep with me and that will be my prize?"

Jay's eyes widened. "No, that's not what I meant."

"So, even for the chance to have this win, you wouldn't dare sleep with a man, is that it?"

Jay snarled. "You're making this impossible. If I want you, I'm manipulating you. If I don't want you, I'm being an asshole. What do you want?"

"I want us to behave as professionals who don't know each other. Treat me like you would any other opposing counsel."

"You aren't any other opposing counsel. And this isn't any other lawsuit. Your client is your friend. And I..."

Had he been about to mention the promotion? Did he think he could play on my emotions like that? Would it work if he did?

“I’m offering a reasonable compromise.”

“My client doesn’t really believe in reasonable.”

Jay laughed. “That sure seems to be the case.”

“We’re going to win this case. The law is behind us.”

“You’re so fucking sure of that.” The bitterness I was used to was back in his tone.

“Have you got something to rattle my confidence?”

“I’m going to find something.”

I shook my head. “I shouldn’t be here.”

The smile left Jay’s face. “We’re having a meeting about our clients.”

“Are we?”

“Yes. If my suggestion doesn’t suit you, then what would you suggest as a compromise?”

“I already told you, compromise is not on the table here.”

“You don’t want to take this to court any more than I do. That would take too much time out of your tennis schedule.”

I huffed. “I don’t want to take it to court, but the only way I’m going to get my wish is if your client agrees to meet my client’s demands.”

“Tell me the truth. If my client was represented by anybody else, would you hold the line this hard?”

“Yes.”

He narrowed his eyes, studying me, and I let myself truly consider the question. “If it was anyone else, I would have never agreed to dinner. I would have never agreed to leave the club last night. If it was anyone else, I’d simply state my demands and refuse contact unless it was court mandated.”

“And you say I am an asshole.”

“You’re an asshole in your personal life. I’m an asshole professionally. That’s what this job is about.”

“Yeah, fucking tell me about it.” He picked up his drink and downed the rest of it in one go.

“I think it’s time for me to leave.”

“We haven’t ordered dinner yet.”

“This meeting has gone on long enough. Anything else you have to say to me can be sent to me in writing.” I pushed back my chair and tossed my napkin on the table, hating that my hands were shaking. I wasn’t even sure I could identify the emotions I was feeling as I practically ran from the restaurant.

“Ford, wait!” he called, but I didn’t stop. I kept moving. I needed to get out of there. I hoped he thought it was because I was angry or an ice princess or anything other than the fact that I had to get out of there before I gave in, or worse, started to believe his act was real.

JAY

I wasn't going to let the night end this way. I needed a win on something. I pulled out my wallet, tossed some bills on the table to cover what we ordered, and went after Ford. When I stepped onto the sidewalk, I looked around for him. Finally, I saw him walking toward the closest intersection.

I caught up to him just before he could cross at the light. When I grabbed his arm, he turned, ready to punch me. I blocked him, and he pushed me away.

"I told you I was done."

"Well, I'm not."

"Yes, you are. I'll see you in court." He jerked free of my hold, the light turned in his favor, and he rushed across the street. I stood there, staring after him, tears stinging the back of my eyes.

I was falling apart. Had I finally pushed myself so hard I was having a fucking nervous breakdown? That was the only thing that could explain it, because if I was in my right mind I wouldn't be standing here nearly crying over a man who was running from me. I could pretend I was upset because this situation could fuck up my career, but I knew that wasn't the issue.

I turned and started walking in the opposite direction, not even sure where I was headed. At least it was New York, so only a few tourists bothered to stop and stare as I'd argued with Ford.

I wandered until I was exhausted, then managed to drag myself home. All I did before I went to bed was talk to Emily. I couldn't make myself give a fuck about casework.

The next morning, I was getting ready for work on autopilot when my phone rang. Stupidly, I grabbed it, thinking it might be Ford. It was Emily. She would be leaving in a few hours.

"Hey, how are you?"

"I don't want to go home. Not with Gran so sick." That answered my question about whether Gran had improved yesterday. This week just kept getting worse. I scrubbed a hand over my face, knowing I had to get myself together for Gran and Emily.

"I know. I don't want you to leave either. How was she when you left last night?"

"Still weak, and only staying awake for a few minutes at a time. I know you're supposed to be working, but I was hoping you could visit with me this morning so I can see her one more time before I have to go home."

I didn't hesitate. "I'll be there as quickly as I can."

Gran's condition hadn't changed overnight. I guess I could at least be glad she wasn't any worse. When it was time for Emily to leave, I considered staying with Gran and letting the office know I wouldn't be in today, but the nurse said it was best to just let her rest and come back later.

As I waited with Emily for her ride to the airport, she took my hand and squeezed it. "Why don't you call him?"

"Who?"

She glared at me. "You know who."

"Ford? I doubt he'd even answer after last night."

"What did you do to him?"

"Me? I didn't—"

She raised her brows. "I'm sure you didn't do what I said."

"I told you, we're both working the same lawsuit."

“Jay, I want you to enjoy your life, whatever that means for you. I’m sure Gran would say the same.”

“Ford only makes my life more difficult.”

“That may or may not be true, but what about your job? I know you’re not happy, and it’s not just this lawsuit.”

She was right, but I had no idea what to do to change anything.

“I’ll be all right. Don’t worry about me.”

“I always worry about you.” Her car arrived a moment later. I hugged her tight before opening the door for her.

“Call me tonight.”

“I will.” The last thing I wanted to do after she drove away was go to work, but I didn’t have a choice.

Once I sorted through my email and checked on the other cases on my roster, I messaged Ford.

Did you reconsider my proposal from last night?

Half an hour passed before I received an answer.

My client is not interested.

Do you have a counteroffer?

No.

I nearly threw my phone across the room. Fuck Ford and Miles and the whole fucking situation.

I wanted to go tell my boss I quit and leave this fucking office for good, but no matter what she said, Emily needed me. I also needed to pay for Gran’s care, and I still had fucking loan debt from law school. Beyond all that, I needed to know I was secure, that nothing was going to happen to leave me struggling the way my dad had struggled while I was growing up.

I’d thought the day couldn’t get any worse, but it turned out I was wrong. My phone rang as I sat there staring at the case

file, willing myself to come up with a miracle. I answered it, even though I didn't recognize the number. "This is Jasper Rollins."

"Mr. Rollins, I'm calling to make sure you understand how vital it is that your client wins against Miles Montgomery."

"Who is this?"

"An interested party."

"I can't discuss the case with anyone but my client."

"Your client works for me, though she might not admit it. Things are going to be very rough for her if she loses, just like they will be for you."

The man's voice sent chills through me. I couldn't explain why, but he sounded like pure evil. I'd confronted evil often enough at work, though, so I wasn't going to back down. "Like I said. I cannot discuss any aspects of the case."

"You don't have to discuss it, you just have to win it. Let's just say your life may depend on it."

Before I could respond, he ended the call.

As I sat staring at my phone for several moments, I began to wonder if my lack of sleep was getting to me and I'd imagined the whole thing, but when I checked my call log displayed "Unknown Caller." I'd certainly talked to someone.

I'd suspected there was more to the lawsuit than a dispute over a real estate purchase. What difference could it possibly make to Montgomery which warehouse he purchased? Was he simply that stubborn? I wouldn't put it past him, but I'd sensed there was more going on, and now I was sure of it.

I needed to talk to Ford, but did I dare bring up this phone call? What kind of shit was my client involved with, and how much did Montgomery know about it? Did he tell Ford everything? I needed answers, but even more than that, I needed something to go right. I couldn't remember a worse week since my father died.

What would Ford say if I let him know I was being threatened? Would he care? Would he hope they did me in and

made the case even easier to win? I wanted to call him, but I wasn't sure I wanted to know the answer to those questions.

Instead, I kept looking for my needle in a haystack, my way to win without his cooperation. After hours of tedious research and nothing to show for it, I left the office without speaking to anyone and headed straight for my favorite dive bar. After Emily called to let me know she was home safe and things had gone well at the café, I let myself get very, very drunk.

FORD

Someone was ringing my doorbell over and over. I glanced at the clock. It was past eleven at night. Who the fuck would be here now other than my close friends? And they would text or call first. I pulled up the doorbell app on my phone and saw Jay standing, or rather leaning, against my door.

Before I reached the door, he started calling my name. I ran the rest of the way, but only opened the door a crack. “What are you doing here?”

He shrugged, and the movement nearly sent him toppling over. “Nowhere else to go.”

“What about home?”

“No. Being watched.”

“What the fuck do you mean?”

“There’s a man watching my apartment.”

Had Miles sent someone to spy on him?

I opened the door wider. “Get in here before someone calls the cops on you.”

He stumbled over the threshold. I caught his shoulders, but we hit the coatrack and crashed to the floor. He landed on top of me. Instead of moving, he used his hips to push my legs apart and settled more tightly against me. “Fuck. This feels good.”

I pushed at his chest. “Jay, get off.”

He shook his head. “Kiss me. I need to know how it feels.”

“You’re too drunk to know what you want.”

“I dreamed about you last night. Your lips. They’re so damn beautiful. Are they as soft as they look?”

He couldn’t mean what he was saying, but I wanted him too. Had he really dreamed about me?

“Why do you do this to me?”

“What?”

“Make me want you so damn much.” He worked his hips against me, and I could feel his cock. It was hard as steel. For me. He fucking wanted me.

I couldn’t do this. I *shouldn’t* do this.

Jay grabbed my hands, dragged them above my head, and pinned them to the floor. I’d fantasized about this exact scenario. How the hell was I supposed to fight this?

Jay’s aggressive kiss stole my breath. I opened to him instantly, letting him thrust his tongue into my mouth. He was fucking me with it like I wanted him to fuck my ass with the thick cock I could feel pressing against me.

“Fuck, this is good,” he said as he pulled back from the kiss and rubbed his face against mine, our stubble rasping together.

Once I could breathe again, I found enough self-control to shove at his shoulders. “We’ve got to stop, Jay.”

He rolled off me, but his hold on my hips was so tight I rolled with him and ended up straddling his waist. He reached up, brushed my hair off my forehead, and cupped my cheek. “Why is this happening?”

I shrugged. “Midlife crisis?”

He scowled. “I’m not that fucking old.”

He felt so good under me, and I wanted him desperately. It had been too long since I’d been with anyone. I’d been fantasizing about him for months, but this was so fucking wrong. He

didn't know what he was doing. He was half out of his mind talking about his apartment being watched. Unless....

I knew Miles wasn't telling me everything about the lawsuit. Was he watching Jay or was something else going on? If Jay was in danger, I was going to do whatever was necessary to keep him safe, and I didn't give a fuck what Miles or the others thought about that.

But that was a problem for the morning. Right now, I needed to keep us both from doing something stupid. "Jay, you're going to regret this tomorrow."

He shook his head. "I already regret every other fucking thing in my life."

Damn. What was that about? "This is a really bad idea."

"No. I want you."

I shook my head and managed to free myself from his grip. When I got to my feet, he rolled over and came up on his hands and knees. He hung there for a moment, and I was afraid he might pass out, but he managed to get to his feet.

"Let me get you a cab home."

"No. I don't want to go home. I want to go to bed with you."

He took a step toward me, and I stupidly backed myself into a wall. He was on me in a second, his lips crushing mine, his hands dragging my hips to his as he pressed his whole body against me, pushing me into the wall, reminding me of how he'd almost kissed me before putting me into a cab.

I didn't have the strength to fight this. It was insane. It was wrong, and I was only going to feel worse in the morning, but I couldn't stop it. He slid his hands up under my shirt, caressing my back.

"Feel so good. So different. I need this."

"So you do like men after all?" I hoped challenging him might get him to slow down, because I was fast approaching the point of no return. My dick was all in, and the feel of Jay against me was making me lose my mind.

“Fuck, Ford. What have you done to me?”

“I haven’t done a thing.”

“You watch me with those seductive eyes. You make me want things I’ve never thought about. I need to touch you.” He reached for the fastenings of my jeans, popped the button, and drew the zipper down slowly.

He hesitated then. This was my last chance. My friends had warned me I was going to get hurt. I knew Jay was drunk as hell, but I no longer gave a fuck. I pulled my cock out and stroked it. Jay’s eyes widened, and he licked his lips.

“Have you ever watched another guy jerk off?”

“Only online. I’ve been watching videos, trying to figure out what the fuck is going on with me.”

Oh God. He’d been watching gay porn. He’d been thinking about this, so it wasn’t spontaneous.

You’re just an experiment to him. “You want to know what fucking a man is like, and you expect me to let you use me?” Why did that turn me on? Damn, I was fucked up.

“No, I want to know what fucking *you* is like. I’ve never wanted another man. You...you’ve put some kind of fucking spell on me.”

I wished I had that kind of power. “Touch me, then. Find out how it feels to wrap your hand around another man’s dick.”

He did. I gasped when he gripped me tightly, stroking me up and down. “More. Faster.”

Jay did as I said, and I thrust into his hand, frustrated that it wasn’t slick enough for me to slide in and out easily.

“You want to fuck me?” I challenged him.

“Yes,” he growled.

“Then you’re going to have to get rougher than that.”

Jay gripped my hips and shoved me back into the wall, then spit into his hand and started stroking me roughly, his grip almost painful.

“God, yes. Like that.”

He kissed me again, and I was lost. His lips trailed along my throat, and I tilted my head to the side to give him better access. He sucked at the skin where my neck and shoulder met. He was going to fucking mark me, and I wanted that. I wanted to be his, even if it was just for a moment.

“Do it. Bruise me. Hurt me.”

“Jesus, Ford.”

I slid my hand between us and pressed the base of my palm against his cock, rubbing him through his pants. I needed to feel his skin. “Get these off.”

“You’re fucking bossy.”

“Then find a way to shut me up.”

JAY

This wasn't real. It couldn't be. I wasn't stroking Ford's dick. I wasn't about to fuck his ass. This had to be a dream.

The best dream ever. I didn't want to do anything to make it stop.

The feel of Ford's hand pressing against my cock was so good I was sure I would come in my pants if he kept it up.

When he demanded I strip, I tried to open my pants without letting go of his dick. I was that fucking enamored of the way it felt in my hand, hard but soft, like mine but so different.

Ford pushed my hands out of the way and unfastened my pants while I kissed him again. I couldn't get enough of his mouth. How the hell did it feel so good to kiss a guy—no, not any guy, to kiss Ford. I'd wanted him for so long. Was I really ready to admit that now?

When Ford wrapped his hand around my naked cock, I sucked in my breath. Holy shit. His hand was soft and smooth, his fingers long. He worked me up and down, and I was suddenly so close to the edge I tried to push him away.

"Are you scared now?" The fucker was goading me, trying to make me snap.

"Fuck no. I'm ready for more." I took hold of his biceps, yanked him away from the wall, and pushed him toward the sofa.

The bastard turned and grinned at me. "That's more like it."

I gripped his hips and turned him to face the back of the sofa, then pushed at his back, folding him over it.

“Oh, Jay, did I make you angry?”

I yanked down his pants, exposing his ass, then stopped and stared. His cheeks were perfectly round, I squeezed them and pulled them part. Ford groaned and pushed back into my hands.

“I’m going to fucking wreck you,” I snarled.

“Are you? Do you even know what you’re doing?”

He was going to find out just how much I knew. I was going to make him beg. I needed to hear that, I needed to know how much he loved taking my dick. I might be out of my mind, but I was going to prove to him just how good I was. “You think I’ve never fucked a girl in the ass?”

“I’m not a girl.”

“I know that, but the concept is the same.”

“Nothing about this will be the same as any other sex you’ve had. I’m not going to let you forget that it’s me you’re fucking, and if you’re used to sticking it in some girl’s ass you should know you need lube.”

Ford freed himself from my hold and moved toward the end of the couch.

“No,” I yelled. “You’re not going anywhere until I’m done with you.” When I grabbed him, pulling him back to me, the end table tipped sideways and crashed the floor.

“I was just trying to get the lube you son of a bitch.”

“I’ll get it.”

“It’s in the damn drawer.” He gestured toward the fallen table.

I found the bottle of lube and squirted some onto my fingers as I positioned myself behind Ford. He gasped when I pushed a finger into him. His ass was so tight and hot as it gripped my finger. Fucking him was going to be amazing. I hoped I’d be able to last more than a few seconds.

I added a second finger, pushing deep. He turned his head and looked up at me. "I thought you'd just drive your dick in there. I didn't expect you to get me all prepped."

"I want you ready because once I'm inside you I'm not going to go slow or easy."

"I don't want you to. I want you to use me just like you've fantasized about."

"You're fucking filthy. I knew you would be."

"Thought a lot about it, have you?"

"Enough. You fucking bastard."

He worked his hips, pushing back to take my fingers deep. I pulled them almost all the way out, then pushed in again, working him open slowly.

"You can go harder. I won't break."

I drove into him hard and stretched my fingers apart as far as I could.

"Curl them down," he ordered.

Was I positioned right to press on his prostate? I did as he said, and he cried out, jerking in my arms. I did it again, and he reached around and seized my wrist. "Fuck me now. I'm more than ready."

I let my fingers slip from his body and slicked up my cock. This was happening. I was going to fuck a man, a man I was supposed to be working against. A man who hated me but wanted me. This was so messed up, but there was no way I could stop now. Just the thought of his ass squeezing my dick had me close to spilling my load already.

I took my cock in hand and brushed the tip over his hole. Then I surged forward, pushing through his resistance.

"Fuck you," he yelled.

"I thought this was what you wanted."

"It is, you bastard. Give me more."

I pulled most of the way out and drove in again.

Ford whimpered and the sound nearly made me lose it. His ass clamped down on my dick. “Is it too much for you?”

“Never.”

“You want it all? You want my dick buried in you?”

“Yes, goddamn you. You know I do.”

Once again I pulled back, then thrust into him, fighting the tightness of his ass until I was buried to the balls.

“I told you I could take it,” he taunted.

“We’re just getting started.”

He looked up at me. “Don’t tell me you’re straight ever again.”

“I’m not—”

“Who are you fucking?” The anger in his eyes made me suck in my breath.

“You.”

“Say my fucking name.”

“Ford. Asshole lawyer, Ford Wainwright.”

“Don’t you forget it.”

I drove into him and kept going, fucking him again and again until he was open for me, his body no longer protesting the invasion. He was driving his hips back to meet my strokes as he reached under himself and started stroking his cock. Fuck, he really was into this.

When his movements grew more frantic, and he didn’t seem able to catch his breath. I squeezed his wrist, forcing him to let go of his dick.

“Hands on the couch,” I demanded. He struggled for a moment, then gave in.

“You like that, don’t you?” he asked. “You like telling me what to do.”

“Fuck off.” I took him even harder, using him relentlessly until I wasn’t sure I could hold back much longer.

It was every bit as good as I'd imagined, better even, perfect. Why hadn't I done this before?

He tried to reach for his cock again, but I seized his hand. "No, not yet."

"I want to come, you fucker."

"I bet you do."

He tried to free his arm. "Let me go."

"Beg me. Beg me to let you come."

"No."

I grabbed his other wrist too and pinned them both to the couch as I lay over him and fucked him hard and deep.

"I can't...Jay...Let go...."

"Beg me."

He drove back against me like he was trying to take even more of me inside. "Give me what I need."

"Not yet."

I slowed my pace, working slowly into him. He was panting, whining. "I need to fucking come."

"I don't want to let you."

"I hate you."

"I know, but it just makes this hotter. Your ass is mine. You're bent over for me, taking my dick."

That only made him try harder to get more from me. He wanted to be used. He wanted it rough. I took his cock in my hand and worked him as I fucked into his ass. "Yes. Like that. Oh, fuck."

I let go of his cock before he could come.

"No. What are you doing?"

"Are you a slut for me, Ford?"

He whimpered. "Jay...don't do this."

“But you like this. You like me in charge. Tell me how much you want me.”

“Jay, you know.”

I growled. “Tell me.”

“I want...God, please.”

“That’s it. Tell me what you need, beg me for it.”

“Jay,” he sounded so desperate, and it made me have to fight to hold myself back.

“Yes?”

“Please, let me come, please.”

I wrapped my hand around him again and worked him hard and fast. He thrust into my hand, and I felt his ass squeeze my dick just before he cried out. His cum ran over my hand. I’d jerked off another man. I was holding a dick. It should be freaking me out, but it was the hottest fucking thing ever.

I drove into him a few more times and let go, spilling my load in his ass.

“Oh fuck,” he cried out.

“You loved that, didn’t you?”

“I...no condom. I feel your cum inside me. So hot, but...”

Condoms hadn’t even occurred to me. Hell, he’d had to remind me to get the lube. “I’m negative. You’re safe with me.”

“No. I don’t think I am, but not because you fucked me bare. You’re...I’m...you’re good too.”

“I bet you never forget protection.”

“I don’t, but I can’t expect a former straight boy to remember.”

“I...damn it, Ford.”

“You loved fucking me.”

“I did, and I made you beg for me. Don’t forget that.”

“It doesn’t mean anything.”

I hated that those words hurt. It shouldn't mean anything. What did I think this was? The start of fucking relationship? I didn't even have those with women.

"There's no reason it should."

I let my dick slip from his body, and he groaned. "Damn, you fucked me hard."

I had. I'd completely lost control. The room spun around me as Ford rose up and frowned at the mess we'd made on the back of the couch. "I'll send you a bill if that doesn't come out."

How could he be so together right now and so fucking cold? I could barely think.

He walked away and came back with a towel for me. I wiped myself as clean as I could and pulled my pants up. I was still mostly dressed, and Ford had only taken one leg out of his pants.

When my pants were zipped, I looked up, and Ford met my gaze. My breath caught, and I froze. The depth of emotion in his eyes let me know he wasn't as unaffected as he wanted me to believe. "Ford, I..."

He shook his head. "I will still fight you in court. I won't give in. I won't change my tactics. I won't negotiate something that isn't what Miles wants. Just because you fucked me doesn't mean you get what you want from me."

No feelings. That's how this should be. I could play it that way too. "I already got what I wanted, and so did you. Don't try to act like I didn't rock your world."

"Damn, you're even more arrogant when you're drunk. Go home and sober up." He leaned over and picked up his phone which had fallen from his pocket in my haste to get his pants down.

"What are you doing?" I asked when he started typing on it.

"Calling you a cab."

"I can't go home. I already told you. Somebody's watching my apartment."

FORD

Was he really serious about that? “Jay, what you talking about? You really think someone is watching you?”

“I got a call today from some guy who threatened me, then someone followed me when I left the office.”

“Threatened you how?” If Miles had sent someone after Jay, I was going to take his fucking head off.

Jay ran a hand through his hair, and I fought the urge to stare at his perfectly formed arms. He’d just fucked the hell out of me, and I still wanted him. “The guy has some connection to Lisa Jenkins. He said I’d better win this lawsuit, that my life depended on it.”

That made no sense. Anyone Miles sent would have been telling him he better make his client back off. “You think the person who threatened you was watching your apartment?”

“Yeah. I went to a bar, and then when I tried to go home, two men were sitting in a car by the back of my building, looking up at my balcony.”

Whether or not these men were actually watching him, I believed he’d been threatened. I couldn’t send him home. Part of me hated him for how easily he’d made me forget why I had no business fucking him, but if anyone was going to hurt him, it was going to be me.

“You can sleep on the couch.”

He wrinkled his nose. “The couch is—”

“My best offer.” A sick part of me liked the idea that he’d lay there, thinking about what we’d done, knowing my cum was still drying on the cushions.

“Can you really say you don’t want more?”

I wanted so much more, but I’d been stupid enough for one night. “When you’re ready to suck my dick. Come find me.”

He sputtered. “What?”

“If you want to be with a man, it’s a skill you need to learn.”

He huffed and sat down. “Fine. I’ll sleep on the couch.”

“That’s what I thought. I’ll get you some water.” By the time I got back with water, he was passed out and snoring.

I left a glass of water and a bottle of ibuprofen on the coffee table. I also placed a trash can by the couch in case he woke up sick and couldn’t make it to the bathroom.

After righting the end table and putting the lube back in the drawer, I grabbed a blanket from a nearby chair and covered Jay.

He snuggled into it and smiled in his sleep. I couldn’t resist watching him for a few moments. Tonight had been an emotional roller coaster, and I knew it wasn’t over yet. I wanted to be angry with Jay, but I’d known what I was doing, and now, instead of being angry, I was worried about him. Who was threatening him and why?

He looked far too innocent sleeping on my couch. I’d thought he was an overconfident asshole who had everything he wanted. Now I thought he might be more fucked up than I was. I wanted to know more about the real Jay. Worse, I wanted to help him. I was such a fool.

I forced myself to walk away. I hurried upstairs, shut the door to my bedroom, and turned the lock in case Jay came looking for me in the night. If he slid under the covers and wrapped his body around mine, there was no way in hell I was going to stop him from having me a second time.

When my alarm went off, I felt like I'd only been asleep for a few minutes, mostly because as tired as I'd been when I went to bed, I'd tossed and turned for ages. I couldn't stop thinking about Jay downstairs on the couch. What the hell was I going to say to him when he woke up? How much of the night would he remember?

I was also running through the conversation I needed to have with Miles. I had to confront him about Jay being threatened. One way or another, I was certain he knew what was going on, and he was damn well going to tell me. The protective streak I now felt for Jay hadn't faded overnight. I was going to make damn sure he was safe, and I wasn't going to justify that to Miles or Worth or Carter.

I decided to shower and get dressed before confronting Jay. Once I'd stalled as long as I could if I was going to make it to the office when I meant to, I took a deep breath before opening my bedroom door. When I reached the first floor, I saw that Jay was still on the couch in the same position as when I left him.

"Are you alive?" I asked. When he didn't respond, I repeated myself in a much louder voice.

Jay rolled over and squinted at me. "Where am I?"

"My house."

He blinked a few times, then sat up. He was pale, and his eyes were bloodshot. "Did we really..."

I narrowed my eyes. "What do you remember?"

"I...I fucked you."

"You did, but it's probably best if we don't talk about it now. Or ever. I need to get you out of here so I can get to work. Do you think you can make it upstairs? If so, you can use my bathroom to shower. I left you a towel and some other things." As I said it, I realized I should have put his things in the guest

bathroom. At least he looked too hungover to try anything this morning.

“I’m not even sure I can stand up.” He pressed his hand against his forehead, and I could imagine he was probably trying to keep his head from rolling off his shoulders.

“Give it a try.”

He rose to his feet, stood there for a moment, then fell to his knees and put the trash can to good use. When he was done, I handed him a towel from the kitchen so he could wipe his mouth.

“God that was.... You already hate me and now....”

“I don’t know how I feel about you right now.” I wasn’t sure why I spoke so honestly, but I knew he felt like shit, and I didn’t need to make it worse. “You can clean this up after you’ve showered.”

“Okay. I think...I think I can make it upstairs now. Last night, did I—”

“We’re not talking about last night.” I took his arm and helped him up. “Come on. You’ll feel better after you’re clean. There’s a toothbrush and toothpaste in there for you too.”

“Thanks.”

When I sent Jay into the bathroom, he didn’t bother to shut the door behind him. While I was debating whether I was going to stay and watch him, my phone buzzed, startling me. I looked around until I saw where I’d left it on my nightstand. Worth’s name showed on the screen. What the hell was he doing calling me?

I answered it, and instead of walking downstairs like I should have, I stood there, staring into my bathroom, watching a very naked Jay who was brushing his teeth in front of the sink.

“Worth, what are you doing up at this hour?”

“I haven’t been to bed yet.” That made more sense.

Jay had put the toothbrush down, and he was looking around for something. He probably didn’t want to interrupt my phone

call or maybe he was too hungover to put the right words together. When he reached for the handle of the one drawer I absolutely did not want him opening, I called out, “Wait. Don’t open that.”

“Is someone’s there with you?” Worth asked.

“Um....”

“Who is it?”

“It doesn’t matter.”

Jay was staring at me, but at least he hadn’t opened my toy drawer. “What do you need?”

“Me?” Worth asked.

“No.”

“Ibuprofen,” Jay said.

“It’s in the top drawer on the other side.”

“What’s in there?” he asked, pointing to the forbidden drawer.

I glared at him and shook my head.

The smirk he gave me should not have turned me on.

I pulled the bathroom door shut and headed downstairs. I did not need to watch him anymore. If I did, I might end up in the shower with him. He was too hungover, and I was running late already. Also, I’d told myself last night was a one-time thing.

“Was that the shower?” Worth asked. “You’re not talking to me while you take a shower with some guy, are you?”

“No, he’s showering on his own.”

“Since when do you have hookups on weeknights, especially ones who stay over?”

“Since I’m under a lot of stress.” I struggled to sound casual, like my hookup was nothing unusual.

“You didn’t see Jay again, did you?”

“Yes. We needed to talk about the case over dinner.”

“Oh shit. Ford, tell me you didn’t.”

“I didn’t.” There were plenty of things I didn’t do. Send Jay home. Suck his dick. Bring him to my bed.

“Are you lying to me?”

“Nothing serious happened.” That was the truth. It was a stupid one-time mistake that Jay was going to regret, that was all.

“Then who’s at your house?”

I wasn’t going to be able to keep this from him. “He slept on the couch. He was too drunk to go home.”

“You said there wouldn’t be any drinking.”

“There wasn’t on my part.”

“How did he end up at your house? If you were out and he got drunk, he could’ve taken a cab home.”

“Worth, just drop it, okay? He’s taking a shower, then he’s getting out of here. I need to eat breakfast and head to the office.”

“I’ll let you go now, but we’re talking again tonight.”

“Why do we need to talk? What did you call about anyway?”

“I’m worried about you. You didn’t respond to my texts yesterday.”

“Sorry. I was busy. Don’t be worried. I’m fine.” I didn’t need my friends getting involved in this.

“I’ll talk to you later.”

FORD

When I reached the office, I wasn't the least bit surprised to find Carter and Miles waiting for me. Worth had probably tattled to them, and they were there to scold me. The best way to prevent that was to attack first.

I scowled at both of them. "Did you send someone to watch Jasper's apartment?"

Carter shook his head, and Miles said, "No, but it sounds like we might need to."

"Not for the reasons you think."

"Ford, what are you doing?" Carter asked.

"Nothing. Jay showed up at my house upset about someone following him and watching his apartment. He was drunk, so I let him crash on my couch."

"And that's all that happened?" Miles's tone made it clear he wasn't buying my story.

"Nothing else matters."

He narrowed his eyes. "You're telling me absolutely nothing else significant happened when he was there in your house?"

I scowled, "What are you suggesting?"

"That Jay wants you, and you might not say no," Carter said.

I scowled at him. "Jay was too drunk to know what he wanted." Another true statement.

"Right," Miles replied.

I glared at him. “Do you want someone else to represent you?”

“No.”

“Then can I get on with my work?”

“Ford, you know getting involved with Jasper is only going to cause trouble.”

“For which one of us?”

Carter interrupted before Miles could answer. “Do you remember your reaction when Miles started things with Ben?”

“I was just trying to protect—” I wished I could bite back the words. That was exactly what Miles was doing.

“We want to protect you,” Carter said.

I sighed. “I appreciate that you’re concerned, but I can handle this.”

Miles laid a hand on my arm. “He’s already hurt you once when he turned you down.”

“I wasn’t hurt. I was just annoyed.”

Miles narrowed his eyes. He didn’t believe me, and I wasn’t sure I believed myself. “You know what happened with the last straight guy you got involved with. It broke you.”

“And you had to pick up the pieces. I know.”

“Do you really think that’s what we’re worried about?” Miles asked.

I blew out a long breath “No, I guess not.”

“We will always be here for you, but wouldn’t it be better if you avoided getting hurt?”

“I know being involved with Jasper in any way is a bad idea. I’m not stupid.”

Carter raised his brows. “But?”

“I don’t know how to explain it.”

Miles sighed.

“Just hear me out.”

Carter nodded. “Explain what you can.”

“There’s something going on with Jay. He’s a mess.”

“Oh shit,” Miles said. “You want to put him back together.”

“No. Yes. I...his grandmother is really sick, and I think he hates his job, and—”

“Ford—” Miles started before I cut him off. Maybe I’d had a tendency in the past to want to take care of people who wouldn’t do the same for me.

“This case. It’s putting a lot of stress on him.”

Miles shook his head. “How can you be so cutthroat when it comes to casework, but such a softie for men who are assholes?”

I shrugged. “It’s a special talent.”

Carter shook his head. “You deserve better.”

“Probably, but—”

“You’re not going to listen to us, are you?” Miles asked.

“I don’t know, but I won’t let anything affect this case.”

“Even though Jasper is up for a promotion?” Carter said.

“How did you know that?”

Miles raised his brows.

“Why do you even need me? I know you could take care of this without me.”

“But you’ve memorized all those little nuances of law that I don’t want to learn,” Miles said.

I flipped him off, and he smiled.

“You. All of you.” I looked back and forth from Carter to Miles and they knew I was also including Worth. “You’re my priority. I’m going to do whatever is necessary to take care of you, but Jesus, could you just let me make a few mistakes?”

“When it comes to men,” Carter said, “you’ve made more than a few mistakes.”

“Fuck off.”

“I’m more worried about this one than most of them,” Miles said. I started to protest, but he held up his hand. “I don’t mean because of the trial. Because you’ve been....”

“Obsessed,” Carter offered.

I glared at him as Miles finished. “Obsessed with him for a long time. You honestly thought there might be something there, and then—”

“And then he made it very clear that there wasn’t.” Why did he have to bring that up? And why was I letting myself wonder—hope?—that I’d been right all along?

Carter looked at Miles. “No matter what else is going on, Jasper is being threatened. It’s time to tell Ford everything.”

I glared at Miles. “What the fuck have you done?”

“He hasn’t done anything to Jasper,” Carter said. “I would’ve put a stop to that, but he hasn’t told you everything about the reason for the lawsuit.”

“You don’t have to talk about me like I’m not here,” Miles snapped.

Anger made my face feel like it was on fire. “You better tell me what’s going on. Right now.”

“I don’t want the warehouse for myself. A friend asked me to make an offer on it. He got word that a group owing loyalty to a Colombian cartel wanted to use it for their own illegal imports.”

“What friend?”

“You know him.” I thought for a moment, then realized I did. This friend was involved in a lot of shady business, though it usually seemed to be for a good cause.

“You just took his word for it?”

“No. I respect him, but I also had Carter look into it.”

“And?”

“This group is not only pushing Lisa Jenkins to keep the warehouse. They’re buying up other properties nearby, and I’m going to make sure they don’t get a stronghold here.”

“And you didn’t think it was important to tell me any of that?”

“I didn’t think you’d like it, and I was hoping to keep you out of it.”

“Now Jasper’s in danger, and it’s our fucking fault.”

Miles sighed. “I did offer to handle this another way.”

“I told you I agreed with Ford on that,” Carter said. “You’ve been walking the line too often.”

“Would you have made a different choice if I’d told you more details?” Miles asked me.

I considered that. “Maybe not at first, but now.... Those men won’t hesitate to kill Jasper if they think he’s not going to win for them.”

“My men are keeping an eye on him.”

“So it is you watching him apartment?”

Carter shook his head. “The men he saw aren’t ours.”

“You knew he was being followed, and you acted like—”

“Ford, I’m sorry.”

I stared at Miles in shock. He almost never apologized.

“If I’d known Jasper was involved, I might have made different choices.”

I nodded. “Thank you. What happens now? We need to tell Jay something. Even with protection from us, he’s still in danger.”

Miles shook his head. “It’s better if he doesn’t know any details.”

“So what are we going to do? Are you actually going to take this suit to court? Men like that won’t hesitate to kill Ms. Jenkins or Jay or anyone else if they get in the way.”

Miles nodded. “For now, we’re going to act like nothing has changed while we look at our best options.”

I considered telling Miles I'd changed my mind and ask him to have his contacts go in and take out everyone involved in this. If we ended this quickly, I could cut my ties to Jay and things could go back to normal.

Did I really want that? Jay might be an asshole, and he might be manipulating the fuck out of me. I might be the biggest fool to once again think there was more between us than lust.

"They're watching his apartment. Even with our security watching them, Jay isn't safe there. They called him at work and threatened him."

"Fuck." Miles ran a hand over his hair.

"If he alters his behavior too much, things could get worse," Carter said. "He needs to act like he's doing what they want."

"He can keep going to work as usual, but at night, he'll stay with me."

"No." Miles and Carter answered at the same time.

"I'm the counsel for the plaintiff. I'm the last person they'd think he was with."

"Unless they see you together."

"Carter's men are too good to let that happen."

Carter nodded his agreement. "I've already got men checking on you."

"Did you see Jay come over last night? Is that why Worth guessed who was with me so fast?"

Carter shook his head. "No, you're just that obvious."

"Damn it." I sighed. "If Jay is at my place, then you can keep an eye on both of us without him realizing it. He'll be protected, but we won't have to say too much. He can throw around the story at work that he's staying with a new girlfriend. He doesn't socialize with anyone from there, so they won't ask too many questions."

"And you're just going to be fine with him staying at your house?" Miles asked.

“I don’t know what’s going to happen, but I know he’ll be safe.”

“Will you be safe?” Miles asked.

“Who the fuck knows?”

“At least try to take care of yourself.”

JAY

My receptionist buzzed my office, and I reluctantly picked up the phone. “Mr. Wainwright is here to see you. Are you available?”

Mr. Wainwright? Ford? I ran a hand over my hair and readjusted my tie. I’d assumed he’d do everything he could to avoid me after last night, not seek me out. “Yes, send him in.”

My cock reacted the moment Ford stepped into my office. He could have been straight off the set of a professor fetish porno. He had on a tweed blazer that would have been perfect for an Oxford don and glasses that set the whole look off to perfection.

I’d fucked this man and loved it, and now, seeing him again, I was actually considering what it would be like to get on my knees for him. Would he still demand that from me if I wanted more? Would I go through with it?

What was I doing even thinking about it? Last night was an aberration. I’d lost my mind. What was wrong with me?

You’re lonely and needy.

And I fucking hated that.

“Jay? Are you alright?”

Damn. I’d just been staring at him. “I’m fine.”

“No headache or anything?”

“I’ve felt better physically. What are you doing here?”

“I thought I’d demonstrate how we can visit each other professionally.”

I glared at him. “Did you come here with a counterproposal or just to gloat?”

“So you are hungover?”

“Now who’s an asshole?”

Ford smiled. “I never said I wasn’t.”

“Tell me you’re actually here to negotiate. There’s really no reason to take this to court. I’m confident we can settle it between us and our clients.” I wished that was true.

Ford smiled as he sank into one of the chairs in front of my desk. “That’s not why I’m here.”

He was looking at me so intently my pulse sped up. What did he want? Had he changed his mind about letting me have more of him? Did sober me actually want him to?

Yes, I did.

Once again, I thought about using my mouth on him. I’d never even considered doing that before. I’d never understood why the women I’d been with were willing to put my dick in their mouths, I’d just been thankful when they were. Now though, after watching some videos, I knew watching a man suck off another man turned me on, and when I imagined doing it with Ford, it no longer seemed like a hard limit.

“You are having trouble concentrating this morning, aren’t you?”

He had to know I wanted him. Damn bastard. “Why are you here?”

He glanced toward the reception area. “As much as I do love behaving professionally—”

“Like how we did last night?”

Ford shook his head and mouthed “don’t.” What was going on? “We need to be sure this conversation is one hundred percent private.”

“So you do have a proposal?”

“Not exactly.”

I raised my brows. Why was he acting so strange?

Ford reached across my desk and grabbed the notepad I'd been writing on. “Hey, you can't—”

He shook his head, giving me a look that dared me to defy him. Then he flipped over the page where I'd been making notes and started writing.

When he handed the notepad back, I read his words. *You are being followed, and the office may be bugged. We need to talk.*

I glared at him and mouthed. “Montgomery.”

He shook his head.

It wouldn't make sense for Montgomery to say I'd be in trouble if I lost, but for all I knew I had more than one party watching me.

“I thought we could head to a café I know. It's not far.”

I frowned at him but answered. “That's sounds like a great idea.”

I got my jacket off the back of my chair and followed him out. Part of me wished this was just a ploy to get me in bed, but I didn't think I was that lucky.

Ford didn't say anything as we walked. He lead me to a café, one I'd never been in before. This early in the morning, it wasn't crowded. We found a table in a back corner where no one was within hearing distance.

“You're in danger,” Ford said.

“No shit.”

“Worse than you might think.”

Worse than me spending thirty years of my life thinking I was straight, then falling for a man who wanted nothing from me but hate sex? “I've been threatened not to lose this suit, but I've also been told by you that your powerful client never

loses, all while my grandmother could be dying, and I think I'm having some kind of breakdown."

"You had hot sex with me. That is not a symptom of a breakdown."

"Just tell me what the fuck is going on."

"Your client has been targeted by a criminal organization that wants the warehouses her family owns for their...let's call it an import business. That's the real reason Miles wants this particular warehouse. It's not really for him."

"How do you know all this?"

Ford raised his brows. "Miles had sources you don't want or need to know. These men pressured your client into refusing to sell, but Miles doesn't want to let them get ahold of any property in the city. That's the reason he won't negotiate."

"How is he involved in this?"

Ford shook his head. "That's not important."

"Really?"

"The only thing you need to know is that these men will kill you if you don't give them what they want."

"Great and you—the one person who could possibly help me with that—won't negotiate. So, you're basically telling me I'd be dead."

"No, I'm telling you I'm going to protect you."

"What?" Was he really planning to help me? "You're going to lose the suit on purpose?"

"No, I'm going to keep you safe."

"How?"

"To start with, you're going to stay with me until this is over."

"Stay with you, like at your house?" This was crazy. "What are you going to do if they follow us there, hurl law books at them?"

Ford glared at me in a way that made me shiver. Just how well did I know this man? "While many books from my personal

law library could inflict serious damage, I know how to use much more effective weapons.”

“Are you about to tell me you’re some kind of spy? That would be just typical with the way my week is going?”

“I’m not a spy, but I’ve had reasons to need to protect myself. However, you won’t need to rely on those. Montgomery Enterprises’ security team will be taking care of us.”

“They’ll be taking care of me even though I’m representing Ms. Jenkins?”

“Yes. Miles’s lawsuit has put you in danger, so you’re our responsibility.”

“If they followed me to my apartment, they’ll follow me to your house too.”

“No, they’ll be misdirected. I doubt you grasp the extent of Miles’s ability to get things done.”

“So, what? He has people at his beck and call to rearrange the world however he wants it?”

Ford smiled. “More or less.”

“And you don’t?”

“I prefer a quieter life than Miles does.”

“But if you wanted to....”

“When I need to get things done, I do, but I already have a top-notch security team at my disposal. Why would I turn that down?”

I just shook my head. What would it be like to have that level of confidence rather than just putting on the pretense of it? “If I change my behavior patterns, the men who are after me will know something is up.”

“They threatened you. Isn’t it logical that you would make some changes?”

“Buy a gun, get a bodyguard, sure. But move in with you?”

“You’ll put the word out at the office that you’re moving in with your girlfriend.”

“But I don’t have—”

“Does anyone at work know that?”

“No, but these men might.”

“That doesn’t matter if we keep them off your trail.”

“Why are you helping me?”

“I told you, this is partly my fault. Miles’s fault really, but I’m his representative.”

If the beginning of the week hadn’t been as crazy as it was, I would think this was all some kind of elaborate prank, not that Ford seemed like the pranking type. How was this my life now? What would happen next? I felt like I’d been thrust into some kind of crazy movie. “How many security guards does Miles employ?”

“As many as are necessary.”

“And they’re all the best of the best?”

Ford smiled. “Obviously. You’ve already met Carter, he’s Miles’s head of security.”

“He’s former military, isn’t he?”

Ford nodded. “Yes, a Navy SEAL.”

At least I’d been right about one thing. “And Carter has been your friend for a long time?”

“Since ninth grade, and there’s no question of his loyalty. He saved my life when I was fourteen, and I would trust him with it anytime.”

“What about my client? What about the lawsuit?”

“We keep moving forward like nothing’s changed until Miles and Carter work out a plan to solve our problem.”

“And I’m just supposed to trust you.”

“You’re already trusting me not to mention what we did last night.”

“I... Fuck. When you say they’ll take care of us, how will they keep these men from following me without making it

obvious?”

“Someone will arrive to escort you back to my house, and another guard will drive your car to a different location. We’ll also have people in place making sure you aren’t followed.”

“And once I’m at your house?”

“You’ll just have to stay in until you’re picked up for work the next day.”

“Do you expect me to keep sleeping on the couch?”

He studied me for a moment, letting his gaze rake down my torso and back up. I was glad I was seated so he wouldn’t notice my body’s reaction. “I have several guest rooms.”

“But you didn’t offer one to me last night.”

“I didn’t think I could get you upstairs.”

He probably couldn’t have. I’d been a fucking mess. “But when I’m sober, I’m allowed a bed.”

“Yes.”

“But not in your room?”

Ford’s smile widened. “Do you remember what I told you about what I would expect if you wanted to get in my bed?”

Jesus, why did that make my cock even harder? I did not want to suck dick.

Don’t you, though? When it’s Ford’s?

FORD

The lust on his face as he looked at me had me needing to shift the bag I was carrying so it could block my cock's reaction to his expression. Was he actually considering sucking my dick?

The fact that he still wanted me now when he was sober made him so fucking tempting. I wanted to circle his desk, get on my knees, and show him exactly what I wanted him to do to me, but I wasn't that lost to sanity, not yet anyway. After some time with him staying at my house, who knew what I might do.

He's only in this to get off. He's still going to claim to be straight.

Maybe, but I wanted to watch him try to deny what he wanted with my dick in his mouth.

I pushed all those thoughts away. "I take it you do remember. Nothing has changed. I'll make sure the guest room is ready for you."

He nodded.

I turned to go, but he called me back. If I stayed much longer, I was going to reconsider fucking him right here in his office.

"I went by my apartment this morning to put on fresh clothes and see if the men were still there. I got a picture of them."

I shivered at the thought of them coming after him for that. "Be careful. Do you think they saw you?"

“I know how to be discreet.”

“From now on, if you notice anyone watching or following you, pretend you don’t see them.”

“Fine. Do you want to see the picture?”

“Yeah, send it to me. I’ll have Carter take a look at it.”

When he sent the picture, I opened it and knew immediately that Miles had been telling the truth. Those weren’t his men. For one, no employee of his would be dressed like they were in a poorly budgeted mafia movie, and two, they wouldn’t have allowed themselves to be seen so easily.

“Hopefully Carter can identify the men. You don’t need to worry about them anymore.”

Jay scowled. “What does that mean exactly?”

“It’s best you don’t know too many details.”

“Who are you? Because you’re not just an attorney.”

“A very rich man who likes fine things, winning arguments, and protecting those he cares about.”

Jay’s eyes widened. “Does that mean...?”

Fuck. I hadn’t meant to say that. “Or those I’m responsible for.”

“Of course.”

Was that hurt in Jay’s eyes? Did he want me to care about him? If so, was that just part of a power game? It was best if I assumed it was.

I heard the door open on the parlor floor above me, then the sound of the alarm beeping as it accepted the code. Jay was here, and I wasn’t mentally or emotionally prepared to have him living with me.

I’d spent part of the afternoon working with Carter and the rest of the time sitting here, pretending to work while fantasizing

about Jay and all the things I could beg him to do to me. If only I was capable of just enjoying sex and leaving my heart out of it.

I had no doubt Jay wanted me. I'd been right all along. I was sure now that he'd wanted me from the first time we met. He might not have realized it for a while, but the spark had been there.

But if he had to face the reality of wanting me when he wasn't three sheets to the wind, would he still admit what he needed? Maybe. As long as it was just sex. If it were more.... I didn't think dating a man had ever crossed his mind. When we were done, I'd be nothing but his dirty little secret.

Are you sure?

What else could I be to him? He told me he wanted to use me, and I'd let him. Now I was his protection, so of course he was willing to stay at my place.

"Ford?"

Fuck. I had to get myself together.

"Come downstairs. I'm in the kitchen."

I heard his feet on the stairs, then he appeared in the kitchen.

"Are you cooking dinner?"

He sounded very skeptical. Was he insinuating I wouldn't be capable? "I am."

"For me?"

Yes, but I didn't want to admit. "For myself, but there will be enough for you."

"Right. Thanks."

Dammit, I wasn't going to be a jerk to him the whole time he was here. He was probably scared. He was being followed by men who would shoot him on sight if they were ordered to. Plus his grandmother's condition was serious. I knew she might not make it. We needed to get this situation taken care of fast, so he could visit her again.

“There’s beer in the fridge. The food will be done in about thirty minutes.”

“Do you want a beer?” he asked.

“Sure. Thanks.” The tension in the room was way too high for comfort and trying to talk to Jay here, in my own kitchen, was awkward as hell. What was the worst thing that could happen if I started drinking? Maybe I’d let him fuck me against the counter. He handed me a bottle, I popped the top, then passed him the opener. Neither of us said anything else, and I turned back to the stove.

It has been ages since I felt this awkward around anyone. My stomach was in knots, and I was sweaty. I had no idea what to say. Insisting Jay stay here was a mistake.

I was going to spend the entire time he was staying with me thinking about him, obsessing over him. Miles had been right; this was totally a toxic relationship for me, and yet....

I glanced over my shoulder at Jay. He was watching me, his beer seemingly forgotten in his hand as it dripped condensation over his fingers and onto the table.

I smiled. He was nervous too and maybe a little bit obsessed with me. Why was I fighting this when I could have a delicious man fuck me all night?

He broke the silence first. “You never mentioned that you cooked.”

“There’s a lot about me you don’t know.”

“You could tell me more.” I shook my head like I was trying to shake my thoughts loose. I really needed to keep my distance before I got in over my head. *Aren’t you already?*

“No more flirting,” I snapped.

Jay grinned. “You like when I flirt with you.”

“I know I’m your only choice right now, since you’re essentially on house arrest when you’re not at the office, but I don’t think this will last long. Once Miles decides to destroy someone, he’s not patient about it.”

“Are you always this prickly with your guests?”

“Are you always this flirtatious with men?”

“Ford....”

I faced him again. “Do you really want to talk about this?”

He shook his head.

A few moments later, I heard his chair slide back. I forced myself to pretend the onions, carrots, and peppers I was sautéing needed all my concentration. I shivered when he placed his hands on my hips and kissed my neck. “I think we both need to release some tension.”

“You should sit back down.”

“Is that what you really want?” The sensation of his warm breath against my ear made me shudder.

Was it what I wanted? No, definitely not.

“Or would you rather I bend you over this counter and fuck you until you scream?”

“*Fuck.*” The word came out as an exhalation.

“Turn around, Ford.”

I slid the pan from the burner and turned the knob to the off position. My pasta sauce could wait.

Slowly, I moved to face Jay. He used his grip on my hips to slide me along the edge of the counter so we wouldn't get burned. Then he moved even closer and took my chin in his hand, forcing me to look at him.

“I thought you'd regret all this.” I hated how breathless my voice was.

“Fucking you?”

“Yes. You said you were straight.”

He dropped his hands to the counter, caging me in. “I don't want to fucking analyze it.”

“You just want to stick your dick in me and enjoy it?”

“You enjoyed it too. You know you did.”

I didn't want to admit it, so I said nothing.

"I'm not just doing this because you're here and convenient. First of all, the idea of you being convenient is ridiculous. Nothing about this is convenient. We're supposed to be opposing each other on a lawsuit, it's your life's mission to beat me in tennis, and you're a man."

"I am a man. I don't want you to forget that. I don't want you to walk away from this and act like it never happened, act like you're one hundred percent straight. I told you where things stood. If you're ready for more, get on your knees."

He raised his brows. "Are you really going to hold out on me if I don't?"

Was I? Probably not. "If you've decided you're into men, then you should be in all the way. If you're going to experiment with me, you're going to have to use your mouth."

"Later," he said.

I shook my head. "Now."

"That's not how this works."

"Actually, it is."

"No. I want to fuck you again, to—"

"Use me, dominate me. I know what you want, but I don't want to give you that."

"I think you do. I think you want it as much as I do."

I did. I also wanted his mouth around my cock. I wanted to know how far he'd go to have me, but right then, all I really wanted was for him to take me again, to make me forget everything but pleasure.

He cupped my neck and brushed his thumb over my jaw. "I want you. I know what I'm doing. I know who you are."

"Are you ready to admit you've wanted me since I propositioned you?"

This time, he was the one who didn't answer. I caught him off guard, grabbing his waist and flipping us so he was the one

pressed into the counter, then I sank to the floor.

He looked down at me, eyes wide. “What are you doing?”

“I thought maybe you needed a lesson in sucking dick, so I’m going to show you how it’s done. I love having a man’s cock in my mouth, knowing the power I hold over him having something so delicate between my teeth.”

He shuddered, and I just laughed.

“Maybe we should—”

I started undoing his pants and he shut up.

JAY

I looked down at Ford, mesmerized as I watched him undo my pants. He shoved them and my underwear down over my ass.

My cock sprang free.

It was only inches from his mouth.

What would it feel like to have those beautiful lips wrapped around me? To feel that wet heat? Was this a trick? Surely he wasn't really going to do this, not here, kneeling on the hard kitchen floor.

He cupped my balls in his hand, and I sucked in a breath. When he tugged on them, nearly hard enough to hurt, I thought about what he'd said, about how vulnerable I would be with my cock in his mouth. I'd never felt like that with a woman, but here, now, I realized he was right. I wasn't the one in charge.

He smiled up at me as he wrapped a hand around my cock. The sensation made me groan. I'd been hard for him since I'd walked into the kitchen. Hell, I'd been hard for him most of the day.

When he licked the tip of my cock, catching my precum on his tongue, my head clunked back against the cabinet. I closed my eyes and tried to remember how to breathe.

"Look at me," he demanded.

I did, though I worried I'd come instantly if I watched him.

He licked me again, teasing the slit as he slid his hand up and down my shaft.

I bit my lip to hold in a whimper. It felt so fucking good. Then he took me into his mouth, sucking on the head of my cock. I gasped, and he smiled around me.

I thought I might die before this was over. He probably wanted to kill me. That was his motivation.

I reached for him, needing to touch him, but he pulled back. "Hands on the counter, or I'll stop."

"Fuck." I gripped the edge to the counter, not sure I'd be able to keep my hands there.

He took me deeper in his mouth, swallowing around me. I couldn't stay still. I pushed into him, and he squeezed my hips, pushing me back. Once again, he pulled back, and I groaned.

"I didn't say you could fuck my mouth. You stay still and pay attention. I'm showing you what I want you to do to me."

"God, Ford. This is too much."

"I've hardly started yet." He swallowed me down again, deeper this time. The sensation of his throat closing around me was so fucking hot. He took hold of my balls again, playing with them as he sucked me.

I wasn't sure anything had ever felt this good. Then he took me in all the way, pressing his face to my pubic bone.

I did whimper then. "Ford. That's so hot, feels so good." I held onto the counter so tightly I wondered if I would pull it from the wall or break off a chunk of the marble.

When he finally pulled back for air, there were tears in his eyes and his chin was wet with drool, but he was smiling.

"Think you could do that?" He asked, his voice raspy.

I shook my head. "No, that's.... How do you...? Please."

"You're the one begging now, aren't you?"

I didn't care. I needed his mouth back on me. "More. I need more. Please."

“Luckily for you, I want the same thing.”

He worked my cock up and down, pressing his tongue along the underside, humming around me, using his hand sometimes, playing with my balls, pressing his fingers against my taint.

I thought I’d had incredible blowjobs before, but Ford was a whole new level of skilled.

When he slid two fingers into his mouth along with my cock, stretching his lips obscenely. I was too far gone to even wonder what he was doing until he slid them between my legs.

“Ford?”

“Shut up and feel,” he said before swallowing me deep again.

When he pressed a finger against my ass I tensed, but he distracted me by humming around my cock. It felt so fucking good I didn’t care what else he did. He pushed a finger into me. The sensation was strange but not bad.

When he worked the digit deeper, he curled his finger the way he’d told me to when I was opening him up, I cried out. I might have screamed, I don’t even know. My whole body lit up. I’d never felt anything so intense.

I gripped the sides of his head, no longer able to stop myself.

He didn’t protest. He just worked his finger in and out of me, then added a second one. I would have let him do anything to me at that moment.

I was so fucking close. “Ford, I...I can’t....”

He pulled back, and very reluctantly, I let him go. He sat back on his heels and stared up at me, licking his lips. “Do you want to come down my throat? Do you want to watch me swallow it all?”

I wanted to hate him for the way he was taunting me, but he’d wrecked my ability to think. My mouth hung open as I stared at him. Finally, I managed to nod.

“Maybe one day. Right now, you’re going to fuck me.”

He rose to his feet. I tried to move, but my body and brain weren’t cooperating.

“Follow me if you can.”

I quickly fastened my pants, then had to hold onto the railing to pull myself up the stairs after him. He turned like he was going to continue further up, likely toward the guest room he had ready for me, but I grabbed his arm and pushed him into his room instead. “I’m fucking you in your own bed.”

“No.”

“Yes. I’m in charge now.” I’d held back all I could as he brought me right to the edge and stopped. I was going to take what I needed right then.

“You don’t get to decide that.”

“Yes, I do.” I pushed him down onto the bed and climbed on top of him.

Instead of fighting me, he dropped his legs open and pulled me down for a kiss. There was nothing sweet about it. He bit my lip and drove his tongue into me, but I held his arms down and showed him I was going to have my way.

When I ended the kiss to suck in air, he glared up at me.

“Take your clothes off,” I ordered, sitting up so I could get my shirt off. “I want you all the way naked this time.”

Ford sat up, and I moved off the bed to give him room.

He pulled his sweater over his head and tossed it to the floor. I fumbled with the fastenings of my pants and managed to get them off as he raised his hips to push his pants down. I took off his shoes and socks, then grabbed the hem of his jeans and yanked them off.

When I’d disentangled myself from my shoes and pants, I climbed back between his legs.

He glared at me. “You’re still an asshole.”

“So are you.”

He reached for me, and I stretched out on him, the feel of his naked body against mine was incredible. I noticed he was made of hard muscle, that his legs and chest were hairy, but none of that mattered. It was Ford, and his skin was against

mine, and I needed this. I needed to be with him. I'd been sure he was going to push me away in the kitchen. I'd never dreamed I'd ever experience him sucking my cock. I still couldn't really believe any of this was happening.

After I kissed him breathless again, I pushed up on my arms and looked down at him. His eyes were full of some emotion I couldn't decode.

"This is so wrong," he said.

I had no idea how to respond. "Are you telling me to leave?"

"No. I can't. I'm too horny for you."

"Then enjoy it. Where's the lube?" It was a hell of a lot easier to focus on what we knew we wanted than to deal with how fucked up this thing between us was.

He rolled to his side, stuck his hand under the pillow, and pulled out a bottle.

"Keep it handy, do you?"

"Some bastard has been taunting me."

"Do you think about me while you jerk off?"

"Never."

I laughed. It was so obvious he was lying. I loved the idea of him in the bed, wrapping his hand around his cock, and thinking about me fucking him. I wondered how long he'd been doing that. Since we first met? And why was that so hot?

I'd acted like I didn't want him staring at me like he wanted to devour me, but I'd flirted with him anyway. I'd been planning to use that against him. Now I wasn't sure which of us was using whom. I needed the protection he could offer me, but right that moment I needed his ass even more.

I popped the top of the lube, drizzled some on my cock, then worked it in with my hand. I took my slick fingers and pushed into him. His eyes widened, and his legs dropped open further.

I pumped him a few times, then settled between his legs and teased the rim of his hole with the tip of my cock. "Is this what

you want? Is this what you were thinking about all day? Do you want it inside you as much as you want it in your mouth?"

"Are you always this filthy?" he asked.

"I like to talk, and I think you like it too."

"I do. Just like I like it when you use me, hold me down, tell me what to do, but you can't always be in charge, Jay. Sometimes you're going to have to give in to me."

When I thrust into him, his eyes went wide, and he made a strangled sound. "Now isn't one of those times."

"No," Ford said. "I've had enough of controlling this. Fuck me, Jay. Fuck me as hard as you did last night, but this time you're going to have to look at me while you do it."

"I could flip you over, hold you down, and drive into you, use you from behind, never have to look at you."

"That's not how it's going to be."

"I just said I was in charge."

"Yeah, and this is how you want it. If you didn't, you would've made me turn over to start with."

I squeezed his thighs hard, pulling him toward me as I thrust deep.

FORD

It felt like Jay was going to split me open. I'd taunted him into this. I'd wanted him to be brutal with me. I needed him to take charge and make it impossible for me to think.

"This is exactly what you want, isn't it? You want me angry, unsure if I want to fight you or fuck you."

I hated that he could read me so well. I refused to say anything else. He pulled back and drove into me again, making me slide toward the head of the bed before leaning forward, seizing my wrists, and pinning me to the bed.

It was so fucking hot. It was perfect. I shouldn't trust him like this, let him see what I needed, but I couldn't hold back with him. I'd meant what I said. He wasn't going to always be in charge. Fuck. He wasn't going to always be here.

I couldn't think about that not now, so I snarled at him. "Is that all you've got?"

Jay growled and fucked me relentlessly, brutally, exactly like I wanted him to. I wanted it to hurt. I wanted him to make me totally lose control.

I struggled against the hold he had on my wrists, but he held me down easily. I was stronger than I seemed and could probably break his hold if I wanted to, but I wasn't sure. Panic rose in me, but it just fueled my pleasure. I needed this so badly.

"Look at me," Jay ordered.

When I did, I saw so much in his eyes—grief, anger, desperate need.

“I know what I’m doing, and I know who you are,” he said. “You’ve been chasing this for a long time, wearing me down with your gorgeous, seductive self, making me have to admit things about myself that I didn’t even fucking know. I don’t know what kind of wizard you are, and I don’t know what kind of hold you have over me, but right now, I’m going to use you, fuck you, hear you beg again. You’re always ready to beg for my cock, aren’t you? You’re a fucking slut for me.”

I didn’t even want to deny it. “I will always get what I want from you.”

“No,” he pulled out, grabbed me viciously by the hips, forced me over onto my stomach, then yanked my ass up into the air and pinned me down with a hand on the back of my neck. When he drove back into me, he sank balls deep in one harsh stroke.

“Jesus, Jay. You’re going to fucking kill me.”

“I’m going to try.”

I arched my back, giving him even better access. He gripped me tighter, squeezing my neck.

“Do you want it rough? I can give it to you fucking rough.”

He took me so hard and so fast I couldn’t think. I couldn’t breathe. I was panting, begging, crying his name. I didn’t care what it took, I was going to have everything from him. He was going to make me come.

I reached a hand under me, wrapping it around my cock, gasping at the feel of the friction I was so desperate for.

“No the fuck you don’t,” Jay snarled. “You don’t get to do that. You don’t get to do anything unless I want to give it to you.”

“You can’t stop. There’s no way in hell you could stop now, and you know it.”

“I have no intention of stopping. I’m going to fill your ass with my cum. I’m going to watch it drip down your legs, but that

doesn't mean I have to let you come. That doesn't mean you have to get what you want."

"Fuck you, Jay. You will not do that."

"Are you so sure?"

"You want to feel my ass clinch around you. You want to know you can bring me off even though I fucking hate you."

"You don't hate me. You need me too much. You're protecting me. You don't protect people you hate."

"I'm protecting you because if you die, I'll have to explain it. That's too complicated."

"Fuck you, Ford. I don't owe you anything."

"You're going to owe me your fucking life. I could kick you out right now. I could abandon you."

"But you won't, because you need this, you need my dick."

"I hate you."

He laughed. "Do you think you could come hands-free? Is that a real thing?"

Why did his question make me feel like I might come right then? "I've never...done that before. I don't know if it's even possible."

"Let's find out."

He shifted his angle a few different times until his dick was perfectly positioned to rub over my prostate. It was so intense I couldn't see, couldn't think. I clutched at the sheets and heard something rip, but I didn't care.

"You're so fucking close, aren't you, Ford? I'm ready now. I'm ready for you to come."

I was right on the edge. "I need. Please. I don't think.... I can't do this. Need just a little friction, please. Don't do this to me."

"God, I love your hearing you beg." He gave in then and grabbed my cock, working his hand up and down. It took only seconds, and I was crying out as wave after wave of pleasure rushed through me, and I soaked the sheets with my cum.

“It feels so good, your tight little ass clenching around my cock, showing me how much you need me. I’m going to fill you up. You want that, don’t you?”

“Yes, I want it all inside me.”

He groaned, the sound deep and gravelly, then he let go, and I could feel the heat of his load as he spilled again and again.

Finally, he collapsed over me, his breathing ragged.

I sighed, letting myself feel how sore and exhausted I was. “That was so fucking good. If only you hadn’t waited all this time. Think of all the months you could’ve been doing this.”

Jay shoved me away then, pulling out and making me gasp. He shocked me when he gripped my ass cheeks and pulled them apart. I turned so I could see him staring at me.

“Why are you so fucking gorgeous all wrecked from me?” he asked.

“Do you like staking your claim? Do you think it makes you better than me? Do you think it makes you the one in charge? I let you do this. I wanted it.”

“I knew you’d be like this, slutty, needy, up for anything.”

“Anything?”

“Tell me something you wouldn’t let me do.”

“I won’t let you sleep here with me tonight.”

For just a moment, I thought my answer might have hurt him, but that was ridiculous. Surely he wasn’t a man who liked to cuddle. I imagined he was the type who went home with a girl and left as soon as he’d come.

“Anything else?”

I smiled at him. “I do have limits.”

“I bet they go pretty far.”

“What do you want to do?”

“God, Ford. I don’t even know.”

I rolled onto my side and looked at him. He reached out and ran a thumb up and down my throat. “Do you want to choke me? See if you can really kill me?”

“No. Yes. I don’t....”

“But you do. You want to push things with me as far as you can. It helps to make it a game, an experiment. You know what a man’s body feels like now, and you’re going to find out other things.”

“What the fuck are you doing to me?”

“You’re telling me you’ve never gotten kinky with the women you’ve slept with?”

“No, I’m not...I mean, yes, I have, but....” He rolled and stood up, obviously done with the conversation. He tried to take a step and had to hold onto the footboard for a moment to steady himself. I loved that I’d worn him out like that.

“I’m going to take a shower.”

“There are towels are in the closet. Stay out of the rest of my shit.”

“What if I don’t want to?”

“Then I’ll have to come in there and supervise.”

He shook his head. “When will it be enough?”

“I don’t think you’re ever going to have enough of me.”

“Just go finish dinner.”

“Seriously?” I huffed. “You think you’re going to get away with treating me like that?”

“Fine. Then come suck my dick in the shower.”

“Now that you might get away with, but I’m going to bet you’re pretty worn out right now.”

“Come on in and find out.”

I joined him, but we were both truly exhausted, so we didn’t do anything but make out a little in the shower and get clean. I got out first, ordered a pizza, and put the start of my sauce in

the fridge. I would make it tomorrow. I was way too tired for cooking now, and my mind was spinning too much to focus.

Thoughts raced through my head, like how fucking hot and filthy Jay was, how much danger he was in, what Miles was going to do about it, and how the hell I was going to live with Jay for days. I was frightened by the fact that I didn't really hate Jay anymore; I was growing more and more afraid I felt very much the opposite. Those feelings were going to be hell to deal with when this was over.

JAY

After pretending to work for most of the next morning, I gave up on getting anything productive done. I told my assistant I was going to visit my grandmother. I wanted to see her today, but it was also a good reason to get out of the office. I couldn't stay there anymore. I couldn't focus on anything.

The night before, I'd been insane. I'd completely lost control with Ford. Remembering the things I'd said to him caused my face to heat. He brought out the most primitive, animalistic side of me, and it felt so fucking good.

When I'd gotten out of the shower, he'd told me he ordered a pizza. We sat down in his living room, and after a few minutes of scrolling through channels, we settled on one of the early seasons of *Law & Order*. I'd asked him if he didn't get enough attorney shit doing his job.

"According to you, I don't have a real job," he'd said.

"That was before I realized you worked in espionage as well as the law."

We snuggled up and enjoyed critiquing the episodes—what they got wrong, what they got right, and how much we'd love to have one of those gotcha moments in the courtroom.

The pizza came and we devoured it, then kept watching *Law & Order* until I was mostly asleep. Ford turned off the TV and told me everything I should need would be in the guest room. He'd asked some of the Montgomery security guards to go to my apartment to gather some of my clothes and other things

I'd need. Ford acted like that was normal, like anyone might have done such a service.

I wanted to be angry at the invasion of privacy, but being with Ford felt so good, talking to him had become so easy, I wasn't going to risk fucking up the rapport we had when I was depending on him for security.

The guest room bed was luxurious, but I still couldn't sleep. I wanted to be with Ford. And now, I was regretting all those hours of tossing and turning.

When I got to Gran's care center, the nurse on duty let me know that Gran had been awake for a while that morning, but after a lengthy coughing fit, they'd given her something to help her sleep. She probably wouldn't wake up during my visit, but at least she'd improved some.

She didn't stir when I stepped into the room. I sat down next to the bed and laid my hand over hers. I stayed there for a while, letting my thoughts wander. There was a bird feeder right outside her window. I watched some wrens bickering over whose turn it was to eat and contemplated whether or not I was going to return to the office today, or if I was going to go indulge in a long liquid lunch.

Suddenly, I knew exactly what I wanted to do. I wanted to call Ford and have him come to lunch with me. I could call Emily if I needed to talk to someone, but she'd be busy in the café. There wasn't anyone else but Ford. How fucking sad was that? Emily was right. I'd put all my energy into my career and a few activities like tennis where I could also prove I was the best. Now, I had to resort to asking a man who professed to hate me to keep me company so I wouldn't be too sad and lonely after leaving Gran.

I stared at my phone for several minutes, but ultimately, I pulled up Ford's contact info and called him. I was surprised when he answered almost immediately.

“What's up?”

“Let's have lunch.”

“Lunch?”

Did he have to be this difficult? “You do eat in the middle of the day, don’t you?”

“I do.”

“I’m visiting my grandmother.” I wasn’t sure why I needed to tell him that.

“How is she?”

“She’s sleeping, so I’m just sitting with her.”

“And you’d like some company?”

“Yes.” It wasn’t like I could hide it, I had called him.

“Did you take a car there?”

I rose and began pacing the room as I said, “Yes, there’s a security guard waiting for me out front.”

“I’ll be there to pick you up in about half an hour.”

“Really?” I couldn’t hide my surprise, I’d thought he was going to blow me off.

“Do you want to go to lunch or not?”

“I do. Thanks.”

“Where are you?”

I circled the room as I gave him the name and address of the care center.

“See you soon.” He ended the call, and I settled back down in the chair by my grandmother’s bed. My conversation with Ford hadn’t even made her stir.

I talked to her for a while, even though she probably wouldn’t hear anything I said. I even dared to tell her all about Ford. When I’d run out of things to say, I looked at the birds once more, but something else caught my attention.

There was a car positioned directly across from Gran’s window. That lot was restricted to staff only, but the men in the car were definitely not staff. They were the men who’d been watching my apartment. They were looking right toward my grandmother’s room.

I was out of my seat and through the door before I realized how stupid it would be for me to confront these men head-on. I wanted to. I wanted to rip them the fuck apart. Instead, I called Ford.

“I’m on my way,” he said when he answered.

It was a relief to hear his voice. “The men who were watching my apartment are here. They’re watching my grandmother’s room.”

“Fuck. Did you tell the guard who’s with you?”

That would have been smart. “I hadn’t even thought about that. I just called you.”

“That’s ok. I tell him, and I’ll get us more backup. I’ll be there in five minutes. Stay where you are.”

“What if they—”

“They won’t get out of the car. They’re there to observe or something would already have happened.”

I kept my eye on the men, but I stayed put like he said. There was no point in having called Ford if I wasn’t going to let him help me.

The minutes seemed to pass as slowly as hours. Finally, Ford appeared at Gran’s door. “How did you get in?” I’d assumed he’d call so I could go to the lobby and register him as a guest.

“I’m not giving away all my secrets.”

“Ford.”

“Sometimes a smile and a little cash can do wonders.”

“You bribed the nurses?”

“I helped them feel better about not questioning me.”

Before I could question him, he continued. “The guard who drove you here is moving in from behind the parking lot to take care of the problem. I’m going to watch from the rear entrance in case he needs help. Promise me you’ll stay here.”

“What?” No way in hell was Ford going after those men. “You can’t go out there and—”

“I’ll do what’s necessary to keep you and your Gran safe.”

“Ford, don’t put yourself in danger.”

“I’ll be fine.”

No, he wouldn’t, not if... “The back door is set to alarm if opened.”

He shook his head. “Not anymore. I turned it off.”

“You...how?”

“I told you I have a lot of skills you don’t know about.”

“I’m coming with you.”

He sighed, but he didn’t try to stop me. We watched the guard slowly move around parked cars as he approached the men who were watching my Gran’s room.

Police sirens sounded nearby.

“Shit, did someone here call the police?” I asked.

“No, I did. Everything is under control.”

I stared at him. “You control the police too?”

“I told you, Miles has contacts everywhere. This particular problem was one that could be handled easily. However, our contacts can’t solve the whole situation for us.”

The men in the car remained focused on the building as the guard neared their location, but just before he reached them, they noticed his approach.

The taller man who sat the driver’s seat leaped from the car and fired a gun at the guard who clutched his chest as he fell backward.

Ford opened the door and took off.

“No,” I yelled, but he didn’t slow down.

The sirens were much louder now.

The passenger from the car jumped out and charged Ford, I rushed out to help him. I couldn’t stand there and let him fight for me. He might have plenty of unexpected skills, but I knew

from holding him down the night before that super strength wasn't one of them.

Before I reached him, he'd gotten the man in a chokehold. I froze as I watched him tighten his arm around the man's neck. The guard hadn't moved, and the driver had escaped over the perimeter wall.

I glanced back at Ford who now had the other man on his knees, his arm still cutting off the man's air. Was Ford going to kill him? Should I try and stop him?

The man stopped fighting and went slack in Ford's arms. Ford let him go, and he dropped to the ground.

"Is he...?"

"No, he's just unconscious."

We both turned toward the guard who had risen to a sitting position. I was shocked to see that there was no blood on his shirt, just a hole. He looked like he was struggling to breathe though.

"Are you okay?" Ford asked.

The man nodded. "Just...wind...knocked...out."

"Police and paramedics are on their way."

He shook his head. "I'm fine."

That was when it hit me that he was wearing a Kevlar vest.

"Should we try to...?" I pointed to where the driver had escaped.

Ford shook his head. "I'm sure they have an endless supply of goons, one escaping won't matter. We'll see what we can get out of this one." He pushed at the unconscious man with his foot.

"Won't he be taken to jail?"

"He'll be taken somewhere."

I frowned. "What are you going to do?"

"What is Carter going to do is the question. Interrogation is not my area."

A police car slid to stop beside us. An officer rushed out along with a man in plain clothes.

“Everything okay here?” the detective asked as the officer knelt by the injured guard.

“He’s just stunned,” Ford told him. “He was shot, but he’s wearing a vest.”

“Is this the one who shot him?” The detective pointed toward the still unconscious man.

“No, the shooter escaped. This was his accomplice. He didn’t get his weapon out in time.”

“And he passed out?” The detective asked.

Ford nodded. “Yes. He’s obviously not cut out for this line of work.”

I looked back and forth between the two of them. Ford had had the nerve to act all superior when I’d offered him a bribe, and now this. What the fuck kind of business were they running at Montgomery Enterprises?

The detective turned to the uniformed officer. “Go on in and speak to the manager. Make sure everything’s settled, everyone’s calm, and they know there’s nothing more to worry about. The situation is under control.”

“What exactly do I say if they want to know why these men targeted the facility?”

The detective turned to Ford.

“They were under the impression one of the residents had a lot of valuables with her. They won’t be back.”

The officer looked from the detective to Ford. “You heard him, go on.” The young man jogged toward the front door of the facility.

“If you don’t need anything else from us, we’re going to go.” Ford said.

The man at Ford’s feet stirred. The detective pulled cuffs from his pocket and bent to close them around the man’s wrists. “I can find out anything else I need from Carter.”

“Thank you for your assistance.”

The man nodded. I hoped he was being well compensated for his actions.

“Let’s go.” Ford laid a hand between my shoulder blades. The unexpected contact made me jump. No matter that it was through two layers of clothing, his touch was warm and potent.

“Wait,” I said. “I need to tell Gran goodbye.”

“Okay. I’ll reset the alarm on the back door while you talk to her.”

We slipped back in the way we had come out. When I entered Gran’s room, she seemed less deeply asleep than before. The sound of sirens must have roused her a little. “Gran?”

She smiled but didn’t open her eyes. I squeezed her hand and felt the tiniest squeeze back.

“I love you. I’ll be back to see you soon.”

When I left the room, Ford was waiting for me in the hall. We walked out the front door, waving to the nurses at the front desk like nothing odd had occurred. Once we were seated in Ford’s car, I said, “Are we just going to act like none of that happened?”

“Yes.”

“And you’re not going to explain anything?”

“Surely you can see it’s better if I don’t.”

“I can’t believe you had the nerve to act like I was outrageous when I proposed a solution that was a little like bribery.”

Ford laughed. “A little? That was when we were following the letter of the law. As soon as you were threatened, that went out the window.”

From the way he looked at me when he said that I could almost believe he cared about something more than his own convenience and making sure this ended up the way Montgomery wanted it to. “Are we still going to lunch?”

Ford shook his head. “We’re going back to my house. I’m going to finish the sauce I was making last night. You’re going to work from there for the rest of the day. You may be working from there until this is settled.”

“And what the hell am I going to tell the senior partners about that?”

“Whatever it takes.”

I sighed.

“It’s obvious something went wrong today. I know you’ll need to visit your grandmother again, but we need to minimize your movements.”

“Ford, I need to know more about what’s going on. My client keeps calling, and I’m just having to say bullshit to her.”

“Isn’t that what you usually do with most of them?”

I started to deny it, but then I shrugged. “When it’s necessary.”

“It’s necessary now.”

I didn’t say anything else, but I watched him as he drove. I thought about how effortlessly he’d nearly choked the life out of that man. I thought about how calm he’d been as he did it. I’d known there was more to him than the prickly, arrogant asshole he presented himself as at the club. I’d guessed at how wild he’d be in bed, but I’d never guessed any of this.

I also hadn’t known how fucking hot it would be to see him in action. I’d never wanted to be the one rescued. I always wanted to be the one in charge, the one who took care of everyone, but watching the way Ford had raced to my defense, the way he’d dispatched that man as if it was nothing...I had to admit it was fucking amazing.

FORD

Jay and I were silent for most of the drive home. I could feel the tension in the air, sexual and otherwise. After knowing how close he'd come to potential harm and the adrenaline rush of making sure he stayed safe, I knew one spark was all it would take to have me jerking the car to the side of the road and fucking him right there. I needed to get home, I needed to call Carter. My mind was buzzing. We needed to end this now.

I allowed myself a quick glance in Jay's direction. His head was laid back on the seat, his eyes closed, but he wasn't relaxed. I could see the tension in his jaw and shoulders.

I wanted to reach out and touch him to reassure him, but I didn't dare lest I start a full-on wildfire. How have I gone from hating this man to being willing to do anything to keep him safe? What the fuck was I gonna do when he walked away?

As soon as we got to my house, I sent Jay into my office to work, and I went to the kitchen. For a few moments, I focused on cooking, letting it calm me—or pretending it did anyway. The stress from today was way more than any simple task like cooking or knitting could get rid of.

When I thought I had a chance of talking to Carter without yelling, I called him. When he didn't answer I called right back.

"I'm busy with the guy you've sent in. I'll call you back," he said, then hung up. I paced the kitchen while the sauce simmered and I heated the water for pasta. Would Carter get anything useful out of that fucker? I hoped so. I couldn't stand

the thought of Jay in danger or of anyone but me putting their hands on him.

I blew out a long breath. I was so fucked.

It seemed like ages before Carter called back. “What did you learn?”

“Plenty. I’ve got names and locations.”

“I want in on this.”

“That’s not a good idea. You don’t have the right training.”

“They went after—” I stopped. Jay was in the kitchen doorway, watching me. His hair was wet from the shower, and he was wearing only a pair of sleep pants.

“You’ve fallen for him, haven’t you?” Carter asked.

My heart pounded so hard I thought I might pass out. “I don’t know.”

“You better figure it out, because if you want a relationship with him, you’re going to have to fight for it.”

Was I? The way Jay was looking at me, I could almost convince myself he was as obsessed as I was.

“I want to know what you’re planning. I deserve that.”

“I get that, especially since it affects you, and you’ll be a target if anything goes wrong.”

“Nothing’s going to go wrong.” It couldn’t.

“Something always goes wrong; that’s why we have contingency plans.”

I did not want Carter acting all practical now. “I want to get this right the first time.”

“Jesus, you sound like Miles.”

I felt a little bit like Miles right then, the arrogance, the need to possess. Was this how out of control he felt with Ben? No wonder he’d acted so fucking erratic.

“Since Jay and I can’t leave, why don’t you come over to discuss strategy.”

“All right, give me about an hour.”

Jay was scowling at me when I ended the call. “You’re not going after these people yourself,” he said.

“You don’t get to make that decision.”

The intensity in his eyes as he held my gaze made me shiver. “I will tie you up and keep you here. You’re not going to risk yourself again, not for me, not for Miles, not for the ownership of a warehouse.”

My breath caught. I was angry, but also turned on as hell. “I’m the one who’s protecting you.”

“Somebody has to protect you from being foolish. When you ran out of the care center today....”

“I knew what I was doing.”

“They could have shot you.”

“I calculated the risks.”

He held my gaze “Did you?”

“Yes.” I hadn’t. I just knew I needed to stop those men. I wasn’t going to let them hurt Jay or his Gran.

I turned back to the stove and dropped the pasta in the now furiously boiling water. “Carter is coming over to talk strategy soon. We should eat once this is done.”

Jay moved so close I swore I could feel the heat of him. “Or —”

“No. You’re not distracting me from cooking again.”

“Could I help then?” I looked over my shoulder. Jay was grinning. He loved that he’d surprised me. “I can cook pasta.”

I nodded. “Thanks.”

He used my pasta scoop to stir the noodles and keep them from sticking while I tasted the sauce once more and decided it was done. I let Jay watch over the pasta while I got plates and a bottle of wine.

“I would think you were trying to seduce me with all this, but we both know how unnecessary that is, especially after your

performance today.”

“What performance?”

“Don’t pretend you don’t know how hot you looked racing out to do battle and bringing that man down like he wasn’t way bigger than you.”

Heat rushed to my face. “I told you I knew how to defend myself.”

“You didn’t warn me how horny it would make me.”

Had he really been turned on by that?

“You’re like a walking example of competence porn.”

“What about you? Undefeated at tennis, the youngest candidate for partner in your firm’s history, literally a self-made man.”

Jay rolled his eyes. “It’s hard fucking work.”

“And you think I don’t know how to work hard?”

“No, not exactly, but you do things so effortlessly. You make it all look so damn easy, all while living like this,” he gestured around the house. “And you’re actually reading the books on the shelf and listening to the records and cooking in your high-end kitchen.”

“And you like that?” I asked. “It’s hot?” If he knew I spent most nights sitting in my antique chairs reading books he’d find pretentious, would he think that was sexy?

Jay’s cheeks turned a delightful shade of pink. “Yeah.”

I smiled as I nudged him out of the way and plated the pasta. “Good to know.”

Jay shook his head. “This is all so ridiculous.”

“Your life being in danger or you drooling over a man?” I asked as I put our plates on the table and motioned for Jay to join me there.

“All of it. And then Gran...I...I don’t want to lose her.”

I sat down next to him and placed a hand over his. “I’m really sorry she’s so sick. I wish there was something I could do.”

He smiled. “You really do mean that.”

“Yes.”

“Most people...most people just say that, but—”

“I don’t offer things if I’m not sincere about it, and that includes my ass.”

I watched as he tried not to smile. “You’re terrible.”

I watched as he tasted the sauce I’d made. “This is incredible.”

I smiled. “Thank you. I would love to say it’s an old family recipe, but it’s a former family cook’s recipe.”

Jay shook his head. “Of course you ate like this growing up. No boxed mac and cheese for you. Did she teach you to make it?”

“No, Miles taught me to cook when we were in college.”

“Miles cooks? I would have expected him to have a whole slew of servants at his disposal.”

I laughed. “Actually, he only has a cleaning service come in every few days. He likes his privacy at home, even more so now that Ben is there. We see them go at it enough at the office. I’d feel sorry for anyone who had to live with them.”

“So when you suggested we fuck at my office, that’s just normal practice for Montgomery Enterprises?”

“I wouldn’t say normal, but Miles would have a hard time telling someone else off about it.”

“When this is over, expect a visit to your office.”

I laughed again. “I thought after this shit show you’d want to stay as far away from me and Montgomery Enterprises as you could.”

“Ford, I—”

Whatever he was going to say was interrupted by the doorbell. Fuck Carter and his impeccable timing. “I’m sure that’s Carter.”

Jay nodded. “I want to hear what he has to say.”

“I thought you would. I can’t promise Carter is going to love that idea, but you’re part of this.”

“Damn right I am. Those men were watching my grandmother.”

“I know. We’re going to keep her safe, but we need to get more aggressive.”

When I went to the door, I saw it wasn’t just Carter. Miles had come with him. This was definitely going to be a shit show.

I looked at Miles. “What are you doing here?”

“Visiting a friend?”

I shook my head.

“Assessing the situation.”

“The only situation that needs your assessment is how the hell we’re going to get rid of these enemies we’ve made. This whole thing is a fuck up, and we need to figure out how to put an end to it.”

“I didn’t think things would get this out of control.”

“It would have helped if you’d been honest from the beginning.”

Miles scowled. “I already admitted I fucked up. We’re going to fix it.”

“I have a feeling you’re going to make it worse first.”

“Are you talking about your personal life or the situation with the criminals?”

“Let me make my own mistakes. You’ve sure as hell made plenty of your own.”

Before I could say anything else, Jay climbed the steps from the floor below.

I glared at Miles, daring him to start something.

He ignored me and gave Jay an assessing glance. “Don’t you look comfortable here.”

“I am,” he said. “Very comfortable.”

Miles narrowed his eyes. “Don’t be. As soon as we solve this little problem, you’ll be back to your own apartment and out of Ford’s way.”

“Jesus, Miles,” Carter said. “We’re here to discuss strategy.”

“I’m here to protect a friend.”

“Miles, stop,” I yelled. “I’m not some little princess who needs protecting. I can handle my own business. This isn’t high school anymore.”

“He can definitely handle his business,” Jay said. “I’ve seen him.”

I knew he was referring to me taking out the assailant at the care center, but Miles clearly assumed it was something far more lascivious.

“Keep your hands off him,” he said.

“Get out.” I pointed to the door, but Miles shook his head.

“Can we all stop acting like this is high school? Because there are men out there who want to kill us and I’d like to stop them.”

“Same,” I said.

“Why don’t we all go sit down?” Carter said, gesturing toward my living room.

Jay turned and stomped off in that direction. Carter followed him, but I grabbed Miles’s arm before he could walk away.

“You’ve been a good friend for a long time, and I know you want to protect me, but you’re out of line.”

“I don’t like him. I don’t like the way he looks at you.”

“What if I said that about Ben?”

“Who wouldn’t like Ben?”

“We’re not all going to fall for sweet, innocent young men. I can take care of myself.”

Miles sighed. “I’m worried about you because Jay has manipulated you from the moment you met. I shouldn’t have

left you on this case, but let's go take care of this problem right now."

I couldn't imagine Miles having said anything that emotionally insightful before he met Ben. Miles did what he did, and it was up to anyone else to refuse to go along with him. I appreciated that he truly cared and wanted to keep me from getting hurt, but I wasn't going to walk away from Jay, not yet anyway.

When we entered the living room, Carter was seated, but Jay was up, pacing. I moved to stand beside him, and Miles glared at him again.

"I'm not walking away," Jay said.

"Not now, while you need our protection." When Jay didn't respond, didn't deny that he would leave when things were over, I tried to tell myself that was fine. That was what I'd expected all along, but the thought still made my chest ache.

"We need to get you both somewhere safer," Carter said.

Miles nodded. "Ford, we were thinking you should go visit your grandparents' place, and we have a safehouse where Jay can—"

"No. Jay stays with me."

Carter frowned. "We can get you both someplace safe without anyone following us, but it works better if there are multiple targets, and our enemies' attention is split."

Jay glanced at me, then back to Carter. "How am I supposed to keep doing my job? I have other cases. I can't just go hide somewhere."

"You can work from my grandparents' estate in Bedford."

"Ford, I don't think—"

"I do. You're mine, and I'm going to protect you."

"Damn," Carter said. "I didn't know things had gone that far."

Miles's eyes were wide. I think he finally realized that this thing between me and Jay wasn't what he thought.

“Nothing has gone anywhere,” Jay protested.

No way in hell was I going to let Jay deny what was happening, not in front of my friends, not after I’d been defending him. I grabbed his arm and yanked him toward my office which opened into the living room. “We’ll be back.”

“You can’t just...claim me,” he said once the door was shut.

“Yes, I can. Is that too much for you? Do you have to be in charge of everything?” I hated that we had to keep our voices down. I really wanted to yell at him.

The way he looked at me, I wasn’t sure if he wanted to run away, punch me, or kiss me. “I’m here, aren’t I? If I needed to be in charge, I wouldn’t have agreed to this.”

“Wouldn’t you? You wanted me. You wanted a chance to fuck me every night.”

“You’re....” He ran a hand over his hair. “This is crazy.”

“Then leave.”

“There are men who want to kill me.”

“If you don’t want my protection, that’s your own problem.”

“I didn’t say that,” he growled. “I didn’t say I don’t want protection.”

“You just don’t want to be possessed?”

“You shouldn’t be able to possess me. What are you? A demon? That would explain a lot, because I can’t fucking stay away from you.”

“Do you wish you could?”

He shook his head. “No. Fuck me. No, I don’t.”

“Then come with me to see my grandparents and let me take care of you.”

“That’s not how things work. I....”

“You are a big, strong man who can take care of himself?”

“Fuck you. Yes,” he snarled.

“Okay. Then go do that.”

“Jesus, Ford. Nothing about this is normal.”

“Exactly and that’s why you need help, and apparently, dick.”

“Yeah, apparently I do.”

At least he didn’t deny it.

JAY

When we walked back out into the living room, Carter was clearly chastising Miles in a low voice. Miles glared at him before they turned to face us.

“I’ll be going with Ford to his grandparents’ estate,” I said.

Miles looked between the two of us. “You’re sure this is the best idea?”

We said “yes” at the same time, and I couldn’t help but smile.

I thought Miles would protest further, but he simply nodded. “I will make the arrangements for you to leave in the morning. Until then, you’re under very tight security. Do not leave the house.”

Ford huffed. “I’m not going to miss knitting circle tonight.”

Miles eyes widened. “You’ve got to be kidding.”

Carter shook his head. “It’s best if you stay here.”

“No, I’m going to go. I’d need to see Eudora before I leave town.”

“Ben is going to be there,” Miles said.

“Or you could try to convince him to stay home,” Ford said. “I’m sure that will go over well.”

Miles scowled. Ford had confided to me that while Miles might think he was in control in the relationship, Ben had him wrapped around his little finger.

“Don’t leave on your own,” Miles ordered. “You’ll need a security escort.”

“That’s fine. I’m happy to have all the security you can spare, but I need to go tonight.”

I frowned at Ford. Why was knitting circle so important? I understood he liked it, and he was close friends with Eudora and the other club members, including Ben, but why would he push this?

“And you’ll be staying here?” Carter asked me.

“Yes.” I didn’t think Ford wanted me going with him, and I wasn’t going to ask to go. I already felt like I was walking on eggshells with the whole situation between us. And the thing was, I didn’t even know what I ultimately wanted from it.

Don’t you? that voice inside me asked.

I knew I wanted to keep fucking Ford, but beyond that? What was there for us?

We might end up on opposite sides of another court case. We might be on the same tennis team, but we lived in different worlds. I knew better than to think I was going to break into his strata of society.

This was just some kind of strange obsession, some sort of early midlife crisis.

Are you sure?

I wasn’t ready to consider any other options. I didn’t think Ford was either. He’d pursued me first, and he’d finally gotten what he wanted. But now there was more between us than just a struggle for power. There had been moments when it felt like something much more tender.

I pushed those thoughts aside and contemplated the reality of being alone in Ford’s house for hours. The chance that I could keep myself from finding out what he was hiding in the bathroom drawer he’d forbidden me to open was almost zero. I had my suspicions, but I needed to know.

When Miles and Carter left, Ford looked at his watch. “I’ve got to finish some work before knitting circle.”

“I can’t believe you can just go from choking a guy unconscious to knitting.”

Ford huffed. “I’m not going to skip knitting just because some asshole got in our fucking way.”

“Damn. Why is that hot?”

Ford grinned. “I have no idea.”

I grabbed his arm as he walked by me. “What if someone comes after you tonight?”

“They’ll be sorry they ever met Eudora. I would bet on her against any assassin.”

I knew of Eudora from her charitable work, and she had a very formidable reputation, but... “Aren’t you putting her at risk?”

“As you heard, Miles’s boyfriend is also in the knitting circle, so I promise there will be plenty of protection there.”

“As protective as Miles is of his friends, I can’t even imagine how he acts with Ben.”

“It’s rather spectacular.”

“You stood up for me against him.” I couldn’t remember when anything had affected me so much.

Ford looked away. “I stood up for myself.”

I sighed. Of course he was going to dismiss it now. “What the hell are we doing?”

“I don’t know, but you’re coming to meet my grandparents.”

“That seems a little premature.”

Ford shrugged. “I’ve met your Gran, more or less.”

“She wasn’t awake.”

“Would you be embarrassed to bring a man to see her?”

“No. I... What are we right now?”

“Friends with benefits? Enemies with benefits?”

Was that it? “Then why would I meet your family?”

“Because they will keep you safe.”

That was another thing I didn't understand. "Why would we go there and put them in danger?"

"Don't you know who my grandfather is?"

Oh shit, what surprise was coming now? "Sorry, I'm not up on your lineage."

"Should I be hurt that you haven't stalked me better?"

"Have you stalked me?"

"If I hadn't, Miles, Carter and Worth would have."

I shook my head. "I should have known that."

"If it makes you feel better, it was initially because you were a competitor."

"You didn't do it when I joined the tennis club?"

Ford's cheeks turned a beautiful shade of pink. "Maybe a little."

"Who is your grandfather?"

"Retired Senator Jonathan Wainwright."

How the hell had I not connected *that*?

"Believe me when I say the security at their house is top of the line, and these men don't want the kind of trouble they could get for going after us there. They were trying to keep a low profile until they made the mistake of pissing off Miles."

"What are you going to tell your grandparents about our visit?"

"I'm not going to call you my boyfriend if that's what you're worried about. I'd hate for word to get out and ruin your reputation with any ladies you have your eye on."

"I don't...that's not...." How did Ford always manage to make me feel so off balance?

"I'm going to tell them the truth, or at least part of it. We're being targeted because of a case, and it's safer for us to leave the city."

"And they'll be fine with that?"

“In front of you, yes. I’ll get grilled in private, but they would never express displeasure around a guest.”

I was not ready to meet Senator and Mrs. Wainwright. I was barely able to comprehend what I was feeling for Ford. When he took me to their estate, I would have to face just how out of my league he was.

FORD

I let my head rest back against the car seat as one of Carter's most reliable guards drove me to Eudora's house, despite it being close enough to easily walk. I took a deep breath which felt like the first one I'd had since Jay had called to say there were men watching his Gran's room.

Whenever I was with Jay, I felt like he took up most of the air in the room. I couldn't breathe right or think clearly. Was Miles right to be worried about me? Was I crazy to think Jay was feeling more than just the thrill of having power over me?

Eudora and Ben were going to interrogate me. I could easily have avoided that by saying it wasn't safe for me to be there, but I couldn't spend the whole evening home alone with Jay. My heart was in danger. Even knowing our relationship was doomed from the start, I couldn't help falling for him, and now...now I needed Eudora and Ben's insight, not just Miles's aggressive protection or Carter's sensible planning. I needed to talk to people who actually let their emotions show.

I wanted reassurance that I wasn't crazy to take Jay to meet my grandparents. If Eudora thought I was, she wouldn't hesitate to tell me.

"I didn't think we'd be seeing you tonight you," Eudora said when she let me in.

I assumed Ben had filled her in on some of what was going on. "You know how much I hate to miss these gatherings."

"I do, but I also know how much you like to avoid discussing your personal life."

I sniffed. “There’s no reason to discuss my personal life. This is a knitting circle. We’re here to further our craft in each other’s company.”

“Such beautiful bullshit from your mouth. You will be staying afterwards, and you will be telling me everything.”

“Not quite everything.”

“So, you finally managed to seduce the gorgeous man?”

That seemed much too calm a word for what had happened between me and Jay. “Something like that.”

Ben smiled and called hello when I entered the room Eudora referred to as the parlor. I took a seat next to him and hoped he would be discreet enough not to discuss the situation with Jay while everyone else was there.

“Miles tells me you’ve had a rough day,” he said.

“That is quite an understatement. In fact, it was so rough I’m going to be taking some time off.”

Ben frowned. “He didn’t tell me that.”

“I’ll give you more details later, when I’m more certain about my plans.”

Ben nodded, and we began talking with everyone. We all shared what we were working on and projects we had in mind for later this year. Several of the members were already working on holiday gifts. I’d started a hat, telling myself it wasn’t for Jay, but knowing it was.

The conversation turned to books, then to food and new restaurants. It seemed like hardly any time had passed before the meeting was over, and most of the other members were rising to depart. I’d managed to finish the hat and even added a small J to the inside. I wasn’t sure when I’d give it to him, though, but I knew it would not be tonight.

Robert, an elderly gentleman who’d been friends with Eudora for ages, narrowed his eyes at me. “Something’s different about you today. You’re not usually this quiet.”

“It’s been a long week.”

He shook his head. "I don't think that's all of it."

I glanced at Eudora, wondering if she had been spilling my secrets, but she shook her head.

"I'm just tired. How about you? How's your week been?"

"The same as usual, golf, drinks, more golf, more knitting, people hounding me to attend their fundraisers." He glanced at Eudora, and she grinned.

I cupped my hand over my mouth, pretending to speak in secret. "I wouldn't say no to her if I were you."

He smiled. "No, I know better than that."

"Don't play coy," Eudora said. "You know you want to come."

"Of course, dear."

Eudora walked Robert to the door while Ben and I remained in the parlor. I poured myself a glass of port from the sideboard and offered one to Ben, but he declined. "Need to stay sober to interrogate me?"

He just smiled.

"Did Miles give you questions to ask me?"

"He tried, but I have questions of my own."

"And you're going to tell him everything you learn?"

Ben shrugged. "Let's see how this goes. I might just sway it your way."

Eudora returned then. She accepted a glass of port from me, and we all sat back down. "Spill it," she ordered.

"Yes," Ben said. "Tell us exactly how have things developed with Mr. Rollins?"

I frowned at Ben. "You looked him up, didn't you?"

"I did, and the man is hot as hell."

Eudora snorted. "That often means they are the worst sort."

"What about Miles?" No one, gay or straight, could deny that Miles was hot as hell.

“Miles is an exception.”

I laughed. “To most things.”

“Miles, Carter, and Worth really don’t approve of Jay, and I understand why they’re so worried. They’ve seen me after I’ve been dumped before.”

“It’s not pretty,” Eudora said. “Not when you’ve let yourself really get involved.”

“I told myself I wasn’t going to pursue Jay, but we got thrown together with this lawsuit, and....”

“Miles said Jasper was trying to manipulate you, to pretend he liked you so you would go easy on him in court.”

“I think he was, but things have changed now that we’re in danger. Did Miles tell you he didn’t bother to let me know exactly how dangerous this case was, or that this wasn’t about Montgomery Enterprises but about protecting people from a criminal organization?”

Eudora’s eyes widened. “What?”

Ben’s lack of surprise confirmed my suspicion. “You knew?”

“I knew Miles was worrying over something, and I managed to get the basics out of him.”

I bet Ben had let Miles know how unacceptable that was, and he’d probably had to do a lot of groveling. Ben must have thoroughly enjoyed that.

“We’re going to stay at my grandparents’ estate.”

“We, as in you and Jasper?” Eudora asked.

“You do know Jasper’s been staying with Ford already, right?” Ben asked, the sly little bastard.

Eudora shook her head, then turned and gave me a hard look.

“Are you sure you know what you’re doing?”

“No, but he slept with me, and he didn’t run or insist he was straight, and he didn’t say it would never happen again.”

“That’s something, but is it enough for you to continue with this?” Eudora asked.

“He needs protection.” I hated how weak my defense sounded. “I know I’m probably being stupid, but our dynamic has changed. Jay’s not pushing my buttons constantly. He’s not trying to get the better of me. I’m wondering if maybe he’s actually interested after all.” As soon as I said those words, I tensed, waiting for an onslaught of anger from them and their insistence that I had to be wrong.

Instead, Eudora patted my leg. “Tell me what makes you think so.”

I glanced up at them both. “You’re actually willing to listen?”

“Of course,” Ben said. “Just because Miles thinks he knows something doesn’t make it true. For all I know, Jasper is desperately in love with you. I wish you’d brought him.”

“You wouldn’t have been able to interrogate me then.”

“No, but we would’ve been able to watch the two of you together,” Eudora said.

“Jay and I talk about real things. He’s willing to be vulnerable with me, and while he definitely likes to be in charge—”

Eudora held up a hand. “Not too many details, please.”

I huffed. “He’s also willing to let me be the one who’s calling the shots, and I don’t mean in bed.”

Ben smiled. “I can’t imagine he’d let you take charge in bed, nor that you’d want him to.”

I scowled at him.

“Come on. He’s a ‘straight’ guy. Do you really think he’s going to want to give in to you like that?”

“Boys,” Eudora said. “There is a lady present.”

I raised my brows. I knew the kind of books she like to read. “Don’t act so innocent.”

“I’m hardly innocent, but I don’t want to know the details of your sex lives. Miles and Ford are like sons to me, and now, so are you, Ben. Don’t make things weird.”

Ben and I both smiled. “I’ll be good,” I said.

“I didn’t ask for that much.”

“Jay was so worried today. The men who want to make sure this lawsuit goes their way came to his grandmother’s care facility. She has a bad case of pneumonia, and Jay’s already scared she won’t make it. He went to visit her, and they must have followed him. Of course, he didn’t bother to call and let me know he was leaving the office.”

Ben and Eudora looked at each other, and I did not like their expressions.

“What?”

“Whether Jay’s invested or not, you sure are.”

“Why? Because I’m bitching about him?”

“No, because you care.”

I sighed. “That’s my problem, I always care.”

“You always care about things being a certain way, about what you want, about wrapping a relationship up in the proper package.” I started a protest, but I knew Eudora was right. “This is different. I’ve never heard you talk about a man like this.”

“Too bad he’s a straight man who doesn’t even like me.”

“He ran out in front of a gunman to save you, and you think he doesn’t like you?” Ben asked.

“I’m his ticket to safety.”

“Bullshit. Miles would protect him even if something happened to you. You know that, and I’m sure Jay does too. You don’t put yourself in danger, not like that, for someone who doesn’t matter.”

“So maybe he thinks of me as a friend.”

“That’s a step,” Eudora said.

“So what are you saying?”

Eudora glanced at Ben and then back at me. “I’m saying take him to your grandparents’ place. Introduce him to them. Let

him see how you deal with that dynamic. Take him to your grandad's workshop, let Jay meet his dogs."

"I don't know if Jay even likes dogs or woodworking."

"Just see what happens while you're away."

"You really think I should give this a chance? You think I should go all in?"

"I think you are already all in," Ben said. "So you might as well fight for it."

"Do you want this man?" Eudora asked. "Do you honestly think there could be a chance of something more than fucking between the two of you?"

I nearly choked hearing Eudora use the F word, but I managed to nod. "I know it sounds crazy, and Miles would never believe me, but I do. I can't really put it into words, but something has shifted between us."

"You've always been one to fight for what you wanted," Eudora said. "Miles fell for Ben and look where they are now."

Ben seemed to consider that for a moment. "Miles declared that I was his and basically kidnapped me."

"That's not a hell of a lot different than what I've done with Jay."

"And he's put up with it?" Eudora asked.

I considered the argument Jay and I had when I'd dragged him away from Miles and Carter earlier. Ultimately, he had let me win. He was going to go to my grandparents' place with me, even though it clearly bothered him. "He has so far."

Eudora smiled. "I imagine you've made that worth his while."

"Maybe, but things won't be the same at my grandparents' estate."

Eudora laughed. "No, they certainly won't, but don't let your grandmother intimidate you."

"That's a tall order. She'll put Jay in a separate room."

“Of course she will.”

“I’m not going to introduce him as my boyfriend.”

“What would she do if you did?” Ben asked.

I took a deep breath and let it out. “I really don’t know, but I’m not going to find out that way.”

“Don’t let it be a chance for you to hide,” Eudora said.

I was in deep already. Ben had called that right. I did want to fight for Jay. I wanted him to admit what he was feeling, but if we couldn’t make things work, would I be able to put myself back together this time?

“We’ll be here if things don’t go your way,” Ben said as if he knew what I was thinking. “I might not know you as well as Eudora, but I’ve heard enough from Miles to know how brave you are. You weren’t afraid to be yourself at school, and you shouldn’t be afraid to do what you want now.”

“I was terrified in school, but I refused to let that stop me.”

“Then don’t let it stop you now, no matter what your very well-meaning friends say.”

I needed to hear that.

“And if things don’t work out,” Eudora said. “You’ll survive; you always have.”

“I really don’t want to think about that.”

Ben laid a hand on my arm. “What does your gut tell you?”

I looked from him to Eudora. “That Jay is The One.”

“That’s what mine said about Miles.”

I hugged them both. “Thank you.”

“Any time, and you better keep us posted,” Eudora said.

“I will.”

Ben smiled. “All I’m going to tell Miles is that you really like Jay, and you aren’t going to let him get hurt. It’s your decision if you want to tell him more.”

“Thank you. You’re the best.”

“Now get back to your man.”

I hurried out the door, suddenly very eager to do so.

JAY

When I saw Ford's driver pull out into traffic and head down the street, I walked upstairs. My heart pounded when I reached the door of his bedroom. I knew I shouldn't snoop, but I'd been thinking about that damn drawer since the first time I'd been in his bathroom. I had to know. If it was so secret, he should lock it up—not that he would expect anyone to be in his bathroom.

I moved slowly and quietly across the room. I didn't know why. I knew no one else was there. If Ford had security cameras, I was already fucked. When I stepped into the bathroom, something brightly colored in the shower caught my eye.

I stepped closer, trying to figure out what hot pink item would be in Ford's shower. I tugged on the glass door. As it popped open, my breath caught. There was a sizable dildo suction cupped to the wall of the shower. If he'd left that in the shower, I had to be right about what was in the drawer.

Had Ford used the dildo this morning? Had he thought about me when he did? Jesus Christ. If he was that horny, he could have come to get me. I would gladly have taken care of him.

I could easily imagine him naked in the shower, hand braced on the wall, pushing back to take it inside, his other hand wrapped around his cock, furiously working himself. What I would give to watch that.

I stepped back from the shower and turned toward the vanity. I shouldn't look, but I couldn't help myself. Besides, could it

really be worse than what I'd already seen?

I pulled the drawer open and made a strangled sound. It was filled with butt plugs and dildos in a range of sizes. One of the plugs even had a remote to control the level of vibration. Damn, Ford liked his toys. I wanted to use every single one of them on him.

A video I'd watched replayed in my head. A man was stretched out on the bed, naked. Another man knelt between his legs, working a thick dildo in and out of him as he sucked the reclined man's cock. Suddenly I needed to do that to Ford so badly it made my knees weak.

Ford had challenged me, and I never stepped down from a challenge, even if it meant.... Could I do it? Could I take Ford's cock in my mouth? Would I be any good at it? I couldn't imagine being able to take him as deep as Ford had taken me, but I wanted to try.

I thought of the way he would squirm, the way he would beg with my mouth on him and one of the toys deep inside his ass. I knew exactly what we were going to do when Ford got home from knitting circle.

We needed to talk about things, like where our relationship was headed and what the hell was going to happen with the men who were after me. I wanted to know more about his grandparents before showing up at their home, but I wouldn't be able to think about anything until I'd seen him with one of these toys deep inside him.

The more I stared at the array of options in the drawer, the more I wondered what they would feel like inside of me. I wasn't ready for that yet, but Ford's fingers in me had felt better than I could've imagined. Not all the toys in the drawer were intimidating in size. Maybe, eventually, I'd be ready to try one, but I had no idea how much longer this relationship with Ford going to last.

Ford had gotten what he wanted. He'd gotten me to admit that I liked fucking a man, that I loved being in bed with him. Once we were safe again, there wouldn't be any reason for him to see me.

I was shocked by just how much I hated that idea. I wasn't sure I could handle giving him up. But what could I do? I'd already learned he was an immovable force, no matter how much I wanted to pretend differently.

I tried to push those thoughts from my mind. I needed to enjoy what was happening right now. That had been the way I'd lived since my dad died, taking pleasure where I could get it and fighting my way to the top.

I remembered what Emily had said. There were parts of my life that sucked, and sometimes it was lonely, but did I really want to shake things up? Did I really want to take a risk?

All I knew for sure at that moment was that I wanted to see Ford stuffed with one of his toys. He was going to be mad as hell that I'd gone through his things, but I had a feeling I could make him come so hard he wouldn't give a damn about it anymore.

I loved the way he could give himself totally over to pleasure. He was a completely different person in bed. He just let go. It was so fucking beautiful, and it made me feel things I didn't want to feel.

It seemed to take forever for Ford to return. By the time he got home, I'd almost given in and jerked off twice. I was so hard I didn't know how I was going to hold back long enough to do what I wanted to do with him. Somehow I'd make it, though. It was just one more challenge.

I'd been pretending to work, but it was useless. All I could do was fantasize about the moment I had him exactly where I wanted him.

When I heard the back door open, I raced upstairs to his room and stripped down to a pair of boxer briefs.

I heard him call for me.

"I'm upstairs, come see me."

“What are you doing?” He asked as he continued up the stairs to my room, so I called out to him. “Ford, I’m in here.”

When he turned, his eyes widened. “What are you doing?”

I’ll let my hand skim down my chest and over my hard, aching cock. “Waiting for you.”

“You’re not supposed to be in here.”

“Are you really going to argue with me right now?” He looked like he was considering it. “Take your clothes off and lay on the bed.”

“Jay, I’m—”

“Do what I say.”

“You can’t just—”

“Yes, I can. Take off your clothes and get on the bed.”

I waited, letting my eyes roam up and down his body. Finally, he dropped his bag to the floor, then his coat slid from the shoulders. I watched as he worked open each button on his shirt. He was doing what I said, but he wasn’t going to rush.

I bit my lip to keep from groaning at the sight of his chest, his abs, his slim hips, and then his cock, already hard from anticipation.

When he was fully naked, I rose and pointed to the bed. He glared at me, but he got on his hands and knees.

“No,” I said. “On your back, legs spread.”

His expression was wary, but he did it.

I walked around to his nightstand, opened the drawer, and got the lube. He watched me, eyes wide, chest rising and falling rapidly.

“I’m ready,” I said.

“Ready for what?” he asked as I pushed his legs even wider apart and settled between them.

“Ready to suck your cock.”

His eyes widened, and he sucked in his breath. “Are you serious?”

“Very serious, but I have something else for you too.”

“What?” Ford looked almost afraid.

“Trust me. You’ll like it.” I pulled out the plug I’d chosen and hidden under his pillow.

“What the hell have you been doing?”

I grinned. “Being naughty.”

“I told you not to go in that drawer.”

“I could have just used the one from your shower.”

“Oh fuck, I didn’t take it down.”

“No. I’m disappointed you used it when I was right upstairs.”

He glared at me. “You had no reason to be in my bathroom.”

“Are you really going to complain now?” I pressed my slick fingers against his hole, teasing him. As he started to protest again, I pushed them inside him.

“Jay, you can’t just go through my stuff. You—”

I pushed deeper, working my fingers in and out. Ford squirmed, his cock bouncing as he moved his hips, trying to get more. I pulled my fingers out, and he watched as I slicked up the plug.

“I knew you had something fun in that drawer. I’ve spent the last few hours thinking about seeing you with this in your ass. I want to suck you while I’m fucking you with it.”

“Fuck Jay. How did you even...?”

“I told you I’ve been watching videos, studying, learning things.”

“Stop teasing me.”

I shook my head. “I’m the one in charge now.” I pressed the head of the plug against him, and he gasped. “Can you really take all of this?”

“Yes, damn it.”

I pushed into him, and he squirmed. “More.”

“Fuck, you’re such a slut.”

“You said you’d suck me. Show me what you can do.”

I drove the plug in farther, making him cry out. “You’ll get everything I promised, but I’m enjoying this right now.”

I wrapped a hand around his cock and worked him slowly as I pulled the toy from his body. My cock was throbbing, begging me to fuck him with it instead, but it would have to wait. I repositioned myself so I was lying between his legs. When I lifted his cock and bent low over it, I pushed the plug in again.

“Do it,” he demanded.

“Ask nicely.”

“Put your mouth on me.” I looked up and raised my brows. “Please.”

I licked the tip of his cock the way he’d done mine. The salty taste of his precum made me want more.

“Stop fucking teasing me.”

I pulled the plug almost all the way out. “I’m in charge.”

“Please. I can’t take this.”

I smiled as I gave him my mouth and stuffed his ass at the same time.

I was shocked by how much I enjoyed the feel of his cock in my mouth. I loved the way the head was soft, the shaft hard, and the skin slick against my tongue. I ran my tongue up the underside, feeling the veins there.

Ford thrust up, forcing himself deeper. I gagged around him, and shoved his hips back down the way he had mine.

“Please,” Ford begged. I looked up at him. His eyes were wide. He’d clearly been sinking his teeth into his lower lip. It was red, nearly bleeding, and I’d hardly done anything at all.

“You need this so bad, don’t you?”

He nodded.

I kept my gaze locked with his as I licked him again, then took him into my mouth, swallowing him as deep as I could, wrapping a hand around the base and working him while I fucked him with the plug.

“I can’t stay still. I...fuck, I can’t take this.”

I pulled off long enough to say. “Yes, you can. You don’t have a choice.”

I pushed the plug in all the way, mesmerized by the way his ass sucked it in until the flange was pressed flat against his ass.

Ford worked his hips, trying to fuck the air with his cock. I squeezed his hips hard, forcing them down as I took him back in my mouth, sucking him, licking him, sliding my lips as far down as I could, trying to swallow his whole cock.

How the hell could he do that? I wanted to learn. I wanted him in my throat. I wanted it all. This was insane, but it felt so good being able to use my mouth to make him cry out, make him beg. I’d always fucking loved eating out women, but I never thought I’d want to put a dick in my mouth. Now I wanted to do it every fucking day.

Ford slid his hands into my hair, trying to hold my head down, but I pulled back, showing him I was stronger, that he couldn’t force me. I was doing this because I wanted to.

A few moments later, he pushed at my shoulders.

“I’m going to come. Right now. I can’t....”

I hesitated for a moment. Part of me wanted to try to swallow his load, but I ended up pulling off and watching him. As he shuddered through his climax as I kept stroking him with my hand. When he was done, I brought my hand to my mouth and licked off his cum. His eyes locked with mine as he tried to catch his breath.

He looked totally wrecked, and I fucking loved it. I needed to be inside him right then. I grabbed the lube and slicked up my cock, then pulled the plug from his body, making him groan.

Without hesitating, I doubled his legs onto his chest and thrust into him. He whimpered as I jolted him with the force of my

thrust.

I should've asked if he was okay, but I didn't. I kept driving into him relentlessly. He reached for me, pulling me down for a kiss. I took his mouth, fucking him with my tongue the way I was fucking his ass.

He caught me by surprise when he flipped me over, rose up on top of me, and drove himself down on my cock. He was already hard again.

I gazed up at him, mesmerized. "Are you going to come again?"

"Fuck yes," he said. "The sight of you with your mouth around my dick...I've never...Jesus, Jay, how did you learn to do that?"

"I just did what you did to me."

"So fucking hot."

I took hold of his hips. "Harder," I demanded. "I need more."

Ford smiled as he took me as deep as he could. I held onto him as I drove up into him.

He made a strangled sound and fell forward, bracing himself on my chest. "That's it," I said. "Let me have you, use you. I can claim you too, but I'm going to do it like this."

"Yes! Please fuck me. Give it all to me."

He wrapped a hand around his cock, the ecstasy on his face nearly making me lose it. I flipped us again. This time, I wanted my cum all over him.

I drove into him until he cried out, coming a second time. Then I pulled out and jerked myself off. Seconds later, my cum shot over his chest, making an even bigger mess of him.

"I love seeing you like this, ass wrecked, exhausted, and covered in cum."

"How did you ever think you wouldn't be into this?"

I shook my head. "I don't know."

"I can't fucking believe I came twice."

“I guess I’m just good at everything.”

“Fuck off.”

I laughed as collapsed on my side, facing him.

He reached out and pushed my sweaty hair off my forehead.

“Do you want to stay here tonight?”

“In bed with you?”

“No, on the floor.”

I glared at him.

“Yes, in bed.”

“Can I wake you up and fuck you again?”

He raised his brows. “If you have the stamina.”

I wasn’t sure I did, but I grinned. “Damn right I will.”

“You can fuck me as often as you want.”

“Damn, Ford.”

“And anytime you want to stuff me full and suck me again, feel free.”

“I will, but I…”

“What?”

I shook my head. “Nothing.”

“Jay.”

I blew out a long breath. “I might, sometime, want you to do that to me too, but with a smaller plug.”

“That might fucking kill me, but I’d do it anyway. And don’t worry I have a range of sizes.”

“I noticed. You seem very well supplied.”

“I’m going to let it slide this time, but if I catch you going through anything personal of mine again, there will be consequences.”

“Like what.”

“What did you think of the dildo in the shower?”

“That thing is a monster.”

“I’ll fuck you with it until you scream.”

Despite lying on the bed, I felt dizzy for a moment, but it wasn’t just from fear. The idea of him forcing me wasn’t nearly as horrifying as it should be.

“Interesting.”

“What?”

Ford grinned. “You don’t hate that idea.”

“No, I...I mean....”

“Do you want to be fucked?”

“Do you...um...do you do that?”

Ford grinned. “I do everything.”

FORD

We were less than a mile from my grandparents' estate, and my stomach was extremely uneasy. I wasn't sure how my grandparents would react to Jasper. They had known I was gay for a long time, and while it had taken a bit for them to come around, they ultimately accepted it. My grandmother still wished I'd marry and have several children to continue the family line, but she'd nearly gotten over that as well.

I wasn't going to introduce Jasper as someone I was dating, but my grandmother had a sixth sense about things like that. She always seemed to know exactly what my motivations were, even when I thought I hadn't given her a clue.

She should've been an attorney, but she wouldn't have been able to host luncheons and do all her charity work if she were busy in a law office. She would've been a terror in court, though.

Jasper had plenty of experience dealing with wealthy people who thought the world revolved around them, but I wasn't sure how he'd fare under my grandmother's scrutiny. If she thought for one minute he was a potential husband for me, she would nitpick everything he said or did. I debated how much I should say to warn him, but decided knowing too much would just make him nervous. When Jay got nervous, he got belligerent and aggressive. Sometimes that was wonderful, but my grandmother would not take it well.

As we turned into the driveway and the house came into view, Jay sucked in his breath. "This is their house? This is where

you grew up?”

“It is their house, but I only lived here for almost two years after my parents died when I was twelve. After that I was only home during school holidays.”

“It looks like a hotel.”

I nodded. “It would make a lovely one.”

“But they live here, just the two of them?”

“My grandmother does host plenty of parties.” I slowed to a crawl and laid my hand over Jay’s.

He turned to face me. “I didn’t think....”

“My grandmother is a huge snob. Don’t pay attention to anything she says that’s...offensive.”

“She won’t approve of me, will she? Not even as your friend.”

“She doesn’t really approve of anyone, honestly.”

“And you thought now was a good time to warn me about this?”

I’d fucked up. “I didn’t want to worry you.”

“I’m not worried. I don’t need her approval as long as she lets me stay here.”

“She would never make you leave, especially not when you’re in danger. She’s...a lot more subtle than that.”

“And your grandfather?”

“He does what she says or spends time in his shop to escape.”

“What kind of shop?”

“He took up woodworking as a hobby after he left the Senate. If you get him started talking about his projects, he’ll go on forever. That’s about the only thing he wants to talk about, other than his dogs.”

Jay face lit up at the mention of dogs. “What type of dogs does he have?”

“German Shepherds.”

“I had a couple of German Shepherds growing up. They’re the best dogs.”

I’d never seen Jay looked so wistful. “I loved playing with his dogs when I was growing up here. He’s always had some. He’d love for you to meet them, and if you’d like, we can take them with us for a walk on the trail through the woods.”

Jay frowned. “You want to walk in the woods?”

I huffed. “As you may have guessed, I wasn’t much of an outdoorsy kid, but when it came to a chance to enjoy time with the dogs, I was willing to put up with the heat, the bugs, or whatever. There wasn’t a lot to do out here.”

“Not a lot of other gay boys running around?”

“There was one gardener....”

“No way.”

I laughed. “I know, it’s almost too cliché to believe, but yes. He was too old for me, but he was sweet and gentle. I needed that.”

“As opposed to now when you need it rough and hard, like a punishment.”

“I don’t always need that.”

Jay looked like he was thinking about seeing if we could turn around and find a place for a quick stop. Knowing what he wanted was going to make it even harder to pretend we were just friends, but if I brought him in as my boyfriend, my grandmother would break him.

I brought the car to a stop in front of the entrance to my grandparents’ house.

“Don’t worry,” Jay said as I opened my door. “I’ll do my best not to embarrass you.”

“Jay, just be yourself. Feel free to be an unrelentingly arrogant asshole. All those are qualities my grandmother has herself, so it won’t come as a shock.”

His eyes widened. “You really mean that, don’t you?”

“Yes, I do.” If I hadn’t already been sure, I knew at that moment I’d fallen deeply in love with Jay. I needed to find a way to keep him.

When we stepped inside, everything was as large scale and luxurious as I remembered it. All I could think about was how the house must look to Jay. I glanced back at him. He was doing a good job of keeping a neutral face, but I knew he was feeling overwhelmed. I knew how defensive he’d always been about growing up poor. Why the hell had I brought him here if I wanted him to stay with me?

Staying with my grandparents was only going to emphasize what a different world I’d grown up in. Jay might be over the issue of me being a man, as hard as that was to believe, but my world being full of such casual wealth might be even harder for him to dismiss.

Maybe give him more credit.

I couldn’t let that little voice inside my head give me too much hope.

My grandmother opened the door before I could knock. “Hello, Ford. It’s so nice of you to visit us.” Of course she would put it that way when she knew we were there to hide.

I kissed her cheek. “It’s been too long.”

“Aren’t you going to introduce your friend?”

If she’d give me a chance. “Grandmother, this is Jasper Rollins.” I gestured toward Jay. “Jasper, this is my grandmother, Julia Wainwright.”

She held out her hand and they shook. Jasper smiled at her. He was charming, but he held himself stiffly. He was behaving like he had to me at the club before everything changed.

“How do you know my grandson?” she asked.

“We’re on the same tennis team at our club, and we are both attorneys.” His voice was crisper than usual, polite but not warm. I couldn’t believe how much he’d changed in the days we spent together.

“That’s nice, would you like some refreshments?”

“No, thank you,” we both said.

“Grandmother, I’d like to show Jay the grounds once we’ve put our things in our rooms.”

“Don’t worry about your things. I’ll have someone take them up. I think your grandfather is out in his workshop, at least I suppose he is since I’ve not seen him in sometime. Dinner will be at 6:30.”

“We’ll be back and freshened up by then,” I said.

Once we were far enough away from the house that my grandmother wouldn’t hear, I looked at Jay. “So, is this what you expected?”

He shuddered. “She’s terrifying.”

“I told you.”

“I thought you were exaggerating.”

Was there any chance this could work? “She’s obviously a whole lot different than your Gran.”

“Yeah. I can’t even imagine what was it like to grow up here.”

“My grandparents love me. I know that even if they don’t always know how to show it, and obviously I didn’t want for anything.”

“But was she always so...distant?”

“Maybe not at first, not right after I lost my parents, but for the most part, yes. Once you get to know her, you’ll understand when she’s trying to care, but I don’t think anyone ever showed her much affection.”

“Including your grandfather?”

“I think by the time they married she was already so much herself that he didn’t really know how to. He cares for her.” I sighed. “Their relationship is hard to explain.”

After we’d walked for a few moments, I saw that the lights were on in Grandad’s shed. “Jay, I know you were eager to see me wandering in the woods, but I’d like to introduce you to my grandfather. The dogs are likely in the shop with him.”

“That sounds great. Maybe petting some dogs would help me calm down after meeting your grandmother.”

JAY

When Ford said his grandfather had a woodworking shop, I'd envisioned a shed with some tools like one of my neighbors had growing up. I should have known better. His shop was more on the scale of something a small- to medium-sized company would own. The outbuilding was bigger than most people's houses, and if there was a tool to use in woodworking, I was sure he had it.

I braced myself for another intimidating encounter, but Senator Wainwright looked up and gave me and Ford a genuine smile. Ford hugged him, then the older man turned toward me.

"Granddad, this is Jasper," Ford said. "He's going to be staying with us for a few days."

"Yes, I understand you've gotten into a bit of trouble."

"I'm afraid so, sir. I took on a client who is apparently working for some unsavory individuals, but I wasn't informed of that until I was already on their radar." I looked at Ford, and he had the decency to look contrite.

"We didn't expect things to escalate like this," Ford said.

Senator Wainwright shook his head. "You never do."

"Is Ford always a lot of trouble?" I asked.

His granddad laughed. "It's the quiet ones. You have a watch out for them."

I realized then that two German Shepherds were sitting obediently by his work bench.

“You’ve got some beautiful dogs, sir.”

He beamed. “Thank you. This is Butch and Bandit. He turned to the dogs and whistled. “Boys, come meet our guest.”

They trotted over and sniffed at my shoes. “May I pet them?”

“Sure, they’re as gentle as can be, unless they think someone’s threatening me. They can already tell you’re alright.”

I was thankful to at least be approved by the dogs. They did seem to take to me immediately, rubbing against me and loving when I scratched their ears. When Ford’s grandfather offered me a seat, they lay beside my chair.

“They really do like you,” he said before turning to Ford. “You’ve picked another good one.”

I tensed, and Ford glanced my way. “Grandad’s dogs have always loved Miles, Carter, and Worth.”

So his grandad believed I was just a friend. That was for the best. “What are you working on, sir?”

Ford gave me a look that said he wished I hadn’t asked, but I wanted at least one of Ford’s grandparents to like me.

His grandfather explained in great detail about the miniature cabin he was building, showing me all the tools he was using. Ford was obviously bored. He wandered around the edges of the shop checking out projects he probably hadn’t seen yet. There were a number of bird houses, and Ford pointed out a few bat houses as well. I hadn’t even known that was a thing.

“You encourage bats to be here?” I asked.

“Of course. They eat the mosquitos and other pests. They are very useful.”

An alarm rang on the older man’s phone. “That’s to let me know the glue should be dry by now, and I can move on to the next step.” He glanced at his watch. “I better hurry if I’m going to be on time for dinner.”

“We should probably go freshen up and change,” Ford said.

I glanced at him in his beautifully tailored pants and nice button down. How were we expected to dress for dinner? Since Carter's men had packed for me, I had no idea if I even had anything appropriate.

"Alright, you boys run along. I'll see you at dinner."

"Nice to meet you, Senator Wainwright," I said as I followed Ford out of the shop and back in the direction of the house. We walked along in silence for a while, then Ford asked, "What did you think of Grandad?"

"He's not what I expected. He seemed so relaxed."

"He can be just as formidable as my grandmother if you get in his way, but since he retired, he's relaxed a lot."

I hoped he would have the same demeanor during dinner. I was worried enough about talking to Mrs. Wainwright. We showered and changed into suits. Fortunately, I'd had a selection in my luggage. Ford knocked on my door, and I joined him to head to dinner.

"Do you always dress for dinner here?" I thought about how often I'd eaten in pajamas growing up.

"Not every night, but always on the first night with a new guest. That's the way my grandmother likes it."

The dining room wasn't as large as I expected, which made me wonder if they had a larger one elsewhere in the house. Despite its average size, it was elegantly designed, and nothing was out of place. Ford indicated where I should sit, and we stood behind our chairs until his grandfather helped his grandmother to her seat.

At his grandmother's signal, we began our meal, eating in silence until it became uncomfortable. Finally, his grandmother spoke. "So Jasper, tell me about your family. Did you grow up in New York?"

The way she said family let me know she expected me to have some illustrious pedigree like Ford and his friends. How many ways would she think of to hammer home the differences between me and Ford? His grandparents might be accepting of

his sexuality, but I bet the last thing they wanted for him was a man from a working-class background.

They don't know you're anything more than a colleague of Ford's.

Ford hadn't told them anything—and what was there to tell, that we were hooking up, having really good hate sex? But I had the sense his grandmother read what was between us, maybe better than we did.

There was no point in trying to lie. Ford knew my background, and I wasn't ashamed of how hard my father had worked or how much Gran had done to take care of me and Emily. “I grew up in Albany.”

“Oh, are you related to Matthew Rollins? I know some of his people lived up that way.”

“No, ma'am. My father's name was Stephen, and he worked in semiconductor manufacturing.”

“At VFN? I thought that was owned by some of the Thompsons.”

“Yes, ma'am, it is. My father worked on the production line.”

“Oh. Oh, I see.” And I was sure she did.

I glanced at Ford. His face was red. At first, I thought he was embarrassed by me, which made my food knot up in my stomach, but then he said, “Grandmother, Jasper's father worked hard. He was an amazing man. Jasper lost his mother at a young age, and his grandmother lived with him and raised him, so you have something in common with her.”

I could hear the anger in his voice. I loved that he was willing to defend me, and I wanted to reach for his hand, but that would only make things worse.

Mrs. Wainwright looked skeptical, and she gave me an insincere smile. “I'm so sorry about your loss.”

“Thank you.”

“Now,” Ford said. “Why don't you tell us how things went with the art show last week?”

“Oh, you’ve heard about a million of those. I’d rather learn more about your new friend.”

She spoke as if Ford was still in high school and he’d brought a classmate home.

His grandfather cleared his throat. “Julia, I’d like to hear more about this lawsuit that has Ford and Jasper hiding out here.”

“Jonathan, we don’t talk business at the dinner table.” She looked shocked as if critiquing your guest’s origins was so much more polite.

She turned her attention back to me. “Do you have any siblings?”

“Yes, ma’am. I have a younger sister.”

“And what does she do?”

“She owns a café in Aspen.”

“How adorable. I do enjoy Aspen, though I have found the skiing is better in Utah. I suppose it’s hard for her when the tourists aren’t there.”

I tensed. Making me feel like I was beneath her was one thing, but she wasn’t going to do that to my sister. “She is doing fine year-round. She’s even planning an expansion.”

“Oh...well, good for her.”

“Grandmother, I don’t think Jasper wants to be interrogated while he eats.”

Her eyes widened, and she looked at Ford as if she was shocked by his statement. “I’m hardly interrogating him, dear. I’m just making small talk.”

The interrogation continued until I wanted to tell her how, as a kid, my family had had to scrimp and save and get by on beans at the end of the month just to see how horrified she was.

When the maid had cleared the dishes, Mrs. Wainwright offered us coffee to go with dessert, but I’d had all I could take. If I was going to keep myself from telling off Mrs. Wainwright, I needed to get out of there.

I pushed my chair back from the table. “Thank you so much for dinner. The food was delicious, and I’m much too full for dessert. Please excuse me.”

I didn’t wait for her to dismiss me, I simply rose and headed for the stairs. When I made it to my room, I had to resist the urge to slam the door.

If I’d had any chance with Ford, her humiliating me in front of him had certainly lessened it. Sure, he’d defended me, and I knew he was nowhere near the snob she was, but he had to know I’d never fit in his world.

I flopped down on the bed and draped an arm over my eyes. I longed to fall asleep and forget the whole evening, but every word from the interrogation at dinner replayed in my mind, over and over.

FORD

I watched Jay walk from the room. If he'd turned, snapped, and put my grandmother in her place, I wouldn't have been surprised, and he wouldn't have been in the wrong. Somehow, he managed to exit the room at a normal pace. I couldn't even hear his footsteps going up the stairs.

I turned and glared at my grandmother. "Why did you do that? There was no need to put him on the spot?"

"I simply wanted to know exactly who this man is if he's going to be part of your life."

"He's a colleague. He's in danger because of his involvement with a client who is pitting herself against Miles."

"Well, that was foolish of him to begin with. He should have known he couldn't win that case."

"He was assigned the case, and he needs to win to be up for a promotion."

My grandfather sighed. "Julia, you know how these things work. You don't always get to make those kinds of choices in your career. For all you know, if they'd had a level playing field, he might be an excellent opponent in the courtroom."

My grandmother sniffed. "You think he could beat Ford in court?"

"None of that is relevant," I said. "And it doesn't matter who his family is. You don't have to keep pushing for answers."

“You can sit here and say he’s a colleague all you want. I know there’s more to it. You wouldn’t have brought him here otherwise. You would simply send him somewhere he could be protected.”

She had me there.

Maria, their cook, brought in dessert, and none of us spoke until after we’d been served. I hated that Jay had needed to leave, Maria had made cheesecake with blueberry topping.

As soon as Maria returned to the kitchen, Grandfather picked up his plate and announced he was going to his office. He never stuck around for the arguments between me and my grandmother. I supposed he’d had enough conflict during his years practicing law and being in the Senate. That didn’t mean it didn’t piss me off. I could use his help, but I’d learned to win these battles—or at least negotiate a favorable settlement—on my own.

Grandmother scowled at him as he walked out of the room, but she didn’t bother to encourage him to come back. He usually gave in to whatever she asked, but she knew he would ignore her when she was like this.

I decided to take the offensive. “You embarrassed Jasper and made him feel terrible.”

“I simply asked him some questions.”

“Questions designed to point out ways you think he is beneath us.”

“Questions I would ask anyone.”

No doubt that was true. “It doesn’t matter how or where he grew up or who his family is.”

She gave me her best shocked expression. “How can you say such things Ford? If there’s any chance that you and he are—”

“What we are to each other is none of your business.”

“So you admit you are more than colleagues?”

“We’re friends.”

She huffed. “I’m trying to look out for you. That’s what I’ve been trying to do all these years.”

In her mind, I was sure that was exactly what she was doing. “I don’t need your help in choosing my friends, though I appreciate your concern.”

“I know he needs to stay here for his safety, but surely once this is resolved—”

“Once this is resolved, Jay and I will remain friends.” *And hopefully more.* “Grandmother, I appreciate all you’ve done for me. You know that. I know I’m lucky to have this place to come to where high-level security can be provided, but I could have made other choices.”

“So you’re only going to see me if I decide family doesn’t matter, and you can just be with whomever you like?”

“I can be with whomever I like, and you need to stop making assumptions. Jay graduated at the top of his class from Yale. He is amazing at what he does. Could he beat me in court? I don’t think so, but that’s more to do with matters of personality than anything to do with knowledge. I’ve learned how to remain impassive and cold, like I don’t care. I suppose I have to credit you with that.”

The shock on her face made me hesitate for a moment. Had I actually hurt her? “Ford, that was not a nice thing to—”

“Isn’t that what you wanted to teach me? To not show my emotions, to follow the rules, to follow etiquette?”

“Well, yes, those things are important but—”

“More important than caring? More important than being happy?”

She huffed. “Are you telling me you’re unhappy with where you are in life?”

“Not at all. I have amazing friends. I enjoy my job, and I have the ability to do whatever I want, but Jay has made me happier than I’ve been in a long time.”

“Oh my God. You really care about him, don’t you?”

Was I about to admit something to my grandmother that I hadn't even admitted to myself and certainly never to Jay?
"Yes, I care about him."

"And you think he feels the same for you? You don't think he's not simply after your money?"

"Jay may not be at the same level of society or have the same amount of wealth that we do, but he has plenty of money. He's hardly in need. He's a junior partner with Ralston, Smith, and Abercrombie."

"Yes, that does sound quite respectable."

"It's not 1895, Grandmother. We are wealthy. That doesn't mean I can't be with whomever I like."

"You've always been so stubborn."

"That's not going to change. Where do you think I learned it from?"

She sighed.

"I suppose it's out of the question that you would apologize to him," I said.

"What do I have to apologize for?"

"Grandmother."

For a moment, she actually looked contrite. "I'll consider it."

"I appreciate that." I pushed back my chair and stood.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm going to take this cheesecake up to Jay. It's his favorite dessert."

"I could have Maria bring out another piece, and you can eat yours with me."

"No thank you. Jay and I will share this one."

She sighed but didn't say anything else. I headed upstairs, hoping Jay would be willing to talk to me. When I reached his door, I took a deep breath before knocking. "Jay, it's me."

There was no response for several seconds, and I was considering trying the door when I heard footsteps. Jay opened the door just wide enough to look through the crack. “I don’t want to talk right now.”

I held up the cake. “Then we can eat instead.”

“I’m not hungry.”

“It’s cheesecake.”

“I don’t—”

“I’m sorry.” His eyes widened, and he opened the door a little more. “I told my grandmother her behavior was unacceptable and that....” My hand was shaking, making the fork rattle against the plate.

“What did you tell her?”

“That I care about you. That you’re not just a colleague, and I wasn’t going to allow her to treat you like that.”

“You...you said that? And you....”

“I care about you, Jay.”

He flung open the door, took my arm, and dragged me inside. Once the door was shut again, he grabbed the plate and set it down on the dresser before he backed me into the wall. “I care about you too.”

When he kissed me, it was more intense, more...everything than any kiss we’d shared before. I opened to the pressure of his lips on mine and let him ravage me. In seconds I was desperate for more. I gripped his hips, yanking him toward me, desperate to feel his whole body against me.

Understanding what I needed, he pressed me flat into the wall, letting me feel his weight. I needed the reassurance that he wasn’t going to leave, but I also needed to slow us down.

When he slid his lips along my jawline and started nibbling at my neck, I fought for the will to speak. “Not here.”

He pulled back and looked at me. “Ford, I’m not waiting until we go back home. I am fucking you right here. I don’t care what anyone thinks.”

“No. I mean not in this room, not where there’s a chance someone could hear us. I want to be able to relax.”

“Where can we go?”

“I’ll show you but get the cheesecake. You’re going to need the sugar afterward.”

Jay laughed as he grabbed the plate.

Cautiously, I opened the door and made sure neither of my grandparents were in the hallway. I felt like a teenager again, but I’d never had a man as hot as Jay back then. I considered taking him somewhere outside, but I settled on the place I usually retreated to when I came home and wanted to be left alone.

When I opened the door to the stairs leading to the attic, Jay lay a hand on my arm. “Where are we going?”

“Trust me.”

He frowned. “Alright.”

We ascended the stairs and initially stepped out into a clean, well-organized storage attic. Jay chuckled. “It looks like even creepy attic vibes are scared of your grandmother.”

“You bet they are.” I led him through to a door at the far end, hoping my grandmother had left the room the way it had always been. For all I knew, she’d gotten rid of everything in there, though I thought she would at least have offered me the books.

When I pushed open the door, relief ran through me. Everything was exactly like it had been the last time I’d been up there.

Jay sucked in his breath. “Is this where you would escape to when you were a kid?”

I nodded. “I spent a lot of time up here, especially in the first few years after my parents died. I discovered the room when I was exploring the house, and for once my grandmother let me have what I wanted. I even used to sleep up here a lot.” I gestured toward the twin mattress on the floor, one I had found in the storage area and dragged in there.

There were sheets and blankets, folded and sitting on top of it, which let me know my grandmother had continued to have the room cleaned and freshened up. Otherwise, she had left everything as it was. There were shelves around the room, filled with books. I'd rescued many of them from the storage area as well. There was a square of carpet on the floor by the mattress, but otherwise it was just bare planks.

Jay found a picture on one of the shelves. It was of me and Miles, probably from the beginning of our sophomore year. "Wow, look at y'all. So freaking cute."

"We thought we were so grown up then." I shook my head at the memory.

"You probably were in a lot of ways, especially you, having lost your parents."

I nodded. "I was both incredibly mature and also an idiot."

Jay sighed. "I wish I'd had friends like you did in school."

"I'm sorry you didn't."

Jay continued to look around while I put a fitted sheet on the mattress and tossed several pillows on top. "Have you ever brought anyone else up here?" he asked.

"Only Miles, Carter, and Worth."

"But never anyone...."

"I've never fucked anyone in this room. You're going to be the first."

He turned from a shelf where he'd been looking at a picture of me from my high school graduation and took the few steps necessary to cross the room, then he dropped to his knees in front of me and pushed me back onto the pile of pillows on the mattress. "Thank you for bringing me here."

All I could do was nod. I couldn't make myself say what I was thinking; it felt much too heavy.

I opened my legs wider and reached for him. He stretched out on top of me and kissed me. He was gentle, tender. It was too much, so much harder to take than when he was rough with

me. The intensity made me worry my heart would explode. I wanted this, but I didn't want to be made a fool off in the end.

“Jay?”

“Yes?”

“Is this real?”

“I don't know. It feels like a dream, but it also feels like the most real thing ever.”

He encouraged me to sit up so he could get my shirt off. I undid my pants, and Jay pulled them down my legs. Once had me naked, he stripped himself, then returned to his position between my legs.

“Do you have any lube up here?”

“Fuck.” Why hadn't we brought some from Jay's room? “I don't. Just use spit. I'll be fine.”

“Ford?”

“I need to be fucked more than I need comfort.”

“Goddamn, you're so fucking hot.”

I smiled. “So you're not mad at me anymore?”

“I wasn't ever mad at you. I'm furious with your grandmother, but because I care about you, I didn't tell her what I thought of her questions.”

“Thank you. Now, can we get on with the fucking?”

Jay laughed. “We can.” He stretched out over me again and I wrapped my legs tightly around him. “So needy.”

“I've been waiting ages for you.”

“You had me last night.”

“Sure, but all those months before...you have a lot to make up for.”

He slid his lips along my throat. I arched my neck to give him more access, groaning when he bit down and sucked. He made his way down to my nipples, biting and sucking on them until I was squirming under him.

“Stop fucking teasing me.”

“Never.”

When he shifted lower, placing kisses along my abdomen, I wondered if he was going to take my dick in his mouth again. Just the thought of that made my cock jump. He grinned, then licked the length of my shaft.

“Jay. Please.”

He just chuckled and kissed the seam of my leg and hip. “Legs up and keep them there.”

It never crossed my mind to protest. I’d let him do anything to me.

When he pulled my ass cheeks apart, I gasped. No way was he going to...I felt his hot breath against my hole.

“Jay...?”

“I’m going to use a lot of spit.”

“Fuck. Please. God, Jay, please.” I didn’t care what it took. I’d not even let myself dream of him tongue-fucking me, but now I would say absolutely anything to get that.

“I’m yours. Please, eat me, get me wet and sloppy, and then ___”

I could no longer speak as his tongue made contact with my ass. He licked my hole, flicking his tongue back and forth. I lifted my hips as much as I could, pinned down like I was, but I needed more.

He pressed his tongue flat and licked me slowly before stabbing at me with the tip.

“Yes! Just like that.”

“You like that?” He spoke the words right against my ass, making me shiver.

“I love it. More. I need more.”

He pushed in deeper, then sucked on his fingers and added them too. I whimpered as I tried desperately to lift my hips,

but he kept me pinned down as he drove me insane. He only stopped long enough to tell me to touch myself.

“I’m going to come if I do.”

“Good.”

I couldn’t resist. I wrapped a hand around my cock, and he went back to working me into a frenzy. I gripped myself tightly and worked my hand up and down as fast as I could.

“Jay. Fuck. I’m going to come. I’m....” Cum shot from my cock, and I thought I might die from the intensity of my climax.

I realized Jay had stopped licking me and was staring down at me as I came. When I was done, I watched as he scooped up some of the cum from my abdomen and used it to slick his cock.

“Holy shit! You really have been watching porn.”

JAY

I grinned down at him, loving that I'd gotten up the nerve to try rimming. It had been amazing making him react that way. "Yeah, I have. I've learned so much."

"And you like it."

I did, but I didn't know if I would with anyone else. "I like *you*."

I lined up my cock and pushed into him. He gasped as I opened him up, then tensed. "You okay?"

"I'm fine. I can take it."

He was going to have to. No way in hell was I stopping now. I could try to go slow, to hold back, to let him adjust, but I was going to fuck his ass hard and deep. I was going to make him come again. Watching Ford climax had quickly become my favorite thing in the world.

I braced myself on my arms, giving me more leverage to drive into him.

"Yes. Like that. Take everything you want."

"I want you. All of you. I want to possess you. Make you beg. Make you as desperate as I am."

"I need you so badly. I already need to come again."

"You will."

I rode him hard. We were both barely able to breathe. He was begging, babbling nonsense, and I was focused on going as

deep into him as I possibly could.

“Touch me,” he begged. “Need you.”

I wrapped a hand around his cock and stroked him. He arched up and cried out. The sight of him like that, so desperate, wanting it to be me who got him off, was all I needed to lose it deep inside him. I pumped out my load as he came onto his stomach for a second time.

When he was thoroughly drained, he collapsed back onto the mattress. “Fuck that was...how does it keep getting better every time?”

“I don’t know. How did I not know I wanted this?”

“I have no idea.”

We both turned toward each other, and I reached out to brush his hair from his face. “Ford...?”

His breath caught as if he knew how significant my words were going to be. “Yes?”

The word was barely audible. Was he afraid? I sure as hell was. “I think I’m in love with you.”

He smiled, and I let myself breathe. “You think?”

I shook my head. “I know I am.”

“I love you too.” He sounded relieved to have finally said the words.

“What does this mean?”

“I don’t know. What does it mean to you?”

“I...when this is all over, do we...?”

“Date? Keep fucking? Whatever you want.”

“It’s that easy?”

Ford sighed. “Maybe it could be.”

I didn’t really think so, but for now I was willing to go with that fantasy. “Okay.”

Neither of us said anything else for a few moments, then I asked, “When did you learn to knit? I’m assuming you didn’t

learn to knit from your grandmother.”

Ford laughed. “Hell no. And that’s...not what I expected you to ask.”

“It seemed safer than...”

Ford nodded. “It is.”

I reached for the plate of cheesecake. “You grandmother certainly doesn’t seem like the knitting type. So, who taught you?”

“Eudora Weeks. When I was fresh out of college, she was as much a mother to me and Miles as his mom and my grandmother.”

That was interesting. I needed to meet this woman. I offered Ford a bit of cheesecake before asking, “How did you meet her?”

“Miles has known her as a family friend all his life. He and her daughter were very close.” Ford offered me a bite in return, and I couldn’t help but smile at the memory of us eating cheesecake at the bar on what now seemed like our first date.

“Did they date?”

“Only when it was expedient for them to pretend to date to ward off others.”

I could imagine that happened more than once. “Does Miles knit?”

“No, and he didn’t even know I did for a long time.”

“You wanted to keep your grandmotherish tendencies secret?”

I snorted. “I already read all the time. He didn’t need to know more. Funnily enough, I never thought of it as acting like a grandma, considering my example.”

“What about your maternal grandmother?”

“I never knew her.”

“I’m sorry.”

Ford scooped up the last bit of cake and lifted his fork to my mouth. “As you can see, I’ve done alright.”

“That doesn’t mean things were easy for you.”

“I don’t think they were for you either.”

“Shit. Are we fucking bonding over childhood trauma?”

Ford grimaced. “Let’s not.”

“Will you get in trouble with your grandmother if I stay in your room?”

He glared at me. “I have no intention of letting you out of my sight. What if I need more of you in the night?”

“I thought you didn’t want to fuck in your bedroom.”

Ford smiled. “I’m not sure I care anymore.”

If I could have gotten hard again that fast, I would have. The thought of waking up to him touching me made me dizzy.

“You like that, don’t you?”

I nodded.

“Let’s get cleaned up and go back downstairs. We’ll see what we’re up for later.”

For all that I wanted to fuck him again, we were both exhausted and fell asleep as soon as we got into bed. He did fulfill my fantasy by rousing me for a quick mutual jerk-off session. I felt like we’d only been back asleep for a few minutes when his phone buzzed, waking us up.

“It’s Miles,” he said, his voice rough from sleep.

I half-listened to their conversation, but my mind was whirling with the memory of telling Ford—a man, my rival, the one I’d turned down so rudely six months ago—that I loved him. He’d accepted it. He hadn’t laughed in my face or told me I was crazy or said this was nothing but fucking. He’d said he loved me first. Was that possible? Could I be that lucky?

There’d been something that pulled me toward him from the moment I met him, even before he made it very clear how interested he was, but I was terrified. I’d thought I’d just wanted to get the better of him. I’d thought he’d had it so easy. He worked when he didn’t even need to, then dared to act like

he had bad days. I'd hated him for it, but the moment he stepped into a room, I'd been hyper aware of him. Getting a reaction out of him became my goal every time we were in the same room. The problem was, I'd been reacting to him just as strongly, if not more so.

When he ended his call with Miles, I didn't wait for him to tell me what was up. "I know this situation is serious, and we're in a hell of a lot of danger, but I'm so fucking glad I got handed this lawsuit. I'm so glad you're stubborn as hell and so is Miles, because if I hadn't been pushed to the limit, I might never have had the courage to kiss you."

"Wow. That's...I'm willing to push you to your limits anytime."

"I bet you are."

"Seriously. I'm thankful too."

"So, what did Miles say?"

"He wants me to come meet with him and Carter so we can go over the plan."

"Just you?"

Ford nodded. "You're the main target, at least so far."

"And he hates me."

"Once he realizes you care about me and you aren't going to ghost me when this is over, he won't."

"And if I did ghost you?"

"He'd have to fight me to be the one to kill you."

"Wow. That's..." I pulled him to me and kissed him, hard and demanding, letting him know I wanted to possess him fully. "I won't. I... Nothing has ever felt this good."

"Damn right."

"Are you really going to leave me here on my own?"

"My grandmother will be gone most of the day. You can go see my grandfather or hide out in your room. I'll eat breakfast with you before I leave, and I'll be back as quickly as I can."

I had a sense of unease that wouldn't leave me as we dressed and headed downstairs. It was reasonable that I dreaded running into Ford's grandmother without him there as a buffer, but I could handle her, especially knowing that Ford was fully on my side, that he loved me. I shouldn't be this reluctant for him to leave. No way was I turning into a clingy boyfriend. He needed to go, and Miles didn't want me there.

I knew he would tell me everything they talked about when he returned, but no amount of reassuring thoughts could ease my nerves.

FORD

As soon as I entered Miles's office, I could tell things were bad. Miles had been cagey on the phone about what was up, saying he didn't have time to explain, but I'd understand why this meeting was necessary when I got there.

Miles and Carter were glaring each other, and Worth was there too. If they'd called him in, that meant this went beyond Montgomery Enterprises' business, it was personal. It already had been for me because of Jay, but what had made it personal for everyone else?

I closed the door behind me. "What's going on?"

"One of the men we're after is Matteo."

My eyes widened as I looked at Carter. "The man who took you captive?"

He nodded.

Worth frowned. "Why am I the only one who doesn't know this whole story?"

"Because you weren't around when Carter first came back, and he doesn't like to talk about it," I said.

"Can you at least fill me in now?"

Carter sighed and ran a hand through his hair.

"Would you rather I tell it?" Miles asked.

Carter shook his head. "If I'm going to have to fucking confront Matteo, I better at least be able to talk about him."

The bitterness that had hung over Carter for months after he came home was back, and I hated that.

“Matteo was in my platoon. He was an arrogant shithead, but we hooked up a few times.”

That statement begged for questions, but I knew better than to ask.

“In the midst of a mission that was going to hell, I caught him meeting up with members of the cartel we were supposed to put out of business. I held back, listening, hoping he was setting a trap for them, but knowing in my gut that wasn’t what was happening.”

Worth looked pale. “You were right, weren’t you?”

Carter nodded. “I watched Matteo make a deal with them, but then I fucked up. I reached for my weapon, but I made too much noise. I took off but Matteo brought me down with a bullet to the shoulder.

“The other man ordered him to shoot me in the head, but Matteo said I’d be useful, so they trussed me up, dragged me back to the enemy’s stronghold, and tossed me in a cell. Later that night, Matteo returned. I expected to be tortured, but he let me go, told me to get the hell out. Somehow, I made it back to camp before I collapsed.”

“Fuck, man,” Worth said. “That’s...I knew you’d been through some bad shit and all, but damn. I’m sorry.”

Carter just nodded.

“And now the fucker is right here in New York causing trouble again,” Miles said.

Worth scowled. “Then he’s as good as dead.”

I expected Carter to agree, but he didn’t say anything, didn’t move, didn’t even seem to breathe. There was a lot more to this story than he was telling us.

“Are the men Matteo was working with connected to the ones who want the warehouse?”

“Yes,” Carter said. “That’s probably why Miles’s friend put us onto this situation.”

Miles nodded. “Almost certainly, not that the bastard will give me any details.”

“It’s safer that way.”

“He could have warned us about Matteo.”

Carter huffed. “Yes, he could have.”

None of us suggested that Miles’s friend didn’t know, because this man had an uncanny ability to suss out any and all intel once he involved himself.

“He probably thought it wouldn’t get this far,” Carter said.

“Did he think I’d sacrifice Jay?”

“Jay wasn’t originally on this case.”

I nodded. “True.” The woman who’d been assigned to it was a bitch, not that she necessarily deserved for her life to be in danger, but she’d given the case to Jay just to test him, knowing it was an impossible win, or at least thinking it was. I didn’t think she had any idea about the rest of the bullshit attached to it. “So, what does that mean?”

“It means things just got more complicated,” Carter said.

Miles huffed. “It means we’re going in hard. We aren’t just going to send a warning. We’re going to obliterate them.” He was furious. They’d hurt his friend and that was the last thing he’d tolerate. Next to going after Ben, that was as bad as it got for Miles.

I turned to Carter. “Do you agree?”

He blew out a long breath. “We don’t have a choice.”

We discussed the plan, a bold one that was going to come closer to getting us all arrested than anything I’d been a part of with Miles before. I agreed to it despite my concerns because Jay’s life was in danger. I wasn’t going to let anyone hurt him.

Somehow, we’d get out of it if we were caught. We had money, we had powerful families, and we had contacts within

the police. We'd cover it up one way or another, and Jay would be safe, and we would....

What exactly would we do? Would he move in with me? Were we truly going to build a life together? Was he going to tell his sister and his grandmother that he was bisexual and in love with a man? Fuck. Carter was right, this had all gotten very complicated.

When a valet brought my car around after the meeting, I decided to stop by my house on the way out of town. I regretted not bringing the hat I'd knit for Jay. Now was the perfect time to give it to him. After last night, I didn't want to wait any longer. I'd told Miles I would go straight back to my grandparents' estate, but a quick stop would be fine. I wasn't the real target.

Despite how powerful these assholes might think they were, they hadn't had the balls to make a direct attack on Miles or anyone else at Montgomery Enterprises. Miles believed Ben was the second most likely target, and he had security on him as tight as he could get it.

I was just going to dash in and grab the hat. Surely, I'd be fine. As if it was meant to be, a parking space a few houses down from mine was open. I maneuvered into it, hopped out, and started up the steps to my door. Immediately, I felt uneasy. Something was off. I should have turned back, but I didn't.

I glanced around, looking for any sign that someone had broken in or even been near my door. I didn't see anything. I was just jumpy, unnerved by Matteo showing up, by the haunted look on Carter's face, by how serious the threat was to Jay. I texted Jay, letting him know I'd be heading back soon.

Thank God was his response.

Had he run into my grandmother? She'd better not be interrogating him anymore.

Maybe he was just horny. I smiled at the thought. When I got back, I was going to drag him to my secret room again and ride him until he lost his mind.

I hurried through unlocking the door, then raced up the stairs to retrieve the hat from my bedroom. I was so focused on getting it that I registered the sound of footsteps behind me too late. An arm came around my neck, and I felt the prick of a needle.

I struggled, kicking back, and digging my nails into the man's arm. Whatever he'd injected me with was working fast. The edges of my vision darkened, and I fought for consciousness.

I dropped to my knees, partly because my legs didn't want to work anymore, and partly because I hoped it might throw the man off balance and force him to release me. Even if it had, I doubt I could've held onto consciousness. I fought, driving my head back into him, tearing even harder at his arm, but before I could do much, my eyes closed, and I fell to the floor.

JAY

It had been two hours since Ford told me he'd be leaving the city soon. The drive was just over an hour, so he should have been here a while ago. Would he have called if traffic was terrible?

It didn't matter. I wasn't waiting any longer. I called him and got no answer.

My heart pounded. He might be on the phone with someone else or have some other good explanation, but that didn't stop my stomach from churning. I hadn't wanted him to leave, and it wasn't just because I didn't want to be here with his grandparents. I didn't want him out of my sight.

When another half hour passed, I called him again. Still no answer. I scrolled through my contacts. He'd given me Carter's and Miles's numbers in case of an emergency. They were going to hate me if he was just caught in traffic, but I knew Ford wouldn't ignore my call, not twice, and he'd said he'd be back for lunch. I'd never known him to be late for anything.

I tapped on Carter's name.

"Jasper? What's wrong?" Obviously, Ford had given him my number as well.

"Ford texted me two and a half hours ago that he was leaving the city soon, but he isn't back, and he's not answering his phone."

"Fuck. He left here almost three hours ago."

That was not what I wanted to hear. “Where was he going?”

“He was supposed to be headed back to you. When did he text you?”

My heart nearly pounded out of my chest as I checked my phone and told him the exact time.

“He should have already been out of the city. I’ll figure it out and call you back.”

“Wait! I want to help look for him.”

“No, you need to stay where you are.”

“I can’t do that. If he’s hurt or....” No. No, I wasn’t going to think about the worst possibility. “I need to be there.”

“Not an option.” Carter ended the call.

Did he actually think I was going to sit here and wait to hear something? I might not have the training Ford had, but I wasn’t going to hide anymore. I was going to do whatever it took to see that he was safe.

I shoved my phone in my pocket and ran for the stairs. When I burst into the sitting room, Ford’s grandmother gasped in surprise.

“I need a car.” I blurted the words out like an idiot, but I couldn’t think knowing Ford was missing.

She actually brought her hand to her neck as if to clutch her pearls, but she was only wearing a gold chain. “I could hardly —”

“The men who were after us. They may have Ford. I’ve got to get back to the city.”

“What?”

“You heard me. Ford is in danger.”

“Have you called his friends? Have you called the police?”

“Julia, what’s going on?” Ford’s grandfather entered the room.

“Ford is missing,” I said.

“You said the men who were after you—”

“They’ve likely taken him.”

“How do you know he’s missing?” Senator Wainwright asked.

“He was supposed to be back here a while ago. I just spoke with Carter, and he said Ford left Montgomery’s over two and a half hours ago. He was supposed to come directly here. None of us can reach him by phone or text. I need to borrow a car. I need to be there.”

“You’re in no shape to drive,” his grandmother said.

She was right about that, but it didn’t mean I was going to stay here.

“I’ll get one of our security guards to drive you,” his grandfather said. “You shouldn’t go alone.”

“I don’t—”

“I insist,” he said.

He turned and I started to follow him, but Ford’s grandmother took hold of my arm.

“You took me by surprise,” she said. “I spoke with Ford last night and I....” She looked pained. “I didn’t mean to insult you at dinner.”

Was that her idea of an apology?

“Please be careful. Ford cares about you. Bring him home safe.”

At least she was trying “Yes ma’am. I will.”

She let go of my arm, and I followed Senator Wainwright out to the garage.

The drive into the city felt ten times longer than the drive out had. I kept trying to call Ford. I couldn’t sit still. I was constantly drumming my fingers on the door and tapping my foot, probably making Carl, the guard who was driving me, insane.

Carl hardly said anything the whole trip. He just drove me straight to Montgomery Enterprises’ headquarters, then insisted on going in with me.

I wanted to refuse. The stubbornness in me wanted to do this on my own, but would they even let me in? If someone in Ford's grandfather's employ was with me, I'd have a much better chance of getting to Carter.

I tried calling Carter again, but his phone went to voicemail.

"I'll do the talking," Carl said.

It took him only seconds to have us on the executive elevator, shooting our way to the top of the building. When the doors opened, we nearly ran into Carter and Miles, who seemed to be headed out. Thank God we'd caught them.

"What are you doing here?" Carter asked when he saw me.

"Take him back home," Miles told Carl, but true to his word Carl stood his ground.

"He insists he needs to be here, sir."

"I love Ford." As I'd guessed those words got everyone's attention. "And he loves me. I'm not going to leave him. I'm not going to trick him. I'm not going to hurt him. I need to help with this. I need to know that he's okay."

"We're doing everything we can to find him," Carter said. Miles scowled him, but Carter shook his head. "We're bringing him in on this."

Miles sighed. "Alright, you better mean what you say or you're going to regret it. If you hurt him, I will kill you, then I will bring you back to life and kill you again. Ford has been my friend since we were kids, and I care too much about him to see him hurt again."

I nodded. "Understood."

"Ford's car is parked near his house. We think he must have gone there after he left here," Carter said. "There are signs of a struggle, and he's no longer there."

"So they took him?"

"That's what it looks like."

"And no one was watching his house?"

Carter shook his head. “No one knew he was going there. He told us he was headed straight back to his grandparents’ place.”

“Why would he take that risk?”

Miles sighed. “That might be my fault.”

I took a step toward him, but Carter put a hand up. “It’s not your fault, Miles.”

“I told him I didn’t think they would make a direct hit at us, and if they did, I thought they would go for Ben. I’ve had Ben surrounded by security, but I didn’t think Ford was in serious danger. I also thought he would go straight back to Bedford.”

I wanted to be furious with him, but Ford had made the decision to go to his house on his own.

“We’re headed to Ford’s house now to see what we can find.”

“I’m going with you.”

“No.” Miles shook his head. “The last thing Ford would want is for you to be in more danger.”

“I’ll be with you, and they could get to me here.”

“Our security is top notch.”

I didn’t care. “I’m not staying here.”

“I’ll go with you too,” Carl said.

“Thank you, but you should go back and tell Senator and Mrs. Wainwright what’s going on and make sure they stay safe.”

He glanced toward Miles and Carter, and they both nodded.

“Let us know as soon as you have any word,” Carl said.

I nodded. “We will.”

When reached Ford’s house, I tried to leap out of the car, but Carter put his hand on mine. “You do this our way or we’re sending you back.”

I wanted to argue, but I knew I should do as he said. Security was his job.

When we went inside, a lump formed in my throat. It looked like someone had fallen or been dragged down the stairs. The carpet was askew. One of the spindles was out of the staircase. A lamp was turned over and in pieces on the floor, and there was blood; not a lot, not enough for anyone to be dead, but enough to make my eyes sting with tears and my stomach flip-flop. *Please let Ford be alive.*

“If they killed him, would they have left him here?”

“Likely,” Carter said. “They’d want us to see what they’d done.”

“They probably want to use him to negotiate,” Miles said.

“At least that would mean we have a chance of saving him.”

“There’s more than a chance,” Miles said. “We are going to rescue him, and he is going to be fine.” I knew Miles wanted to sound certain, but I could hear the fear in his voice.

I noticed a hat lying in the corner of the hallway. It wasn’t the one Ford had worn when he’d left Bedford. “Can I touch this?”

Carter tossed me a pair of gloves. I slipped them on and picked it up. It was handmade. Ford must have knitted it, but why was it here?

I examined it more closely, and that’s when I saw a small J stitched on the inside. He’d made this hat for me, and he’d come here to get it.

I sat it back down where it had been, even though I wanted to hold it, to press my face to it and breathe in his scent. I wanted to let myself cry as I clutched it to me, but I didn’t. Instead, I turned to Miles. “It’s as much my fault as it is yours.”

“What do you mean?”

“This hat. He made it for me. He came back here to get it.”

“You can’t be sure of that,” Carter said.

“Why would it be lying here on the floor? It has my initial in it. He stopped by to get it for me. I know he did. Last night.

We...we said we loved each other for the first time.” I squeezed my eyes shut and turned away.

I felt a hand on my back. “It’s not your fault. We’re going to find him, and you’re going to have plenty of time together.”

It was Miles. I turned and looked at him. “You’re okay with that?”

He nodded. “I’ll still kill you if you hurt him, but yes, I’m okay with it.”

That was as good as it was going to get. “What happens now?”

“We need to let his grandparents know. Do you think you could take care of that since Carl won’t be there yet?”

I didn’t want to, but Ford’s grandfather had given me his number before I left, and I certainly owed him that. “Yes.”

Before I could start my call, Miles’s phone rang. When he pulled it from his pocket, his eyes widened. I’d never seen him visibly shaken before.

“Who is it?” Carter asked.

“I don’t recognize the number.”

I must’ve looked confused, so Carter filled me in. “It’s a private line. Only a few people have the number.”

Miles took the call, and the color drained from his face as he listened to the person on the other end.

“I’ll contact you within the hour,” he said, then ended the call.

“Who was it?”

“They have Ford, and they want to meet to negotiate. Tonight. Our timeline just got moved up.”

“We have to save him,” I said.

Carter nodded. “We will. Right now, we need to get back to headquarters and come up with a plan. I’m going to make two quick phone calls.”

I barely heard anything Carter said as he spoke into the phone.

Miles placed a hand on my shoulder. “Take your hat.”

“We’re not calling the police, are we?”

Miles shook his head. “No, we’re taking care of this our way.”

“And then what? You just make all the evidence go away?”

He nodded. “You may not like it, but it’s going to keep us all out of jail. You’re in this now.”

I nodded. “I’ll do whatever it takes to keep Ford safe.”

“Good.”

I picked up the hat and squeezed it tightly, which made me want to hold Ford against me. *Please let me be able to do that again. I can’t lose him.*

Carter ended his call. “I’ve got my guys working on finding us a location, trying to trace their call, and searching for any other clues we can get.” He turned to Miles. “When you call the asshole back, insist he bring Ford. They’ll be no negotiation if you don’t see him alive and well.”

Miles nodded.

“What are you going to do?” I ask.

“We’re going to bring them all together, then we’re going to take them out once we have Ford back.”

“You can’t kill them all of them.”

“If we get rid of the major players, the rest will scatter.”

What would it be like to have that kind of money and power?

As if he read my thoughts, Carter said, “We use it for nicer things too.”

“I’ll have to talk to Ford about that.”

“I’ll make sure you get that chance.”

JAY

Back at headquarters, they once again tried to convince me I should go to a safehouse or somewhere with guards, but I refused. “I want to know what the plan is.”

“Fine,” Miles sighed. “You can stay with us while we make plans, but you’re not going with us tonight. Ford would kill me for putting you in that kind of danger.”

Carter nodded. “You are not prepared for the kind of battle we’re walking into.”

“Okay.” I hated how right he was. I’d always thought of myself as strong and capable, but I didn’t have the skills that they did.

“We’ll get Worth to stay with you,” Carter said.

“He won’t be going with you?”

“Did you meet him?”

I smiled. “I met Ford too, but I didn’t know he was some kind of skilled warrior.”

“Ford has been trained on the shooting range,” Carter said. “He’s a good shot, but he’s not the first person I would send out in the field.”

“And you?” I said turning to Miles.

“I’m better than Ford, but most of my skill is just blustering my way through. Occasionally I even follow Carter’s directions.”

Carter huffed.

When we sat down in Miles's office, I kept wishing I would wake up and discover this was all a dream. It felt so unreal. When they mentioned a man named Matteo, I could tell there was something there I needed to know.

Reluctantly, Carter explained their connection.

"What if he's there tonight?" Would Carter be willing to kill him?

"I'm counting on him being there," Carter said.

I didn't say anything else. Matteo had betrayed their SEAL platoon. The fact that he'd let Carter escape didn't change that.

Mostly, I just listened, not even trying to comprehend everything except the location and the main logistics of the plan. I knew I had no business being involved in such a dangerous operation, but I wasn't sure I could sit on my ass waiting for them to save the man I'd fallen for.

My sister had always said once I decided I wanted something I went all in, and apparently this was no exception.

"Jay?" I turned to look at Carter. "We're going to have you wait at Ford's house. Worth is going to stay with you, along with a number of security guards."

"Why there? You know these men know how to find his house."

"Yes, but they have no reason to be watching it now, and they won't expect us to go back to the place where Ford was taken."

"It's easier to defend than many other places," Miles said. "And I have a feeling you weren't going to agree to a safehouse outside the city."

"Fuck no."

"This way you'll be there when we bring Ford home."

When, not if. I had to keep thinking that way.

I also knew Ford's house, and I knew how to get from there to the location where everything would go down. Would I be able to get past the guards if I wanted to leave? I'd have to see what the set up was and if I could stand waiting and wondering what was happening.

"I need a drink," I said when Carter and Miles dropped us off at Ford's house.

"You and me both," Worth agreed. He walked over to Ford's wet bar and pulled out a bottle of bourbon that had to have cost a fortune.

"Do you think he'll mind us opening that?"

Worth shrugged. "He'll be alive. That'll be good enough for him tonight. Besides, he can just get more."

I shook my head. No matter how many times I was confronted with that, I still couldn't really conceive of the level of wealth Ford had, that all of them had.

Worth filled two glasses with double measures of bourbon and handed one to me.

"Let's go sit," Worth said.

I followed him to the living room. Carter and Miles hadn't been gone for more than a few minutes, and already I couldn't stand not knowing what was happening. How close were they to the meeting place? Would Ford be there? Would he actually be alive? Was he injured? If so, how badly?

I took a big sip of bourbon. "I hate waiting."

Worth nodded. "It sucks."

"Don't you wish you were there with them?" If he did, maybe we could make our way there together.

Worth shook his head. "That's their business, Carter's really. I don't want to wait, but I also don't want to be in the line of

fire. I'm not really a charge-into-battle kind of a guy. I'm more the fuck-someone-afterward type."

I laughed. "I never really thought about physical battles outside of sports. Most of my battles deal with arguing. I've certainly never needed to confront a drug cartel."

Worth laughed. "I bet not."

I considered my options. If I was going to escape and make my way to the meeting place, I either needed to get Worth so drunk he wasn't going to try to stop me, or I needed to knock him out somehow.

I wondered if Ford had any sleeping pills, and if I could manage to get one into Worth's drink. I had a vague memory of seeing sleeping pills when I was looking for ibuprofen when Ford had yelled at me to not open his dildo drawer.

"All this restlessness is making me warm," I said. "I'm going to go up and change really quick. I'll be back."

Fortunately, I'd left some clothes in the guest room Ford had originally assigned me to. Had he actually thought I was going to sleep anywhere but his bed?

My chest tightened as I thought about not ever sharing a bed with him again. I needed to be there. I needed to make sure that didn't happen. I'd been such an asshole to him, and he still wanted to protect me. Now I needed to be there to protect him.

I hurried upstairs, but I didn't go into the guest room initially. I went into Ford's bathroom. It took a few tries opening drawers and cabinets until I found the bottle I was looking for. I blew out a breath of relief when I saw they were capsules. That would make it so much easier to put one into Worth's drink.

I quickly changed into a T-shirt, realizing that would mean I'd be cold as shit when I left the house, but that didn't matter. All that mattered was Ford.

"Another round?" I asked as I stepped back into the living room.

"Hell yes."

I reached for his glass before he could stand. “I’ll get it.”

“Thanks.”

“It’s hard to sit still right now.”

“Yeah, I get it, but there’s no one I’d trust more to take care of somebody I love than Miles and Carter.”

I nodded. “I know they care about him too, but this all happened so fast, and it’s all so crazy.”

“So you really thought you were straight?”

“Yes. I’ve never wanted a man before, but Ford...there’s been something about him since the day we met.”

“He lights up when he talks about you. I’ve never seen him like that.”

His words sent warmth spreading through me. “Thank you for telling me that.”

I walked over to the wet bar, hating what I was about to do even more now that Worth was trying to comfort me.

Thankfully, Worth was looking out the window while I cracked open the capsules I’d brought down with me and stirred the powder into his drink until there was no evidence. I hoped like hell it wouldn’t affect the taste.

I took a deep breath, then carried both glasses to the living room. When I handed Worth his glass, I hoped that any nervousness he detected would be dismissed as worry about Ford.

When he took a drink and frowned, my heart skipped a beat.

“There’s a bitterness I didn’t notice before. I guess I knocked the first round back too fast. As much as Ford paid for this, it ought to be smoother.”

I nodded in agreement and took a sip. I grimaced. “Yeah, it’s definitely not living up to its promise.”

“Sometimes so you’ve just got to go with it. This is not a night to be sober.” He continued to drink as we chatted about

inconsequential things. By the time he drained his glass, I was hoping the pills would be taking effect.

“More?” he asked.

I shook my head. “Still working on this one. I both want to be plastered and want to be aware enough to talk when Ford comes home.”

Worth nodded as he stood up. He took a step, then wavered.

“Wow. I’ve only had like, two, right?”

“Yeah, just two.”

“Shit. I already feel drunk. That never happens.” He took another step, then stopped. “Wow, the room is spinning.”

“Why don’t you sit back down?” I suggested.

“Maybe I should. I don’t know what’s wrong with me.”

He sat down and tilted his head back on the seat. He closed his eyes, and I held my breath. Was he going to fall asleep already? I’d looked up the highest dosage I could give for someone weighing less than I guessed Worth did, but what if he was allergic or something? I couldn’t kill Ford’s friend.

“I’m so sleepy all of a sudden.” He opened his eyes, blinked, and tried to sit up. “Shit, it feels like...” His eyes widened a bit, and he stared at me. “You fucking drugged me.”

“I...it’s just a sleeping pill.”

“You son of a bitch.” He sat back and closed his eyes. “Go get your man.”

I waited. He didn’t open his eyes again, but his breathing remained steady. Now I just had to avoid the top-notch security guards Carter had hired.

I looked out the front window. There was a man at the bottom of the steps. No way in hell was I getting out that way.

I went to the back and looked out. A guard waved to me from the small yard. I considered my options. Maybe I should just run for it. They weren’t going to shoot me.

What was the chance I could outrun them, though? I was fit. I took a run most mornings and played tennis regularly, but these guys were trained to chase people. My chances of getting away from them weren't great unless I was in a car and they weren't.

A car. That was when I remembered Ford's car was parked out front. What if I said I'd left something in it and needed to get it out? Did he have a spare key here? My heart pounded as I looked around, thinking about where I would keep the keys if I were Ford.

Then I had a thought. I rushed over to the coat closet and opened it up. I must have subconsciously noticed a little key rack on the back of the door when I'd been here before. I scanned the row of keys and saw a Porsche keychain. Ford would be pissed if I wrecked his car, but I didn't care. He could buy himself another one, or Miles could buy him one since he'd gotten us in this mess to begin with.

I picked up the keys, took a deep breath, and opened the door. The guard turned around. "Do you need something?"

"I left something in Mr. Wainwright's car. I'm just going to grab it."

"That's no problem, sir."

He didn't question why I got into the driver's seat. Maybe he thought Ford let me drive it.

I pretended to look around for a moment as I was slipping the key into the ignition. When I cranked the engine, the guy raced over. I hit the button to lock the doors, then started backing up.

He was banging on the side of the car, yelling at me, but I ignored him. I jerked the wheel, barely missing the car parked in front on me and took off. Thank God there was no one coming. At least this neighborhood didn't have a lot of traffic this time of night.

Two men were chasing the car, but they weren't going to get far.

When they turned back and got into their own vehicle, I knew I had to move fast.

It was the most harrowing drive of my life. I rarely drove in Manhattan, and once I got closer to where things were going down, the traffic grew thicker. Finally, I reached my destination, and pulled over to the side of the road. I knew the chances of Ford's car still being there when I returned were slim to none in this part of town, but I didn't give a fuck. It was just a car. I got out and ran. I didn't know how far behind me the guards were, but I wasn't letting them catch me.

I slowed to a walk as I neared the location, then I saw them. Miles, Carter, and a group of men dressed in SWAT team black, facing off against a group of men that looked exactly as I'd imagined a criminal gang would look.

FORD

Since I'd woken in a cell, my head throbbing and my body bruised and battered, I'd done everything I could to find a way to escape. I'd yet to be able free my hands or ankles, and there were no windows or openings other than the heavy door with a tiny, barred window. I knew it would be locked, but I managed to hop to the door and turn so I could move the knob with my hands. It didn't budge. The only object in the room was a bucket. If that was my bathroom, I wasn't going to be able to use it unless I got myself free.

I sat with my back to the wall and hoped like hell that Miles and Carter would figure out where I was. I had no idea how long I'd been there, but it felt like ages. I was hungry and thirsty and desperate to use the bathroom.

When I heard someone approach, I managed to get to my feet, not sure what I could do, but wanting to be ready. A familiar-looking man entered. He had a bottle of water with him, so that probably meant he hadn't come to finish me off. Who the hell was he? I wracked my brain as he assessed me, standing there teetering on my bound feet. Finally, I figured it out. I recognized him from pictures of Carter with his fellow SEALs.

"I see you do recognize me," he said.

"Matteo?"

"Yeah. I suppose Carter has been talking,"

"You're a traitor." Why did I say that? Did I want the man to kill me?

“I have shifting loyalties.”

That was one way of putting it. “Why are you here?”

“I figured I’d better untie you so you can piss in the bucket or things were going to get messy.”

I’d meant why was he in New York, but that answer would do.

He cut through the zip ties binding my wrists and ankles, and I rubbed feeling back into them.

“Your friends are joining us in a few hours. I’ll be back to bring you to them.” He tossed me the bottle of water, then left.

I inspected the bottle and made sure it was sealed before taking a few huge gulps, then forced myself to sip slowly. If Miles and Carter were coming, then they must have a plan. Whatever happened, I had to get out of this alive. I had to see Jay again.

True to his word, Matteo returned along with another man, and they marched me outside at gunpoint.

I saw Miles, Carter and several security guards facing off against a man I presumed was the leader of this group of fuckers. Matteo moved to stand next to him, and the other man kept his gun jabbed into my back.

I hated having to stay silent while Miles negotiated for my life. I was so close to escape. I wanted to run, but I knew these men wouldn’t hesitate to shoot me. I’d need help from Miles and Carter and everyone they’d brought with them.

“If you want your friend to live,” the leader said, “You will drop the lawsuit and refrain from buying any more property in the area. You will not interfere with us continuing to do business in New York. Any sign that you aren’t complying with our wishes will be considered an act of war against us.”

Miles glanced at me. I knew he was trying to communicate something. No way was he going to give in to their demands. He must have something planned, but what?

He looked back at their leader and nodded. “We also have some terms.”

That must have been a signal because all hell broke loose. The man behind me fell to the ground with a bullet hole through his head and everyone seemed to be shooting at someone.

I took off running toward Miles and Carter as the building behind me exploded.

What happen next must have only taken seconds, but it seemed to go in slow motion. Carter, Miles, and several other men started shooting at our enemies.

Then Jay was there, running toward me yelling, “Ford, behind you!”

I turned. The leader was aiming at me. Jay jumped in between us, and I screamed. Carter was suddenly there, knocking me and Jay to the ground as the leader’s head exploded.

My brain seemed to have gone offline. I couldn’t hear. My ears were ringing from the explosion and all the shots being fired around me. I didn’t know who’d shot the leader, and I didn’t know if he had shot Jay or Carter. I groped for Jay, pulling him to me and trying to see if he had been hurt.

He hugged me tightly, then Carter, also uninjured, hustled us away from the middle of the battle, though it seemed to mostly be over. Once the leader had been eliminated, the others started to run.

“Fuck no,” Carter yelled. He jumped up and turned toward one man who had split off from the rest of the group. It was Matteo.

Carter lifted his gun. I tried to call out, but the words caught in my throat. I was still too breathless to speak. I didn’t think Carter really wanted to kill Matteo, but he took the shot. It penetrated right into the center of Matteo’s back, and he fell forward, slamming down onto the pavement. He twitched a time or two, then he was still.

Carter started toward him. “Wait here,” I said to Jay, but he took my hand and pulled me toward Carter. Miles was already several steps ahead of us.

As Carter knelt down, I realized there was a dart sticking out of Matteo’s back and there was no bloodstain. “You tranquilized

him?”

Carter nodded as he pressed his fingers to Matteo’s throat, checking his pulse. “He’s alive.” He pulled a zip tie from a pocket on his pants, yanked Matteo’s wrists behind his back, and secured them, then he did the same to the man’s ankles. “Let’s get him out of here quickly.”

“What are you going to do with him?” Miles asked.

“I’m going to find out exactly why the fuck he betrayed us, why he let me go, and everything he knows about the fucking cartel. Based on his answers, I’ll decide what to do with him next.”

Jay and I looked at each other. I could tell he was as uncomfortable with this as I was, but I wasn’t about to contradict Carter. The anger in his eyes told me Matteo was in for hell, but Jay was safe and sound, and right there by my side. That was my primary concern.

As Carter shouted orders, Miles rushed over to us, I clung to Jay, not willing to let him out of my sight again.

“What the fuck are you doing here?” Miles yelled at Jay.

I growled. “He came to save me.”

“He tried to get himself fucking killed.”

Jay cupped my jaw, turning me to face him. “I wasn’t going to let them hurt you.”

“I get that, but I can’t lose you.”

“Carter had it handled,” Miles snapped “You’re supposed to be back at Ford’s house. Where the hell is Worth?”

My pulse kicked up again. “Is something wrong with Worth?”

“I may have used a few of your sleeping pills to knock him out.”

“And the guards?”

Jay gestured to the group of people Carter was ordering around. “Some of them are here now. They followed me.”

“Were you on foot?”

“Hell no.” Jay told us briefly about his escape. “I left your car parked it a few blocks away, but I don’t know if it will still be there.”

“I don’t give a fuck about the car as long as you’re safe.” A few months ago, if someone had suggested driving my car, much less parking it where it was likely to be stolen, I would have freaked. But now, I had Jay, and he mattered more than any of my possessions.

“Really?”

“We need to get out of here,” Miles said. “The explosion is drawing attention.”

I heard sirens coming from multiple directions. We hopped into Miles’s car, leaving Carter to explain the situation to the police.

When Miles circled the block, we saw my car, miraculously untouched. “Go home and pretend you’ve been there all night. You two can deal with Worth in the morning.”

I could deal with a hung over and pissed off Worth. I’d done that plenty of times. Jay was alive. I was alive. This hell was over, and we had some kind of chance at a future. Jay tossed me the keys, and I hopped into the driver’s seat. He lay his hand on top of mine on the gearshift.

“I want to fuck you right here,” I told him. “But I’m going to get you home so I can relax with you.”

“I would try to convince you, but this car is awfully small. Home would be better; a bed would be better.”

“No guarantees on making it all the way to the bedroom.”

“Then I guess we’d better hope Worth sleeps through it.”

I laughed as I pulled away from the curb.

“Are you okay?” Jay asked. “Did they hurt you?”

“No, I’m only sore from fighting the man who captured me at my house. They kept me tied up in a cell, but they didn’t do anything else to me. I think they knew there was no way they could negotiate with Miles if they damaged me too badly.”

“I still can’t believe all this just happened.”

“Are you okay? This isn’t the sort of thing you see every day. I’m sure it was traumatic.”

“You’re alive, and that makes me okay. I may freak out later, but right now, I just want you.” His thumb caressed the back of my hand, and I drove faster, cursing the traffic around me.

I knew there would still be guards at my house, and they’d probably have a hundred questions, but they weren’t getting answers now, not from me. When Jay and I exited the car, a man who stood by the door started yelling at Jay, but I held up my hand. “Not now. Call Carter. It’s over.”

I walked into my house with Jay right behind me, laughing. “The look on that man’s face...”

“This isn’t the night to fuck with me.” I didn’t slow down. I kept moving toward the stairs as I took Jay’s hand in mine. I saw Worth on the living room couch. He was still sleeping, so we’d deal with him in the morning.

We raced up the stairs. I stumbled once, nearly falling, but Jay caught me and carried me the rest of the way to my room. *Our room.*

We both immediately started stripping. I knew there was so much to talk about, so much to process about what had just happened and about our future, but right then all I cared about was touching him. I needed his skin against mine. I needed him inside me.

When we were naked, he lifted me again, tossing me down on the bed. He grabbed the lube and slicked himself up. There was no prep, no easing into anything. I spread my legs for him, and he drove inside me. We grasped each other, groaning, desperate. His thrusts were hard and fast, and I loved it. I didn’t want to slow down. I didn’t want to think. I just needed to get off. I needed Jay in every possible way.

Neither of us tried to make anything last. We were wild like animals, kissing, biting, grabbing at each other, then riding out our orgasms together. We collapsed in an exhausted, sticky

heap. Eventually Jay rolled off me and pulled me to him. I turned so I could lay my head on his chest.

“Do you want to talk about anything?” I asked.

“Not now. I just want to hold you and to know you’re here, then I want to sleep. We’ll deal with everything tomorrow.”

“Good.” I pressed a kiss against his collarbone. Before long, I was sound asleep.

JAY

I woke to the sound of my phone ringing. I wanted to ignore it, but when I saw Emily's number on my screen, I tensed. Not knowing how long we'd be out of the city, I'd asked if there was any way she could return if I paid for her ticket and hotel. She'd arrived yesterday and I hadn't even talked to her after Ford went missing.

Ford's arm came around me, and his touch gave me the strength to answer the phone, even though I was afraid she had bad news.

"Emily, what's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong. Gran is wide awake this morning. She's doing better than she has in days, and she'd like to see you. When do you think you'll be back?"

Maybe someday I could tell her the real story, but for now, I'd keep it simple. "The case that took me out of town has been resolved out of court. I'll be there as quickly as I can."

"That's great. I'll let her know."

When I ended the call, Ford tugged me against him. "What's up?"

"My grandmother is doing better. She's awake and alert, and she wants to see me. Would you come with me?"

Ford's face lit up. "I would love to meet your grandmother and your sister."

“Thank you. I’ll text Emily and let her know you’re coming too.”

“I’ll get a quick shower, then you can shower while I make us breakfast.”

I pulled him to me for a kiss. “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

When I went downstairs, Worth was sitting at the bar in the kitchen, looking hungover as hell.

“I’m sorry,” I said when he looked up at me.

“I can’t believe you fucking drugged me. What were you thinking?”

“That I had to get to Ford, that I couldn’t stay here a second longer.”

Worth drank some of the coffee Ford sat in front of him. “You owe me.”

Was I going to get off that easy? “You’re right. Let me when you need to cash in on that.”

When we arrived at the care center, Emily was waiting for us in the lobby. Ford held out his hand for her to shake. “It’s nice to meet you, Emily. I’ve heard so many good things about you. I also heard you were looking for an investor for an expansion of your café. I’d love to talk to you about that later.”

“Ford,” Jay said, giving me a concerned look.

I shrugged. “I have a lot of money to invest. It would be good for me. My financial advisor says so.”

“We’ll talk about that later,” Jay said.

“And if you were ever interested in opening a second café here in New York, I’d be interested in that venture too.”

Emily grinned as she looked back and forth between the two of us. “I like him.”

“Good,” we both said at the same time.

Jay frowned. “This doesn’t...it doesn’t bother you?”

“You being with a man? Hell no. Not if he can have you this chilled out. You look happier than you have in years, Jay. I don’t care who puts the smile on your face, a man, a woman, or any other gender. I just want you to be happy.”

I pulled her in for a tight hug. “I’m lucky to have you, Em.”

She smiled. “Don’t forget it. Now let’s go see Gran.”

When we reached Gran’s room, she was sitting up in bed, eating breakfast. She smiled when we stepped inside. Emily and I each hugged her. “It’s so good to see you feeling better,” I said.

“I do feel better, and it’s good to see you too. Where have you been?”

I hadn’t been sure Gran was aware enough to notice that I hadn’t been by in a few days. I glanced at Emily, and she shook her head. She must have just made excuses for my absence.

“I had some emergencies at work, but that’s taken care of now.”

“Good.” She looked at Ford. “Who is this young man?”

I couldn’t help but smile as I looked his way. “This is Ford. He’s my....”

“Friend,” Ford said, saving me from having to out myself to Gran while she was still recovering.

“Well, he’s a nice friend to come visit an old woman like me.”

“Jay talks about you so much, I couldn’t wait to meet you.”

I loved Ford even more as I watched him take her hand and kiss the back of it.

“How are you feeling, Gran?” I asked.

“Like I can actually breathe. I thought it might be my time there for a day or too.”

So had I, but I didn't say that. I just squeezed her hand. "I'm so glad it's not. I want you to be around forever."

She smiled. "I don't think I can do that, but I'm going to be here for a while longer." She turned to Emily. "Did you check on the café?"

Emily nodded. "Things are going fine."

"But they'd be better if you were there," Gran said.

"I wanted to be here for you."

Gran smiled. "I know, and I appreciate that, but now that you know I'm going to be fine, you can get back to your business."

"Gran, you're more important."

She huffed and looked between me and my sister. "Neither one of you take enough time for yourselves. You need to go live your lives instead of spending so much time fussing over me."

"I like worrying over you, Gran," I said.

She looked at Ford and smiled. "I think you have other things to worry about now."

What did that mean? Surely she didn't know about me and Ford. Had Emily said something?

Gran started to say something else, but she was hit with a coughing fit. When she recovered, we must have all looked worried because she scowled at us. "It's just a cough. I'll have it for a while. You don't need to act like I just keeled over."

I saw Emily try to hold back a laugh, but she ultimately failed. "Gran, you're something else, you know that?"

"I try, dear."

"We should let you rest," Emily said. "We don't want to slow down your recovery."

Gran sighed. "I suppose I should take another nap. The nurse said I still need to sleep most of the day, but I should be back to my apartment in a few days."

Emily and I each gave Gran another hug, and Ford took her hand once more. "It was an honor to meet you, ma'am."

We started to leave but Gran called me back. “I’ll wait for you in the lobby,” Ford said.

I closed the door and sat down by Gran.

“I approve of your young man.”

His words startled me. “He’s not....”

“Don’t you lie to me. I saw how you looked at each other and the way he put his hand on your shoulder to reassure you. There’s more between you than friendship.”

I started to deny it but stopped myself. I loved Ford. I wasn’t going to hide that. “Are you okay with that? With Ford being my boyfriend?”

“I’m more than okay with it. I’m happy for you. All I want is for you to have more people in your life who care about you.”

“Oh Gran. I love you so much.”

“I love you too. Now go and take your man out somewhere nice. Don’t screw this up.”

“I promise I’m going to do everything I can to make him happy.”

“From the look of things, you already do that.”

“Thanks, Gran. For everything you’ve done for me and Emily.”

She smiled. “You two keep me young.”

“By the way, Ford knits. Next time we visit, you’ll have to talk to him about all your projects.”

Her smile widened even more. “That sounds lovely.”

FORD

Emily and I found a quiet place to sit in the lobby.

“I approve of your relationship with my brother, but just so you know, if you hurt him, I will make you regret it.”

I could tell she was deadly serious. “I appreciate the warning.”

“Jay is...he’s not as tough as he tries to act.”

Jay was so different than the arrogant man he pretended to be when we met. “I figured that out.”

“I think he’s been crushing on you for a long time. He talked about you incessantly when I last visited.”

I grinned. “Really?”

“Yes. He told me all about how ‘fucking irritating’ you were, but I could tell there was more to it. You really got under his skin. Do not abuse that power.”

“I won’t. I love him. I thought I hated him at one point, but I was so wrong.”

She rolled her eyes. “Men are idiots.”

I wanted to argue with her, but I wasn’t sure I had a lot of ground to stand on.

A few moments later, Jay joined us.

“What did Gran want?” Emily asked.

Jay narrowed his eyes at her. “Did you tell her about me and Ford?”

Emily shook her head “No. Seriously, I wouldn’t do that.”

“She knew.”

“Probably because you talk about Ford a lot.”

“No, I don’t.”

Emily raised her brows and stared at him. Color filled his cheeks. “I guess I have told her things about him.”

“A lot of things.”

“Was I that obvious?”

Emily smiled. “It was adorable.”

“Never say that again.”

She rolled her eyes, then sighed. “I guess I need to see how quickly I can get a flight back to Aspen.”

Jay sighed. “I wish you could stay longer.”

“I know, but I do need to get back to the shop. When it’s a less busy season, maybe I can come for a longer visit.”

“I could get you on a plane this afternoon if you’ll let me make the arrangements,” I said.

“No way will there be a flight open today.”

“Miles has a private plane, and he’s not using it. He’d be happy for his pilot to fly you home.”

“A private plane? Seriously?”

Ford smiled. “It’s very convenient.”

“You really could set that up for me?”

“Yes. I’ll call Miles, and we’ll arrange a flight for a few hours from now as well as a ride to the airport and one from the Aspen airport to your home if you need it.”

“You can just do that?”

Ford nodded, and Emily turned to me. “I like him. Don’t fuck this up.”

When I’d gotten everything arranged for Emily, we dropped her at her hotel, and Jay and I headed back to my house.

“So, what happens now?” Jay asked as I drove.

“You move in with me, and we live happily ever after.”

Jay made a strangled noise. “Are you serious?”

“Very. Also, you’re going to quit your job, because the people you work with are terrible, and you need more time to devote to fucking me.”

“Oh my God. That’s...I can’t just quit.”

“You definitely can.”

“What am I supposed to do if I quit? I’d likely have to start back at the bottom at another firm.”

“It just so happens that I have some really good connections at Montgomery Enterprises. I could get you a job there.”

He huffed. “Like Miles would want to hire me.”

“You proved yourself yesterday. If he still had any doubts, they’re gone now, but if you don’t want to work at Montgomery, you could just be my kept man, spend your days at the club or the spa, and learn how to make me dinner.”

“You do *not* want me making dinner.”

“Then you can order me dinner or just be waiting, naked, ready for me. Does that sound good?”

“I’m not just going to live off you.”

“I have more money than I know what to do with.”

“Ford.” The growl in his voice told me not to push it.

“What do you want to do?”

“I’m an attorney. That’s all I really know.”

“Do you like your job?”

He sighed. “No. Not really”

“If the only thing that mattered was doing something you wanted to do, what would that be?”

Jay was silent for a while, then he said, “I always thought it would be awesome to work with animals, but I...”

“This is about dreams, Jay. You can say anything you want.”

“I’d love to run a rescue for German Shepherds.”

The way his face lit up as he said it let me know how happy that would make him. I was going to make it happen. “We can get a second house outside the city with plenty of land or use some of my grandparents’ land for the rescue.”

“Wouldn’t they mind? And what about you being so far from the city?”

Ford shook his head. “As long as I’m with you, I’ll be happy. We’ll work something out, and you saw how my grandfather dotes on his dogs, and my grandmother loves any chance to be involved with a charity.”

“How involved?”

“She’s not going to do any of the day-to-day dirty work.”

“Alright.”

I glanced at him. “You’ll eventually make peace with her.”

“I think we’re already on the way. She tried to apologize to me.”

“What did she say?”

“She told me she didn’t mean to insult me.”

I nodded. “That’s about as good as it gets for her apologies.”

“I figured as much, but I could tell she meant it.”

“Good. Give her some time.”

“I will because she’s your grandmother and you love her. There must be something good in her.”

“There is, but she’s prickly as hell and such a snob. Your Gran is nothing like that.”

“She can be fierce when she needs to. She didn’t hold back on discipline when Emily and I needed it, but she’s never been prickly.”

“I want to get to know her better.”

“I was actually wondering....”

“What?”

“I thought maybe you could teach me to knit, and Gran and I could come to your knitting circle one week.”

“That is a fantastic idea. Eudora would love to get to know you, and it would give you a chance to meet Ben. Trust me, when you meet him, you’ll have no idea how he puts up with Miles.”

Jay laughed. “I would love that.”

“Then it’s a plan. We’ll get started on lessons today, and as soon as your Gran is well enough, we’ll all go to knitting circle.”

“You know how last night you were so impatient you wanted to just fuck in the car?”

I grinned at him. “Yes.”

“I don’t suppose you know a good place to pull over. I’m not sure I can wait until we’re home.”

I reached over and gripped his thigh. “You’re going to have to wait, but I’ll make it more than worth your while.”

He groaned as I moved my hand higher, brushing over the growing bulge in his pants.

JAY

I don't think I've ever jumped out of a car faster than I did when we reached Ford's house. Ford was right behind me as I hurried up the front steps. I punched in the door code and raced for the stairs to the next level. Ford grabbed for me, but I kept going.

"Bedroom," I shouted.

He jogged up the stairs after me. "You've never cared where we fucked before."

As soon as I was in Ford's room, I started stripping, and he did the same.

"Get on the bed on your back," he ordered when I was naked.

I turned and stared. "What?"

"You heard me. This is one of those times when I'm in charge."

"No."

He narrowed his eyes and took a step toward me. "You're going to do what I say, and you're going to like it."

My cock demanded I stop arguing and go with it. "I'll let you call the shots for now, but don't expect that to last."

I stretched out on the bed. Ford shucked his pants, then walked into the bathroom.

"What are you doing?"

"You'll see."

When he came out, he was carrying a small purple butt plug. I wanted to try it, but I was still nervous. “Ford, I....”

“Do you want this?”

I licked my lips and nodded.

“I’m going to make it good for you. Trust me.” He got the lube from the nightstand. Then he settled between my legs, pushing at my thighs to make me open them more. “Relax. You’re so fucking tense.”

“Your mouth on my dick would help relax me,” I said.

He smiled, then surprised me by bending down and taking me in his mouth. I gasped as the wet heat closed around me.

When he pulled back, I was breathing hard, and I felt like I might die if he didn’t touch me again. He squirted lube on his fingers and teased my hole as he drew each of my balls into his mouth, one at a time.

I sucked in a breath when he pushed a finger inside me, but it didn’t hurt. It felt amazing. He took my cock back into his mouth and thrust in a second finger, pushing the digits deep and curling them forward to rub against my sweet spot.

I arched up, pushing my cock down his throat. He took it easily, swallowing around me. I was going to come in no time if he kept this up.

He must have sensed that because he pulled back, and I watched as he slicked up the plug, making me shudder.

“You can handle it. You could handle this if you wanted to.” He reached down and stroked his cock.

An insane part of me wanted to tell him to forget the plug and just fuck me, but it was better to start out slow.

He teased me with the tip of the plug, flicking it back-and-forth over my hole before he finally pushed it in. It was fine at first, but then the stretch started to burn.

“Ford?”

He took my cock back down his throat, and I forgot everything but pleasure. He hummed around me, using his tongue on the

underside of my cock. He pushed the plug in deeper and I tensed.

He pulled off for a second. "Relax. I've got you."

When he took me back down, I couldn't help but move my hips, thrusting into his mouth. He let me force my cock all the way down his throat as he pushed the plug the rest of the way in. I felt my ass close around the narrowest part as the flange pressed against me.

When Ford tapped on the end of it, sending vibrations through me, I cried out. It felt so fucking good. I gripped the side of his head and held him still as I thrust up into his mouth. He gagged around me, but he didn't pull away. He just pressed my hips back down and kept licking, sucking, making me lose my mind.

"I can't...hold back. Need to come."

Ford smiled around my cock and kept going, bobbing his head up and down. His lips were slick with spit, and his mouth was so hot. He wiggled the plug and I gasped. "So close."

He tapped the end of the plug over and over as he took me all the way to the balls. It was too much. Hot pleasure shot through me, and I emptied myself into his mouth. He swallowed around me again and again. When I was done, he licked his lips. Then he pulled out the plug, making me gasp. "That was incredible."

My brain seemed to have melted, and I couldn't speak yet. I reached for him, knowing what I needed. "Want. Suck. You." I finally managed to say.

He turned and straddled my face, knees against my shoulders. I gripped his ass cheeks and pulled him down until I could take his cock into my mouth.

I didn't care if he choked me. I wanted this, needed it. I wanted to know what it was like to swallow his load as he came. I sucked him greedily, squeezing his ass, demanding to have all of him inside me.

I didn't care that it felt like too much. I didn't care that I couldn't breathe. I wanted this. Finally, he gave in, thrusting

into me, lifting and lowering his hips, filling my mouth with his cock. In no time, he cried out, and I swallowed around him as he shot into my mouth.

I tried to take it all, but some dripped down my chin, I didn't mind, though. I loved the idea of being covered in his cum.

He rolled off me and flopped onto his back. We both lay there, panting. He reached for my hand, and we held on to each other.

"Is there room spinning for you too?" I asked.

"Fuck yes, it is. I can't believe you.... That was...."

"Fucking amazing." I licked my swollen lips and he groaned.

"You're make me want to do it all over again."

"I love you."

"I love you too, Jay. I can't believe everything we've been through. I can't believe the way things have changed in such a short time."

"Neither can I. Do you really want me to move in here?"

"I do."

"And you really want me to quit my job?"

"Absolutely. If I could come home to you like this every night, my life would be fucking perfect."

"I'm going to quit. I don't want to work there, but I'm not just going to be your sugar baby."

Ford laughed. "The position is open, and you are well qualified, but I want you to open your dog rescue. We'll find plenty of time for this."

"I think we're going to be lucky if we get much else done for the next few weeks."

Ford grinned. "I think Miles owes me some time off."

"I agree."

"The weather's pretty nasty right now, maybe we should get out of the city."

“Does Miles owe you a trip on his private plane as well?” I asked.

“Definitely. How about you and me on a tropical beach, soaking up the sun, then spending the rest of the day fucking in a gorgeous hotel room?”

“That sounds amazing.”

“But you know what? Just being here with you, curling up with a book, cooking for you, and teaching you to knit...that sounds perfect as well.”

I shifted so I could pull him to me for a kiss. It was tender and soft, not at all like the wild energy that had just raced between us. “I think that sounds perfect too.”

EPILOGUE

ONE MONTH LATER

FORD

Jay's Gran quickly became a regular at the knitting circle, and Jay's skills were developing nicely. He was working on a hat for me, and I didn't care how wonky any of the stitches turned out, I was going to wear it with pride. There hadn't been a day since we almost lost each other that he hadn't worn the hat that I made him, and I'd just finished a scarf to match.

That night at knitting circle, Gran had taught me some new stitches as she worked on a delicate shawl she'd wear next spring. I was amazed by the beauty of the things she created. Jay said she was working on a sweater for me as a Christmas present, and I couldn't wait to see what she came up with.

I hugged Eudora goodbye, and she leaned close. "Did you get everything finalized?"

I glanced toward Jay, making sure he hadn't heard, then nodded.

"I'm so excited for you."

"Me too."

Once we dropped Gran off at her apartment—she was thrilled to be in her own space again after her long ordeal with pneumonia—I started driving. It took a little while for Jay to notice we weren't headed home.

"Where are we going?"

"You'll see."

He glanced at the clock. “Isn’t it kind of late for a drive out to see your grandparents?”

Jay’s relationship with my grandmother had greatly improved. She was not only more relaxed around Jay, but she was kinder to me than she had been in years, and my grandfather couldn’t be more thrilled about helping out with a German Shepherd rescue.

“It is. That’s not where we’re going.”

He frowned. “It certainly seems like it.”

“You do know there are a lot of other things you can get to this way other than their house.”

Jay snorted. “Of course I do, but none of them are places we would go on a Thursday night.”

“One of them is. You’ll see.”

He pestered me off and on to explain myself during the drive, but I refused to say a word until I turned into the driveway of one of the properties we’d toured in our search for a place where we could live part-time and run a dog rescue.

“What are we doing here?” Jay asked. “I thought the owner changed their mind.”

“He did tell us that.” The house had been on the market when we looked at it, and we’d both adored it, but when we tried to put in an offer, the owner said they weren’t selling after all. But if there was one thing I’d learned from both Miles and my grandmother, it was to never take no for an answer. Without telling Jay, I’d continue to pursue things.

With some research, I’d found out that the property belonged to a young man who’d inherited it from his grandparents. He had sentimental ties to the land but couldn’t really maintain it himself. Once I explained what we intended to do with the property, he was willing to sell it to me. He simply hadn’t wanted to see the house torn down and a development built.

Jay stared at me, and I smiled. “What did you do?”

“I convinced him to sell after all. I happen to be very good at that. I am a top-notch attorney.”

“Wait. What are you saying?”

“I’m saying that the owner changed his mind.”

“And we’re going to put in an offer? Was there something you wanted to show me about the house first?”

“No. I already gave him an offer and closed on the property yesterday.”

“You did what?”

“I bought the property. It’s ours.”

“You’re kidding. You just bought it.”

“You loved this property, and I wanted to get it for you.”

He stared out the window of the car at the house, then back at me. “Do you have the keys and everything?”

“I sure do.”

Before we went into the house, Jay wanted to walk around the grounds again. There was a barn where dogs could stay and plenty of room for them to run, as well as trails in the woods where they could go on walks.

“It’s perfect. The outdoor kitchen even gives us a place to set up a dog wash area and we could prepare food here for the dogs.”

“You’re right, and that’s why I wasn’t going to take no for an answer.”

“The house is great too. It’s not overwhelming, but it’s big enough to have friends come stay.”

I took his hand in mine. “Are you happy?”

“I’m more than happy. How did you convince him?”

“The owner didn’t really want the property, he just hated the idea of seeing the house torn down or the area developed. When I explained our plan for the dog rescue to him, he caved.”

“Ford, you’re the best.”

I shrugged. “You deserve all of this.”

“Are you going to be happy here?”

“As long as we spend some time in the city, which won’t be an issue since we have the cabin near the barn where a manager can live. We’ll hire as much staff as we need to keep the rescue running while we’re in the city.”

“But when we’re here, you’ll have a long commute.”

Ford shrugged. “I can work from here some and I can have a driver take me in so I can work during the ride.”

“And you’re really okay with funding this?”

“You’re contributing too. You’ve got a nice savings set up.”

Jay snorted. “Nothing compared to yours.”

“Few people have money that compares to mine, and I want to use it on something good.”

Jay pulled me to him. When his lips met mine, I could feel all of his love and excitement.

“Thank you so much for this,” he said. “For everything.”

“Thank you for making my life so much brighter.”

“Somebody had to get you away from all those stuffy books and deep dives into legal minutia.”

I huffed. “I went out with my friends plenty.”

“Yes, but...”

“Things are better now. Everything’s better.”

“I’m so excited about our future here and in the city. Your friends like me now, and your grandparents like me well enough.”

“They like you. They’re not going to be effusive about it, but they like you. And your Gran is amazing. Emily, too.”

“She’s so excited about the expansion of her café.”

“I can’t wait to go see her and hear about her vision for it. When it’s all done, we’re going to have a huge celebration.”

“We are, but you know what? I think we should head on inside and have a nice celebration right here.”

“That is a fantastic suggestion.”

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Silvia Violet writes sexy, bad boy romance that will leave you smiling and satisfied. She has a thing for characters who are in need of comfort and enjoys helping them surrender to love even when they doubt it exists. When she needs a break from listening to the voices in her head, she spends time baking, taking long walks, curling up with her favorite books, and hanging out with her family. She also writes paranormal romance as [Silvia Onyx](#).

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