



BAD BOY
BILLIONAIRES

THE
BILLIONAIRE'S
ASSISTANT

SILVIA VIOLET

**THE BILLIONAIRE'S
ASSISTANT**
BAD BOY BILLIONAIRES
BOOK 1

SILVIA VIOLET



The Billionaire's Assistant

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BEN

I took a deep breath as I approached the midtown headquarters of Montgomery Enterprises. I was honestly shocked to have even gotten an interview. No matter how well I'd tailored my résumé, I was seriously under qualified to be the CEO's assistant. Sure, I'd spent the two years since I graduated from college working as an executive assistant to the president of a small company, but that couldn't compare to working for the billionaire head of a huge conglomerate.

I wouldn't have dared applied if I'd had a choice, but my fucking family wasn't giving me one. My father has been running cons since his teens, and once we were old enough, he expected me and my brother to do his dirty work. I thought I'd broken away from that life, but I made the mistake of not running far enough. When my father came to me, asking me to help him steal product formulas from Montgomery, he made it very clear refusal wasn't an option.

I fought back nausea as I stepped into the lobby. What would I do if I didn't get the job? I had no other way of getting access to the kinds of corporate secrets my father was eager to sell.

What if I did get the job? Would that be even worse? I didn't want to be part of any more of my family's cons, but the job would pay better than anything I'd ever dreamed of and with a few paychecks I could gain more independence. What if I could stall long enough to....

No, that would never work. My brother would come knocking at my door. He'd never been afraid to use violence to get what he wanted, and he loved money above everything else. He would track me down and make sure I complied with our father's wishes.

Why hadn't I left New York, changed my name, and started over? It wasn't like I had ties here other than a love for the city.

Unlike most corporations, Montgomery had a reputation for taking good care of their employees. Was there any chance Mr. Montgomery would take care of me? It wasn't like I could tell him I'd come here to steal information, but what I really wanted was his help. No, I had to handle the shitty hand I'd been dealt all by myself—like I always had.

I walked to the concierge desk and greeted a man in a suit far nicer than mine.

“I'm Benjamin Allred. I have an appointment for an interview.”

The man tapped some keys on his computer and nodded. An elevator that stood apart from the main bank slid open. “Take the executive elevator. Mr. Montgomery's office will be straight ahead when it opens.”

It never occurred to me I'd go straight to Mr. Montgomery's office or that I'd see him today at all. I assumed this would be a preliminary interview with an underling or at most a vice president or some lower-level executive.

The man frowned. “Do you have a question?”

I realized I'd been staring at him blankly for several seconds. “No. Sorry. I don't have any questions.” I hurried over to the elevator before he decided to close it and send me on my way.

Once I was inside, the elevator took off, rocketing me to the top of the building. When it stopped, I felt queasier than I had before. When the doors opened, I had to force my mouth to stay closed. The executive lobby was gorgeous. It was quietly elegant with art on the walls that clearly hadn't come from a random box store like most office buildings.

I saw Mr. Montgomery's office straight down the hall like I'd been told.

The door was solid dark wood. A desk stood just outside the office, and a middle-aged woman sat behind it. I assumed she was either the assistant who was leaving or someone who had the position temporarily. I glanced around again, in awe of my surroundings.

Suddenly I wanted this job, not because of the trouble I'd be in if I didn't do what my father demanded, but because I wanted to work here and prove to myself that I was capable of a job like this. I was going to do whatever was necessary to get this job, and I wasn't going to help my family. I was going to help myself. If I had learned anything from my family, it was that when you go after something, you go after it ruthlessly.

I walked down the hall, attempting to look more confident than I actually felt. I was used to faking it. That was how I'd survived my teen years.

I approached the woman at the desk. "Good morning."

"Good morning, sir. Do you have an appointment?"

"Yes. I'm Benjamin Allred. I'm here for an interview."

"Welcome, Mr. Allred." She gestured toward an upholstered chair to her left. "Have a seat. I'll let Mr. Montgomery know you're here. Would you like coffee or anything else to drink?"

"No, thank you." I wasn't about to chance upsetting my stomach or trust in my ability to keep from spilling something on my suit.

I forced myself to sit still even though my whole body was buzzing with nerves. A few moments later, the assistant said, "Mr. Montgomery is ready to see you now. You can go on in."

I heard a lock disengage as I reached the door. When I stepped inside. I saw Mr. Montgomery behind a large desk, looking even better than he had in his many online photos. I knew he was gorgeous, but I wasn't prepared for the reality of seeing him in person.

He was everything I would've wanted if I could've had a man made specifically for me. He was in his mid-thirties and tall, a few inches over six feet, with broad shoulders that made me wonder if he was a swimmer. His dark gray suit hugged his body in all the right places. It had clearly been tailored just for him and likely cost more than I earned in several months. His dark hair was styled to perfection, and his deep blue eyes seemed to see all the way through me.

“Good morning, Benjamin.” His silky voice and the way he looked me up and down made my whole body tingle as if he’d touched me.

I had to stop thinking like that. I was here to be a professional, not to gawk at him. “Good morning, Mr. Montgomery.”

He smiled and something about the look in his eyes unsettled me. I felt like a rabbit being watched by a wolf.

“Have a seat.” He waved his hand toward the chairs in front of his desk.

I chose one, and he surprised me by moving around the desk, and holding out his hand. When I shook it, the electric charge that shot up my arm startled me. For just a second, Mr. Montgomery’s eyes widened.

Had he felt it too, or had he only seen my embarrassing reaction? Either way, he must not have minded. He held my hand longer than he should have, and I reveled in the heat and softness of his skin.

How was I going to get through this interview without embarrassing myself? I never should have applied for this job. I wasn’t qualified, and apparently, I was incapable of doing anything but staring at him.

He settled into the seat beside me, his movements calculated and graceful.

“So, Benjamin, what makes you think you’re qualified for this job?”

Damn, he wasn’t going to hold back, was he? I should have been prepared for this question. I should have been prepared, but my mind went blank.

“Benjamin?”

Something about the way he said my name sounded filthy and that jolted me back to reality. I wanted this job. I needed this job. “I’m familiar with all the software mentioned in the job listing. I have experience as an executive assistant, and I am skilled at arranging schedules and I can make sure you have all the information you need to keep your day running smoothly.”

“Only part of that is reflected on your résumé.” His lip quirked up, and I was sure he was trying not to laugh. How ridiculous did I sound? He obviously knew I didn’t belong here.

I didn’t dare include most of my practical experience, because I’d gained it working for my family. The longer I stayed silent, the broader Mr. Montgomery’s smile became. Had he just brought me here to laugh at me?

What had I expected? He was a fucking billionaire. Of course he would be an asshole. Why had I thought otherwise just because employees rated his company better than lots of others? Working here was better than working in hell. But that didn’t say much.

I needed to pull myself together. I wasn’t going to let him get to me. “I have experience from volunteer positions, but I assure you, I can do everything I’ve said. I have the ability to get people to listen to me without annoying them.” Everyone except my father. He was angry with me all the time.

“Why don’t you tell me more about your volunteer work.”

I’d volunteered to lure my wealthy friend into trusting my brother. I’d volunteered to help my father embezzle from his previous job. I’d volunteered to help my brother cheat his way through school.

“How about you give me a scenario, and I tell you how I’d handle it?”

MILES

From the moment Ben had entered my office, displaying a confusing mix of confidence and uncertainty, I'd known I wanted him to be more than my assistant.

His voice was as soothing and as soft as his blond hair looked, and I could easily imagine gazing into his bright blue eyes all night as I pumped into him. He was young and had an air of innocence that called to me. Hiring him was a terrible idea for so many reasons, but before I'd asked him my next question, I knew he was the one I wanted. And I always got my way.

"Do you always direct your interviews?"

"No, sir. I do, however, know how to show off my assets to their best advantage." His eyes widened as he seemed to realize how that sounded. He immediately looked away, gazing out the windows at my view of the city.

I wanted to reach out and touch him, to push his legs apart, settle between them and see how quickly I could get him off, but I wasn't going to do any of those things. Not today. Not for a while. I did have the presence of mind to remember his loyalty was very much in question.

I never brought anyone in for an interview without a thorough background check. When my people looked into someone's past, they looked deep, pushing away all the layers to find the juicy details. Ben's father had been arrested more than once for various kinds of theft, but he'd always managed to escape charges. I knew the man was guilty as hell. He'd approached me once, years ago, thinking I would want to buy information about a competitor. He made a mistake questioning my honor, and I'd let him know it. What's this an attempt at revenge?

Ben's brother was deeply involved criminal activities as well, and greatly in need of cash. It was hardly a stretch assume they'd sent him here.

I didn't like to think the tempting man in front of me wanted to sell me out, but I wasn't naïve. Most people who wanted to work for me had ulterior motives, and I had plenty of my own. I wanted to hire Ben, but I wanted him in my bed even more.

"All right, I'll humor you. Let's say I've told you I don't want to be disturbed by anyone, but my CFO insists that he needs to see me immediately. How do you handle the situation?"

"I would tell him you were unavailable and let him know when you could meet with him. If he persisted, I would offer to rearrange any less urgent appointments on your schedule to allow him to see you sooner."

"And when he still wouldn't back down?"

"I'd ask if the building was on fire or if anyone's life was at stake. When he told me no, I'd reiterate what time he could come back and ask him if I should put him on your calendar."

I smiled. My CFO was an arrogant asshole who retained his job solely because he was so skilled at it. "I can't wait for you to meet him."

"Will he be part of the interview process?"

I shrugged. "Maybe."

Ben frowned at me, but he didn't ask anything else.

"Let's say one of the directors comes to see me, but I'm not in. She asks you for some information about a project we're working on. I've told you that information is confidential, to be seen only by me and the rest of C-suite. What do you say?"

"I explain that I'm not authorized to distribute that information, and she'll need to schedule an appointment with you or one of the other executives."

"And when she insists that I've told her to come get this information and that it's already approved. What do you say?"

"I tell her I haven't been informed of that and until I am, I will not be distributing the information."

I nodded. "Excellent. And when she gets angry and starts yelling and threatening you?"

“I’ll call security to have her removed.”

I smiled. I liked Ben more and more every minute. He might seem shy and almost criminally innocent, but he had all the right answers, and I had every confidence he would stand up to anyone at the company. He’d had to stand up for himself a lot in his life based on what I’d learned.

“Mr. Montgomery, I’m not going to let anyone have access to you unless you want them to, and I won’t let you miss any appointments or forget any commitments. I will do whatever you ask.”

Those words—and the full potential of their meaning—hung between us, but this time, he didn’t look away.

BEN

The room seemed to spin around us, but Mr. Montgomery stayed in perfect focus, every single gorgeous inch of him. As he stared at me, thinking about what I'd said, I realized I was absolutely serious. I would do anything he asked. I almost wished he'd asked me to do something completely inappropriate, like kneeling between his legs or lying over his desk. I would do it. He had me thoroughly under his spell.

That was so fucking dangerous. I should leave. I never should have come to this interview. He wasn't a fool. He'd surely checked up on me. How much did he know? Was he just playing with me like a cat with a mouse or more appropriately a panther with...whatever they stalk. He was hardly domesticated, which only made him hotter.

"How soon can you start?"

The question startled me. I blinked and had to swallow before I could respond. "I am available in two weeks."

"No, I want you here on Wednesday."

My mouth fell open, and I stared at him. That was two days from now. "This Wednesday? You're hiring me immediately?"

"You want the job, right?"

"I do. However, I need to give notice at my current job."

"I'll take care of that."

"What does that mean?"

He waved off my question. "You said you'd do anything I asked. I'm asking you to be here, ready to work, on Wednesday morning at 8 o'clock."

"What about an employment contract?"

He smiled. Was he pleased, or was he playing with me? "I'll have a contract drawn up for you to look over when you arrive

on Wednesday.”

“And if there’s something in it that I won’t agree to?”

“You said you’d agree to anything?”

“Mr. Montgomery, I am not—”

“It will be a very proper contract. You will be well compensated for your time, though I will expect you to work long hours, including many weekends. I’ll have you at my beck and call.”

I sank my teeth into my lower lip. Was he serious? Was I going to do this? Was I going to be his beck-and-call boy?

Fuck yes I was.

“I’ll see you Wednesday morning, sir.”

MILES

For the first time in ages, my three best friends and I were all free on the same night. I'd agreed to meet them at Vincent's, even though I wanted to go home, pour myself some superior scotch and go through all the files I hadn't looked at because I'd been too busy fantasizing about Ben all afternoon. I couldn't figure out why I'd reacted to him so strongly, but I was mesmerized.

I assumed the infatuation would fade, but for now I was going to have a hard time getting work done when we were both in the office. That meant I'd be facing a lot of late nights working at home alone. Or I could bring Ben home with me.

Maybe then the infatuation would fade faster. I doubted it. There was something about that soft, innocent look in his eyes that made me want to wrap my arms around him and hold him close. Not that I didn't want to do other, far filthier things, but I did long to protect him, and I was sure he needed it.

My chauffeur dropped me off at the door to Vincent's. I gave a nod to the bouncer and walked in.

The others were already there when I arrived, seated in the VIP section. They had gotten a decent head start based on the number of glasses I saw around them. By the time I settled into my seat, a server was already there with my drink of choice. I acknowledged them, then turned to face my friends.

"Nobody would doubt you've spent the last few months in the Caribbean," I said to Worth. He was more tan than I'd ever seen him.

"I would still be there now if the board—and my mother—wasn't pushing for me to show more direct leadership at our company."

Ford snorted. "How long can you sit in the sun getting sucked off by cabana boys? Surely you get bored after a while." Ford

needed work to focus on just like I did, and as my corporate attorney, I gave him plenty of it.

Worth looked at Ford like he couldn't comprehend what he was saying. "I don't understand how you survive closed up in these buildings all day. Going to boring meetings, staring at contracts. It's all such bullshit."

"Without someone taking care of that bullshit, you wouldn't be out there sailing around the Caribbean in your yacht." Carter reminded him. He was leaned back in the booth, his nearly full drink back on the table. It was clear he was more focused on watching us and our surroundings than drinking. He'd only been out of the SEALs for about six months. For the last few of those, he'd been acting as my security chief. I liked having him there. I'd missed him during the years he was overseas. His brother had seized power of his family empire, but Carter had no need for money. He just needed something to focus on. Worth was the only one of us satisfied to live a life of leisure.

He rolled his eyes at my comment. "Sure, that's true, but I don't know why I need to be here looking after the day-to-day nonsense of it all."

"God, it's just like when we were in school," Ford said.

The four of us had attended boarding school together. When Ford was caught kissing a local boy, some classmates started bullying him. Carter jumped right in and beat up the boys badly enough to send them to the infirmary. Worth and I stood by Ford while Carter served his suspension, and I'd had my parents—some of the school's biggest donors—intervene to make certain Carter wouldn't be expelled.

From then on, the four of us were inseparable. Eventually we each confessed to being either bi or gay. Over the years, various ones of us had considered dating the others, but that never worked out. Now we knew we were all better off as friends. I shared things with the three of them that I would never share with anyone else. I trusted them, and it took a hell of a lot to earn my trust.

While we remained at school, we all made certain that anyone who went after any one of us suffered. Sometimes that involved violence, but we often used our connections to make our enemies' lives hell. Worth and I could accomplish pretty much whatever we wanted with a snap of our fingers. I wouldn't say we'd reformed by any stretch of the imagination, but we were slightly more discreet now than we'd been back then. Ford was raised by his grandparents who were reclusive and not as easily swayed as mine and Worth's parents. Carter's father saw him as the black sheep of the family and interacted with him as little as possible.

"It's good to see all of you," I said.

Worth laughed. "Of course it is. Everyone always wants to see me."

Ford turned his "bullshit" into a cough.

Carter caught my eye and raised his brows. "So, did you hire Ben?"

"I told you I was going to."

"And I told you that was foolish."

Ford's eyes widened. "You actually hired him to be your assistant? When you know his father and brother want to steal from you?"

"Oooh, this is going to get good," Worth said.

"I don't know why you're surprised. I told you that was my plan. Keep your enemies close and all of that." I'd talked to both Ford and Carter when I had received Benjamin's application. Carter had been the one to oversee his extensive background check.

Carter studied me for a moment. "I'm not convinced you actually think Ben is an enemy."

"He isn't so far. He's just related to them."

"And probably working for them," Ford said. "Why do you think he applied for this job?"

"We've already been over this."

“Not with me,” Worth said. “Spill it.”

I gave him a short version of the story.

“So you hired him for revenge?”

I glared at Worth. “No.”

“He hired him because he’s fucking hot,” Ford said.

“That is not true.”

Carter snorted. “You actually think we’re going to believe that?”

It didn’t matter how well I could lie—and I was damn good—these guys knew me too well. “Fine. He is hot, but that’s not what I hired him. I want to figure out his motives. I want to know if he was forced to apply by his family or if he’s here of his own volition?”

“You could find that out without hiring him,” Carter said. “Admit it. He intrigued you.”

Worth was grinning so wide his cheeks had to hurt.

“All right. Ben does intrigue me. Today was the first time in years I’ve had fun an interview.”

“You interviewed him yourself?” Ford asked.

“How else was I going to figure out if I wanted to hire him as my assistant?”

Worth laughed. “Don’t you have people for that?”

Normally, someone applying for Benjamin’s job would have gone through several preliminary interviews before I spent time with them. I would only meet them if the others thought they were a top candidate. “This is a unique situation.”

“Anybody else want to make a bet on how fast Miles is going to get his dick in this guy?” Worth asked.

“Two days,” Ford said at the same time Carter said he’d give me a week.

“You’re going to get yourself in trouble if you keep hiring people you’re attracted to,” Ford said.

“I’ve had one scandal. One.”

“That’s only because you haven’t been caught with anyone else.”

“Why would I want to work with people I don’t like.”

“You hate Frank.”

“True, so I need to balance things out.”

Carter rolled his eyes. “You like us, but you don’t want to fuck us.”

“Y’all are different. And I work with plenty of people I have no intention of sleeping with.”

“You wouldn’t be in need of a marketing director if you hadn’t slept with her either.”

I huffed. “Maggie was here temporarily.”

“She was damn good at her job,” Ford said. “She could’ve been permanent.”

“Well, she’s very happy in her current position.”

“You two still talk to each other?” Worth asked.

“Sure.”

“She hated your guts when she left.”

I shrugged. “Time heals all wounds.”

Carter snorted. “True for you. No one wants to wait long to get back in your good graces.”

I smiled. “I’m charming. What can I say?”

Ford shook his head. “In all seriousness, is this a good move?”

“You know me. Once I make a decision, I stick with it. No regrets, no looking back.”

“As annoyed as I am by this decision, I have to stand by that policy,” Carter said.

Worth was clearly enjoying our debate. “You could just fuck off from all of it and borrow my yacht for a while.”

“A while? Does that mean you’re going to be in town for more than a week or so?” That was as long as he’s been back for over six months.

Worth sighed. “I told you, my mother is on my ass. So, I’ll be staying in town for a while.”

Ford scoffed. “Don’t worry, he’s prepared. He’s already called up several of his fuck buddies. He wouldn’t want to have to go at night without.”

Carter grinned when I rolled me eyes. Worth was nothing if not predictable. I liked to enjoy myself, and I had my share of lovers. I access to men or women whenever I might want them, but I didn’t need or want someone in my bed every single night. Sometimes I wanted privacy or just a good night’s sleep.

We spent the rest of the evening talking about Worth’s situation with his family and what was expected of him while he was in town, as well as teasing Ford about a guy—a very straight guy—in his tennis league that he was crushing on. We commiserated, and I hoped to hell he wasn’t going to try to push the situation. Ford was the only one of us who really longed for someone who would be there for the long term, but this guy wasn’t it.

Carter didn’t say much. He’d always been the least talkative of the group, but since he left the SEALs, he’d been even quieter than usual. I knew he’d been through hell during his last tour of duty, and I’d never understood why he hadn’t gotten out sooner. It wasn’t like he didn’t have choices. Maybe one day he’d be ready to talk about it.

Around 1 AM, I set down another empty glass. I didn’t want to think about how many had come before it. “I’ve got to call it a night.”

Worth chuckled. “I guess you’ve got to get all your beauty sleep to get ready for your new assistant.”

“Something like that, but he won’t start until Wednesday.” The truth was I was going to be lucky to get two or three hours at this point. I needed to go through the financials I’d been sent

and some other paperwork. Only Ford knew that we'd had our worst quarter in years. Hiring Ben was even more risky than I'd let on to the others. The company would start to suffer if we had another big loss, and any proprietary information being leaked—which I was sure was his family's objective—would be especially bad for our stock prices. I'd be fine if I had to sell off some divisions, but I took the company's success very personally.

BEN

I checked myself in the mirror one final time. Was a white shirt too stark with a blue suit? Was the tie too trendy or did it give me the fashionable look I was going for so I didn't just fade into the background of an office full of men and women in suits?

I glanced at my watch. It would have to do. I needed to get going. I had every intention of being there well before eight o'clock on my first day. I wanted to have a chance to look over my work area before getting started. I gave my dopey orange cat, Felix, a final belly rub and told him to be a good boy while I was gone.

I had no idea how the day would go. I assumed someone—his previous assistant maybe—would train me. But I was a little worried Mr. Montgomery would expect me to magically know what he wanted. In any other workplace that would be laughable, but nothing was ordinary about this job or the man in charge.

Thankfully, the subway ride went as smoothly as possible, and I arrived at the building by seven forty. The concierge greeted me by name and called the executive elevator without my needing to ask. I was prepared for the fast ride this time. When the doors slid open, I saw Mr. Montgomery in the lobby talking with another man who was almost as gorgeous, though in more of a hot professor kind of way. Mr. Montgomery's suit jacket was off, and his hair was still wet from the shower. It was all I could do not to swoon.

Do not look at his ass.

I looked. It was perfection. His suit pants were made to show it off. I wondered if he'd requested that specifically.

He laughed at something other man said, and in that moment, I knew I really wasn't going to turn him down if he

propositioned me or if he made it clear my job involved more than paperwork, phone calls, and protecting his time.

The sound made me shiver. He looked so relaxed, so pleased with himself. I guessed he had plenty of reasons to be pleased, but damn it looked good on him.

“I think your new assistant is here,” the other man said.

Mr. Montgomery turned around and graced me with a smile. “Benjamin, I see you also like to start the day early.”

“Yes, sir. I wanted to get familiar with everything at my desk before the day started.”

“Why don’t we take a look at everything together?”

“I’m sure you’re busy. I can look around on my own and then whenever...your previous assistant or whoever will be training me arrives, they can explain my duties.”

Mr. Montgomery shook his head. “I prefer a personal touch.”

The man he’d been talking to coughed, and Mr. Montgomery turned to face him.

“Don’t you have somewhere to be?”

He shrugged. “Not anywhere as interesting as this.” He glanced in my direction, then back at Mr. Montgomery.

“Benjamin, this is Ford Wainwright. He is my corporate attorney and a close friend. Ford, this is Benjamin. As you guessed, he’s my new assistant.”

“Welcome to Montgomery Enterprises.” Mr. Wainwright held out his hand, and I shook it. Then he turned back to my boss. “Maybe you were right after all.”

“I always am,” Mr. Montgomery answered.

Something was clearly going on between them that I didn’t understand.

“I’m sure I’ll be seeing you again soon,” Mr. Wainwright said to me, then to Mr. Montgomery, “Call me later.”

As he walked away, Mr. Montgomery said, “Don’t pay any attention to him.”

“Even if he requests a meeting with you later?”

He grinned. “Seeing that he’s my lawyer, you probably shouldn’t ignore him then. Now, let’s take a look at your setup and see what you might need.

“I’m sure whatever your previous assistant used will be fine.”

“Possibly. Possibly not.”

He studied the chair behind my desk and frowned. “We’ll order you a new one. This one has been here for at least two years.”

“I’m sure it’s fine.”

“I like my assistants to be comfortable so they can concentrate on their work.”

“I promise I’ll be comfortable enough in this chair.”

“Comfortable enough isn’t what I’m going for, and this system could be updated,” he said as he looked at the computer. “I will have what you need by tomorrow.”

I stared at the state-of-the-art equipment on the desk. What would it be like to have so much money you could throw it around like this? Of course, office equipment was probably some sort of tax write-off for him.

A few moments later, a woman walked off the elevator pushing a rolling clothes rack. Several suits covered in plastic hung from it. “Is this your dry cleaning?”

Did billionaires do such mundane things as have dry cleaning sent out, or did they just get new suits when the old ones were dirty?

He shook his head. “These are for you.”

“What do you mean?”

“If you’re going to work here, then you need to dress to my standards.”

I looked down at my suit. I’d spent hours picking it out when I’d gotten my previous job. It was perfectly appropriate, even for this office. “There’s nothing wrong with what I have on.”

He raised his brows. Damn. It was my first day and I was already pushing my luck with him. “Your suit is adequate, but we can do better.”

“While my compensation is quite competitive, I can’t afford to dress to your style.”

“You’ve misunderstood. Providing you with office wear is one of the perks I provide my assistant.”

“So you bought suits for your last assistant?”

Ignoring my question, he picked a suit from the rack and motioned toward his office. “Go try one on in my bathroom.”

“Mr. Montgomery, I’m—”

He cleared his throat and stared at me. He didn’t have to say anything else. I took the suit he was holding and headed into his office.

I slipped it on after spending a few minutes gawking at the luxury of his personal bathroom. He had hand towels that were softer than any I’d ever felt.

The suit fit me almost as perfectly as his suits fit him. How had he known my size? And how did he have this made so quickly? I guess he really did get everything he wanted. Maybe had suit-making elves at his disposal? I wouldn’t be surprised.

When I looked in the mirror, I sucked in a breath. I’d looked good in what I’d worn to work, but in this...I looked fucking amazing. This suit had to cost thousands. I couldn’t accept it, no matter how good I looked.

“Ben, are you dressed?”

“Yes, but—”

The door swung open. Hadn’t I locked it?

He smiled at me in the mirror, then walked—no prowled—around me. “Marisol did an amazing job.”

“Is she your tailor?”

“She is that and more.” I raised a brow, and he scowled. “She’s the kindly grandmother I never had.”

“Oh. I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have assumed—”

He cut me off with a wave of his hand. “Just show her respect when you meet her.”

“Of course. Am I going to be meeting her?”

“I’m sure you will eventually.”

I didn’t like the way he seemed to have made plans for me. For us? I wanted to work for him, but despite my fantasies, I knew better than to get involved with him any other way. Why would he introduce me to someone he cared about even if I were more than his assistant? Anything that happened between us wouldn’t be more than a fling, maybe just a single hookup. Wouldn’t it?

It was ridiculous to even think about such a thing. Why on earth would he want me? He could have any man he wanted, and if he didn’t already know my background, it wouldn’t be long before he figured it out. My time here was limited.

I started to slip out of the suit jacket, and he scowled. “What are you doing?”

“I can’t accept this. It’s too much.”

“If you worked for UPS, would you refuse to wear their uniform?”

These suits could hardly be compared to a uniform. “No, but this is not like—”

“This is a job. I’m providing you clothes to do it in. That’s all.”

“These clothes are—”

“What I would like you to wear.” Was he ever going to let me finish a sentence? He narrowed his eyes at me. “Are you going to be this much trouble every day?”

I shook my head. “No, sir.”

“Good. I’ll expect you to wear these. I’ll have some shirts and ties delivered later today.”

“Really I—”

“What happened to doing whatever I ask?”

I couldn’t piss him off on the first day. “Nothing, sir. Thank you. The suit is...I don’t even have words for it.”

“Like I don’t have words for the way you look in it,” he muttered as he walked out the door. I stared after him. Had he actually said that? Or had I just imagined it? What the hell had I gotten myself into?

MILES

I'd left my door open on purpose so I could look out at Ben in the lobby. He was wearing the pinstripe suit I'd picked out for him with a lilac tie. I wanted to devour him.

For the past week, I'd gotten less than half my usual amount of work done, all because I couldn't stop watching Ben.

I wondered how he would react if I brought him into my office and put him over the desk so I could work off some of this tension. I wasn't ready to make that kind of move yet, though. I needed some more time to make sure I understood his real motives for being here.

Not that fucking the enemy wasn't fun. I would enjoy him either way, but I preferred to know what I was getting into.

So far, Carter hadn't found anything to indicate Ben had attempted to contact his family or share any sensitive information he'd been privy to, but I wasn't taking chances. Hopefully, he wasn't intending to sell me out. What I really wanted was for him to be here for completely innocent reasons, then I could defile that innocence.

My intercom buzzed. I cleared my throat before responding. "Yes, Benjamin."

"Mr. Armentrout is here to see you, sir."

"Send him in." I didn't like the expression on Carter's face when he entered my office. I could tell he had bad news.

"What's wrong?" I asked after he closed the door behind him.

"Check out these phone records." He laid the papers on my desk.

"These are Ben's?"

"Yes. I'm assuming you recognized his number. The number highlighted in yellow is his brother and the green highlight

shows calls from his father.”

My pulse accelerated. There were calls from his brother almost daily for the last few weeks. “Fuck.”

“He’s clearly in close contact with his family,” Carter said.

“That doesn’t mean he’s giving them information.”

“No, it doesn’t. But it does raise the likelihood they are pushing him to.” He glanced toward the door, then back at me. “I still think the best thing to do is to let him go.”

I shut my head. “Not an option.”

“Miles—”

“Having him here is the best way to keep an eye on what he and his family are up to.”

“I know you want to—”

“He stays. End of discussion.”

“You want to protect him, don’t you?”

I sighed as I ran a hand through my hair. “So what if I do?”

Carter gave a resigned smile. “You like him.”

“I appreciate—”

“You like him. It’s okay to admit that.”

That was something I couldn’t admit. Ever since college, since I saw what happened to Emily, I made sure not to let feelings for anyone run too deep. “Since when are you all about sharing feelings?”

He chuckled. “Asking you to share your feelings doesn’t mean I have to share mine.”

“Go.” I pointed toward the door.

“Before I do, I wanted to run an idea by you.”

I frowned, not sure I was going to like this.

“What if we deliberately give Ben some false information, something that’s just the sort of thing his father would want to get his hands on?”

“To test him?”

“Yes.”

I glanced toward the door, even though it was closed now, and I couldn't see Ben. It was a good plan and the right one if I was focused on what was best for the business. I normally wouldn't have hesitated to test an employee's loyalty like that, but I didn't like doing it to Ben.

“Miles?”

“Fine. We'll do it.”

Carter met my gaze. “I know you want him to be innocent.”

“I want to protect this company.”

“You'd prefer both.”

I would, and I hoped this was a gamble I wouldn't lose.

I glanced at the time as I slipped on my Rolex. I was definitely going to be late. I should never have let Worth keep me out so late, and I really should have left when he and the young men who'd clustered around him started doing shots.

I had a meeting today with my top executives, one that was going to be tedious as hell since they'd want to focus on our drop in profits. It was a terrible day to be late.

I'd planned to call Ben during my drive so we could go over some points before the meeting, but my phone started ringing before my driver opened the car door for me. I slid inside, set my briefcase down, and glanced at the screen. It was my mother. She was rarely awake at this hour, what the hell was she doing calling me?

I knew if I didn't take the call, I would only have to listen to her berate me for ignoring her along with whatever else she wanted to tell me.

“Good morning, Mother.”

She launched into a seemingly unending rant about all the ways my sister's wedding planner was ruining everything and

apparently my father wasn't even concerned. I tuned out after the first few seconds. My sister and I had hardly spoken in years, and while I'd attend the wedding, I didn't care about the details any more than my father did. When I was finally able to get her off the phone, I realized we were stuck in a snarl of traffic a few blocks from the building, and I was already a few minutes late. "I'll get out here."

"Okay, sir. The usual time tonight?"

"No. It will probably be later. I'll let you know when I'm ready."

"Yes, sir."

I slipped from the car and darted in front of a taxi, receiving a squawk from the driver as I reached the sidewalk.

I rushed along, trying to get around a group of tourists who were blocking the way. "People are trying to get to work here." I grumbled as I pushed my way past.

A kid in roller skates darted in and out around people, and I slipped between him and a yet another slow walker, making him hop the curb and nearly fall into the street. At Montgomery Enterprises, everyone made way for me. I expected the same thing on the street, but I ended up with this bullshit. That was why I rarely walked. If things weren't so dire now, I would be comfortably waiting in the car for traffic to clear. I liked the world to run on my directives, and the sooner I figured out what had gone wrong last quarter, the sooner I could get back to having exactly that.

When I reached my office, Ben wasn't at his desk. Since Vivi had taken up my time during the drive, I'd rushed through to get here as fast as I could so we could talk through the meeting, and he would know what to focus on in his meeting notes.

He should have been in well before now. He always came in early and had coffee waiting for me and a report of my schedule for the day. I double checked my phone. I didn't have any messages from him.

This day was quickly going to shit. I called Ben as I tossed my briefcase on my desk, but he didn't answer. "Where the hell are you?" I asked his voicemail before hanging up in disgust.

For a moment, fear mixed with my annoyance. What if something had happened to him? I pushed that thought from my mind. He was fine. He'd probably overslept or something. I could bitch at him about it later, but I couldn't wait for him any longer. I was already late for the meeting. I grabbed a file folder from my briefcase and left my office.

I took a deep breath and pushed open the boardroom door. "Good morning, everyone."

None of them had the nerve to point out that I was late, but I could tell several of them wanted to.

Assholes.

I impatiently listened as Frank, my long-winded CFO, began his report detailing precisely how our profit margins had been affected.

BEN

Of all the days for my alarm to malfunction, I would have chosen today to be at the bottom of the list. My phone rang as I was rushing to get dressed. I answered it without paying attention, assuming it was Miles—I'd begun to think of him by his given name, but I didn't have the nerve to call him that yet. He often called me on his way to the office whenever the day started with something big. I didn't want to tell him I was running late, but it would be even worse to ignore him.

That was one thing he did not tolerate. And he didn't have to. Everyone who met him fawned over him, wanting something from him: money, status, his gorgeous-as-fuck body.

Unfortunately, it wasn't Miles. It was my brother, Jesse.

"So you finally decided it was in your best interest to take a call from me," he said in response to my hello.

"I'm busy. I have to be at work soon."

I was about to end the call when he snapped. "You'll regret it if you hang up."

I regretted answering the call. He'd been pestering me daily since Miles had hired me. "What do you want?" I asked as I nearly tripped over my cat who was sleeping in the hall.

"You know what I want."

"I don't have any information for you. I've only been working there for a few weeks. This takes time." I didn't know how he thought I was ever going to get access to information so sensitive it stayed in a safe in Mr. Montgomery's office, which as far as I knew only he could open.

"We don't have that kind of time. We've got bills coming due now."

He had bills coming due. Probably payments to loan sharks who scared the shit out of him, no matter how tough he pretended to be. I knew they were working with someone on the inside at Montgomery Enterprises, and I doubted whoever that was intended to pay up before getting the info he wanted. “I am working as fast as I can.”

“That’s a fucking lie. Get me something good, or I’ll come beat it out of you.”

I shivered. Jesse might not be a match for mafia muscle, but I’d been on the wrong end of his fists enough to know how badly he could hurt me.

“You have one week.”

The room spun as he ended the call.

I sank to the floor and Felix ran over to me to rub his face against my side. I picked him up and held him as I lost the battle to hold back my tears. I had to find a way out of this. I didn’t want to give my family anything, but I knew I’d be punished if I didn’t. Between rent and student loan payments, I had next to nothing left of my monthly paychecks, so I wasn’t in a position to go on the run. If I actually did get the information Jesse and my father wanted and got caught, I’d never have another decent job again.

It took me a long time to get myself together. I raced to get dressed and hurried out of the house after a quick goodbye to Felix. This was a terrible day to be late. Miles had an important meeting with his top executives. If he fired me for being late, I would have no money and no information to give my brother.

The meeting was in progress when I stepped into the board room. Everyone turned to look at me and heat rose up my neck and face. Miles glared at me and pointed to a chair next to him without stopping the dressing down he was giving Frank, the CFO.

“I expect you to figure out where the discrepancy is in our financials and when you do, if someone has done this

deliberately, bring them directly to me so I can deal with them personally.”

Ford squeezed his eyes shut and shook his head. “Miles, remember I don’t do murder trials, so don’t put me in that position.”

Miles’s smile was pure evil. “I won’t be charged.”

Mr. Wainwright blew out a pained breath, and I winced. If Miles found out what I’d been sent here to do...would he murder me? How the hell was I going to get out of the trap I was in?

But before I could begin to think of any solutions, Miles pointed at me and barked, “We need to talk in my office.”

“So we’re done here?” Lisa, the COO, asked.

“We are. You all have your orders.”

Frank bristled, obviously not liking the expectation that he would take orders.

“Miles, I’d like to meet with you as soon as possible to go over the planning for our new lab,” Lisa said.

“Ben can get you on my calendar tomorrow.”

She turned to me. “I’ll email you later today.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

I started to follow Miles from the room, but Frank stopped him. “You can’t seriously—”

The look Miles gave him made me shiver, and it wasn’t even directed my way.

“Forgive me.” The man didn’t sound the least bit apologetic. “I believe we can turn things around, but I would like to discuss how we will continue until we do. We need to make a statement to the board by next week.”

“I’ll handle that.”

“I have the latest reports here. If we take a few minutes—”

“I don’t have a few minutes. Send me the most pertinent items and only those.”

The man sighed as Miles walked out of the room. I followed him, not daring to refuse his command. I was far lower in the hierarchy than the other executives, and he didn't even allow them the freedom to disagree with him.

I followed him into his office. He dropped a file folder on his desk and spun to face me. The look on his face confused me. He was angry, but there was something else there, something I couldn't decipher though it felt like eagerness. Maybe he got off on firing employees.

Or maybe....

No. I'd fantasized plenty about being called to his office, bent over his desk, and fucked until I was screaming and begging for more, but that was a porn scenario, not real life. In real life, the boss was just a regular asshole, not one who fucked like a dream and who was a bad boy who could be reformed.

"Close the door and lock it," he ordered.

My pulse accelerated. It wasn't unusual for us to have a closed-door meeting, but something about his tone of voice had my hands shaking as I obeyed his command. I swallowed hard and turned the lock.

"Explain yourself."

Heat rushed to my face, and I wasn't sure I could speak. What did he know? Had he figured out my family connections? Anything I said could make things worse.

Finally, I cleared my throat and said, "About what, sir?"

"You weren't here. I had a crucial meeting, and you didn't show up." I exhaled my relief. I could explain being late. I'd been on time ever other day. Surely he wasn't going to fire me over this one mistake. As I was formulating my response, he continued, "Why did you apply for this job?"

Fuck. Does he know. Think. Think. "It was an excellent opportunity and a chance to work for a well-respected company."

"Bullshit." He stared at me, letting his gaze run up and down my body. I hated how much it turned me on. I wanted him so

damn much, more maybe than I wanted to run, which was stupid. Running was what I should have done when Jesse told me I had to apply for this job. I should have run gotten myself as far away from my family as I could get.

“You already had a good job.”

“This one was better.”

He studied me, letting the silence build. “There were qualifications you didn’t meet.”

Did he know just how much I’d lied on my résumé? “Then why did you hire me?”

“That’s an excellent question. Maybe an even better one is why should I keep you on here? You disappointed me today.”

“It won’t happen again.”

He nodded. “You’re right. It won’t.”

“I need this job.”

He shook his head. “You could get another one.”

Not one where I could steal secrets for my father. If I got fired, he’d blame me, and I might not get another chance to prove I could be useful. “You can’t fire me for being late one time.” Fuck. I sounded pathetic.

“I can do anything I want.”

He could. Anything. With a snap of his fingers, I could be escorted out of the building, or even murdered and never seen again.

No. He wouldn’t kill me. He wasn’t really going to kill whoever had fucked up their financial reporting either. Was he? When I met his gaze again, I wasn’t so sure. He looked like a predator who was ready to hunt me down.

MILES

I knew it was wrong to enjoy Ben's uncertainty as much as I did. If I were more evil, I'd make him beg, make him pay for his mistake, but I had enough self-control to stop myself. "You're in luck, because what I want is to give you another chance."

"Thank you, sir." I could get off to that submissive tone in his voice so easily.

"Do not be late again."

"I won't. Today was...an anomaly."

I gave a quick nod of acknowledgement. "It wasn't a day for anomalies. It was a day for being focused."

"Yes sir. I'm sorry. I will transcribe the meeting recording and have that for you soon."

"See that you do."

"Is there anything else?" Ben glanced nervously toward the door.

There was so much else I wanted, but it wasn't time for that yet. However, I could indulge one of my desires. I hadn't arranged a date to the gala I was hosting the next day. Partly because the only person I wanted to go with was Ben. I'd considered asking him and rejected the idea. Now, with him in front of me, so eager to please, so pliant. I couldn't resist the urge. "I have a proposition for you."

"What is it, sir?" I saw concern flash in his eyes. I could guess what he thought I would propose, and while I fully intended to get to that, this wouldn't be my approach. Although, if he kept using that soft voice and calling me sir....

"As you know, we're hosting a gala tomorrow night to benefit the Artistic Endeavors Foundation." Most of the arrangements

had been made before I hired Ben, but he'd brought me plenty of papers to sign about it and accompanied the event planners to the building's upper-level event space.

"Of course."

"I'd like you to accompany me."

He frowned. "As your assistant?"

I smiled. "If you like."

"Mr. Montgomery, I'm afraid I'm really not prepared. I would need formal wear, and I'm not sure what you would need me for. If you would let me—"

"Hush."

Ben stiffened at the harsh command.

"Marisol will deliver a tux for you later today."

"You're having a tux made for me?"

To see that look of wonder on his face, I'd have a castle built for him. "It's part of your job to attend this function. I told you I would be providing your work wardrobe."

Ben frowned. "You're not doing that for anyone else here."

"How do you know?" Color rose in his cheeks. "Ben?"

"Because I'd be able to tell. Your taste is excellent."

His praise was doing dangerous things to me. "I'm glad you noticed."

"I notice a lot of things."

I looked him up and down slowly. "I think you do."

"What would you need me to do at the gala?"

"Be observant."

He frowned. "That's all?"

"And keep me company. Most of these things are dead boring, and I get preyed up on by gold diggers and people who want to exploit their connection to me."

"Surely you have someone else who could—"

“I’m asking you.”

He clearly wanted to question me, but he stopped himself. “I’ll be there.”

“My car will pick you up at seven thirty. You can mingle during the cocktail hour, then you’ll be seated at my table for dinner.”

“Okay. I can do that, but you never said what you want me to observe.”

“Anyone who seems to be disgruntled. Anyone talking in a way that indicates they’ve just increased their income unexpectedly.”

“So, you want me to help you figure out what’s going on with the financial reporting?”

“Yes, and also, let me know if anyone is talking too enthusiastically about the company, oversharing. I want to be sure no one is sharing proprietary information.”

He looked taken aback for a moment, but he schooled his face quickly. “I...I can do that.”

“Good.” I nodded. “I’d like to know about anyone who’s acting suspiciously interested, like they are seeking information about the company that is none of their business.”

“Yes, sir.” He was pale now, and clearly scared. I was toying with him. It wasn’t nice, but then I wasn’t nice, and if he was innocent, it ultimately wouldn’t matter.

BEN

I was uncomfortable as hell, but not because of what I was wearing. The tux Marisol had made fit me perfectly. The fabric was soft and as comfortable as formal wear could possibly be. I was uncomfortable because I did not belong at a function like this. If I were being honest, I didn't belong in the C-suite at Montgomery Enterprises. I still wasn't sure why Miles had hired me. I wasn't qualified. I was sure he knew that, though I had done a fine job so far. I prayed he hadn't hired me to humiliate me as punishment for trying to infiltrate the company. I couldn't help feeling like the other shoe would drop at any second.

Would he expose me at the gala? I didn't think so. Making a scene at a fundraiser wasn't his style.

I hadn't known what to think about him sending a car to pick me up. The sleek black limo was beyond out of place in my neighborhood. Several people came out on their stoops or fire escapes to watch as the chauffeur opened the door for me.

Miles wasn't in the car. I wasn't sure if I was relieved or disappointed. He probably had dozens of limos and drivers at his disposal, and this wasn't a date. He'd asked me to go with him as his assistant. Hadn't he?

His "if you like" rang in my head. What had he meant by that? Was this a date? No. Billionaires didn't actually date their assistants. If he wanted me, he'd make that clear. He wouldn't expect to need to wine and dine me, and he would be right because, God help me, I'd give him whatever he asked for. If he made a move, there was no way I was going to be able to turn him down. Every time he was near me, I was so distracted I could barely do my job.

I took a different elevator than I usually used. This one sent me all the way to the top level where Montgomery Enterprises had a swanky event space as well as a rooftop garden. Miles

had asked me to observe, but I felt like I didn't know enough of the people here to do that effectively. My knowledge had been limited to the people he'd met with since I was hired and a few other assistants or directors I'd needed to interact with. Most of the guests weren't even employees of Montgomery Enterprises. Many were probably the upper echelon of New York society, but I didn't follow society gossip well enough to know anyone other than a few actors and one famous model that I'd had to fight not to gape at.

I was nervous to go up to people and try to join their conversations. Most of the people were talking about their investments, their other charitable donations, their yachts, and where they would be traveling over the next few months when it was too hot for anyone to stay in New York, anyone except those of us who didn't have the money to leave. Of course, if I managed to keep this job, it wouldn't be too long before I would be able to at least take modest vacations. But first, I had to get out of debt and figure out how to get my family off my back.

I couldn't have actually been mingling that long, but it felt like forever, and I still hadn't seen Miles.

That was fine. He wasn't my date. It wasn't his job to show me around. I was here to work for him, but that didn't stop me from being anxious to see him up close and personal in a tux. At least I would see him eventually since he'd promised we'd be seated together for dinner.

I made another circle of the room, listening to conversations, especially when I noticed someone I knew from the office. I spent a few moments talking with the PR director and few older women she introduced me to. They were pleasant, and at least the conversation focused on art and jewelry, something I knew more about than I did yachts and exotic travel locales.

I was able to snag several canapés from passing waiters, and I was starting on my second glass of champagne when I finally saw Miles.

He was standing near the stage where he would give the welcome speech once everyone had been served dinner.

I watched him, telling myself I should keep walking. When he looked my way, I hesitated. I didn't want to interrupt him, but he waved me over, making it clear he wanted me by his side. I joined him, and he introduced me to Mrs. Eudora Weeks, the director of the Artistic Endeavors Foundation.

Miles only told Mrs. Weeks my name, not that I was his assistant. She beamed as she shook my hand. "How long have you two been together?"

"Oh, we're not—" I said at the same time Miles said, "He's been with me for about three weeks now."

"You two look beautiful together. I'm old enough to get away with saying that, right?"

Miles chuckled. "You certainly are."

What was he doing? Did he want to pretend we were dating because he was uncomfortable with how everyone wanted to get close to him at functions like this? I supposed he could pretend our "relationship" was short-lived. Whatever his plan, I wasn't about to contradict him.

A young woman approached the podium. "Thank you for coming, everyone. If you'll find your tables, we are ready to serve dinner now."

Miles offered an arm to me and to Mrs. Weeks so he could escort us to our table. We were seated on either side of him, and I swore I could feel the warmth of his body even though we were no longer touching.

Miles introduced me to the others who were seated at our table, including an older gentleman who insisted I call him Robert and Mrs. Carson, a middle-aged woman who was on the board of Artistic Endeavors.

A woman closer to my age rushed over to the seat next to Mrs. Weeks, the last available one at the table, and seated herself. She focused on Miles, looking like she wanted to eat him alive. "Miles, it's been far too long since I've seen you."

"It has been a while, hasn't it, April?" The chill in his voice let me know that he could've gone longer without seeing her again. I wondered why she had been seated at this table.

“April, this is Mrs. Weeks. She is the director of Artistic Endeavors.”

“Oh, isn’t that sweet.” She couldn’t have made it more obvious that she didn’t care. “Would you mind switching seats with me, Mrs. Weeks. I would just love to catch up with our dear Miles?”

Mrs. Weeks’s eyes grew wide, and Miles said, “I specifically asked Mrs. Weeks to sit beside me so we could converse about the future of the foundation.”

“Oh, but you wouldn’t mind, would you?” She turned her pleading eyes on Mrs. Weeks who was staring at her like she was an annoying insect.

“Actually, I do.” Mrs. Weeks winked at me, and I had to lift my napkin to my mouth to hide my smile.

April made a sad little moue. “I suppose I understand that. You do have business.”

“Yes,” Mrs. Weeks said. “We do.”

If I was April, I would get up and slink away after their dismissal, but she stayed put, smiling widely at Miles.

Probably to keep Mrs. Weeks from continuing to be on the spot, Miles gestured toward me. “April, I’d like to introduce you to Benjamin.”

She observed me skeptically, and from the corner of my eye, I couldn’t miss Mrs. Weeks making a face at her.

“Oh, he’s your new assistant, isn’t he?” April asked.

Miles scowled. “Benjamin has been invaluable to Montgomery Enterprises since he joined us.”

Warmth rushed from my toes all the way to my face. I knew Miles was likely exaggerating because he was clearly annoyed with April but hearing him complement me like that made me feel so damn good. I didn’t dare look his way. He would see all over my face exactly how I felt about him.

“I’m sure that’s true,” April said. “Perhaps he has some work to do now, and I could have his seat, then we could chat more

easily.”

Robert and Mrs. Carson were staring at April in horror.

I could see Miles stiffen. “Benjamin is here as my guest.” He glanced around the table. “I understood that Marjorie Derringer would be joining us at this table.” He gave April a pointed look. “Are you in her seat?”

April glanced down at the place card in front of her. “Oh, silly me, I got my table number confused.”

“And I see Marjorie by the entrance,” Mrs. Weeks said. “She must’ve been running late.”

With a sigh, April rose from her seat. “It’s been lovely to see you again, Miles. We’ll have to catch up soon.”

“Goodbye, April.” He made the words sound quite final.

“Got yourself a handful with that one,” Robert said.

Miles nodded. “Nothing I can’t handle, though.”

I wanted to think Robert was just referring to Miles having to deal with April’s rudeness, but I couldn’t help but wonder if her assumption that he’d want to reconnect with her indicated they had a past relationship. I knew Miles was bisexual, but I hadn’t heard anything about April in the weeks I’d been at Montgomery Enterprises.

Dinner was served before any other controversies could arise at our table.

The food was delicious, though I’d expected nothing less. The conversation flowed easily at the table. I mostly listened since I didn’t feel like I had much to contribute to discussions of donations and the intricacies of charitable foundations, but when we begin to talk about what Mrs. Weeks hoped to do with the facility in the next few years, I grew braver.

Mrs. Weeks encouraged me to share my ideas. I gave a suggestion about programs in elementary schools that everyone at the table seem to like, and Miles smiled at me warmly. “I meant what I said about Ben being invaluable.”

He laid his hand on my leg under the table. It was warm and soothing, and I missed his touch when he moved it away.

As the caterers brought dessert, Miles pushed his chair back. "Time for our presentation."

As he held out his hand to Mrs. Weeks, she glanced longingly at the luscious chocolate confection on her plate.

"Don't worry, Mrs. Weeks," I told her. "I won't let anyone take it away."

She beamed. "Thank you and do call me Eudora."

Miles gave me a smile that was different from any he'd previously bestowed on me. It held warmth and a sense of something shared. Somehow, it felt almost painfully intimate.

Or was I just imagining it? The idea that he felt more for me than appreciation of the job I was doing was ridiculous. I glanced around the ballroom. This was not a world I belonged in. Miles wasn't a man I could have. I appreciated that he wanted me to participate in dinner and conversation, but April was right. I was just his assistant. I didn't belong here.

I barely heard any of Miles's speech. My stomach suddenly seemed displeased with dinner and my skin grew clammy. I needed to get out of there. The longer I stayed, pretending to be Miles's date, the further I was going to fall into the fantasy that he saw me as more than a valuable employee.

After their speeches, Miles and Eudora were caught up in a crowd of people vying for their attention. When waiters came to clear the table, Mrs. Weeks hadn't even made it halfway back from the podium.

"Would you please wrap these up for Mrs. Weeks and Mr. Montgomery?" I ask one of the waiters.

The young man smiled. "Of course. I'd be happy to arrange that."

As we stood for the tables to be whisked away to make room for dancing, Mrs. Weeks finally made it over to me. "Don't worry. I had them box up your cake. You can pick it up whenever you're ready."

She rose on tiptoe to kiss me on the cheek. “You’re an angel. Miles was absolutely right about you.”

I didn’t dare ask for clarification. If Miles had been talking about me to her, I was better off not knowing what had been said.

“I guess April made it obvious that we’re not actually together.”

She studied me for a moment. “You really haven’t a clue, have you? I’ve been around a long time, and I see how you look at each other, you’re very much together, or at least you want to be.”

I simply smiled, deciding that continuing the conversation was much too dangerous, but I couldn’t help glancing toward the last spot where I had last seen Miles. He’d disappeared into the crowd.

I escorted Mrs. Weeks to the bar where she got a drink and then fell into conversation with a few other ladies. I slipped away, wanting to step out onto the roof for a breath of air. It was warm with all the people circulating—or maybe that was the several glasses of champagne I consumed.

I was standing on the patio outside the ballroom. Several others were out there too, but most of them headed back inside as soon as music began to filter through the doors. I’d known there would be dancing, but I hadn’t really thought about the awkwardness of it. I suppose I could ask Mrs. Weeks to dance if she was available, but I could also try to hide out here a little bit longer.

I was lost in thought when I realized someone was approaching. I turned to see a man who was probably in his mid-fifties. He was comfortable, round, and tanned like he was very fond of his yacht, his house in the Hamptons, or both. He wasn’t unattractive, but there was something about the way he was looking at me that made me uneasy, and from his obvious lack of balance I could tell he’d been drinking heavily.

“I haven’t seen you at one of these shindigs before.”

“I joined Montgomery Enterprises recently. This is my first time attending.” I wasn’t sure if he meant this particular fundraiser or the charity circuit in general, but I left it at that.

“Oh, yes. I do believe I’ve heard of you. You’re Benjamin, aren’t you?”

“I am.” I wasn’t sure of why he would’ve heard about me unless it was from Miles or one of his friends. Who was this man?

He didn’t offer his own name, instead, he said, “You don’t feel like dancing?”

“I do actually. I was planning to go in soon.” Something about the way he was speaking to me made me uneasy.

“I have a much better suggestion. There’s a nice bench in the garden. Why don’t you come with me, and we’ll amuse ourselves with something far better than dancing.” He dropped his hand to his crotch and rubbed it up and down.

I shuddered. “No. I’m going back inside.”

When I turned toward the building, he grabbed my arm, fingers biting into me. “Don’t play coy. Of course you want to step out into the garden with me.”

I felt sick to my stomach, but I knew I had to keep asserting myself. Men like him fed on weakness. “I want to go back inside. I have people waiting on me.”

He snorted. “I doubt that.” I tried to take another step, but he tightened his grip on my arm.

“Let me go.”

“They’ll be plenty of time for dancing later.”

“No.”

“Come on.” He pulled me toward him. “It’s boring in there.”

MILES

“Are you having trouble with your hearing, Medford? He said he wasn’t interested.”

Medford waved me off with his free hand. “Don’t bother yourself about this.”

“Anytime someone gets pushy with my assistant, I’m going to be bothered.”

“Oh, you must have misunderstood.”

I took Ben’s arm, guiding him away from Medford. “Did I misunderstand the situation, Benjamin?”

He glanced at Medford then back at me. “No, sir.”

“It’s time for you to leave, Medford, and if I ever see you near Benjamin again, you’ll lose a lot more than an opportunity to exploit my free bar for the evening.”

The asshole’s mouth dropped open, and he sputtered. “I don’t understand. I was simply—”

“Thinking you could take advantage of my employee.”

He looked between the two of us. “I didn’t know your employees got such special treatment.”

“I don’t consider ensuring the safety of my employees special treatment.”

“He propositioned me, then changed his mind. He’s the one you should be angry with, especially if he’s such a special little pet.”

Fury consumed me, and I punched the bastard hard enough to send him sprawling. I drew back my fist to hit him again as he struggled to his knees, but a hand around my arm stopped me.

“Miles, don’t.” I turned toward Ben. The color was gone from his face, and instantly nothing mattered more than him.

Security guards arrived seconds later. I turned to them, and Ben kept his hold on me. “Get this scum out of here. If he returns, have him arrested.”

“Yes, sir.”

One of the men reached for Medford, but he shook them off, saying, “I’m leaving.”

They followed him toward the door. I ignored the interested crowd that had gathered on the patio and focused on Ben.

“Are you all right?”

“I’m fine. You didn’t have to—”

“Yes, I did.”

He met my gaze. “You punched him.”

“I sure did. I might have killed him if you hadn’t stopped me.”

“Miles, I’m okay.”

“But he didn’t intend for you to be, and it’s my job to protect you.”

“Because I’m your employee?”

I chose not to answer, flexing my fingers instead. Damn they were going to be bruised.

“Do you need some ice?” Ben asked.

I could manage without it. I could stay here, circulate, and try to squash whatever rumors were flying about the incident. That would be the smart thing to do, but asking Ben to get me ice would give me a chance to be alone with him, and that was so much more attractive. I had PR people to handle the gossip.

“I would love for you to ice my hand.”

“I could just bring you—”

I shook my head. “Let’s go to my office.”

He gave me a confused look.

“My office is quiet, and I have an ice machine under my mini bar.”

“I’m not sure....”

“Come with me. I need some time away and it will give you a chance to recover after...” I waved a hand around. “All this.”

He looked down at my hand. “You do need ice.”

I nodded, happy to let him care for me.

“They’re keeping Mrs. Weeks’s dessert in the kitchen. I was going to get it for her when she was ready to go.”

I chuckled. “Knowing her, she won’t leave until they kick her out. She loves dancing.” I glanced inside and saw her twirling around with Robert. “Trust me. She’s fine.”

“Okay.”

“Let me call my PR director. This will only take a moment.” When I was done with the call, I held out the hand that wasn’t throbbing. He took it and the warmth of his skin made me smile. I led him to a different exit from the rooftop garden, one that wouldn’t require us to walk through the crowd of guests.

As we stepped inside, Ben hesitated, “Are you sure this is a good idea?”

I grinned. “No, but I want to do it anyway. What about you?”

“Yeah, I do.” He looked away, but he tightened his grip on my hand.

I let go of his hand before we exited the elevator. He didn’t deserve to be caught up even further in my latest scandal. As long as we looked professional, it was perfectly normal to bring my assistant back to my office. It might not be normal to punch a man on his behalf, but I had a damn good reason, and my PR director would spin it for me. Gossip couldn’t really touch me. I’d become immune to it by the time I was out of college, but I would do anything necessary to keep it from hurting Ben.

When we reached my office, Ben headed for the bathroom. He grabbed a washcloth and filled it with ice from the bar. Once he’d handed it to me, I dutifully placed it against my aching knuckles.

“This office really is equipped with everything,” he said.

I grinned. “Only the best for me.”

“Right.”

“Like you.”

His eyes widened. “W-what do you mean?”

“You’re the best.”

“I told you I was good at my job.” He tried to act sassy as he said it, but I could see the unease in his eyes.

“You are very good at your job, and you’re also....”

“Mr. Montgomery?”

I moved closer to him. “Benjamin, I’m used to getting what I want.”

He nodded. “I’m sure you are.”

“I didn’t like seeing Medford talking to you and when he touched you, I would have killed him if there hadn’t been so many witnesses.”

He tilted his head to the side, clearly trying to decide how serious I was. “I...um...I appreciate you rescuing me.”

“I won’t let anyone hurt you.”

“That’s not your job.”

“What if I want it to be.”

“I’m not sure.... What do you....”

Was he really going to let me dance around it like that? Would he never ask what it was that I wanted? No, he wouldn’t. I was going to have to spell it out. I was going to have to cross that line myself, but I’d always been one to take risks. I sure as hell wouldn’t be where I was now if I hadn’t been.

I closed the last of the distance between us. I saw him hesitate, but his instincts didn’t tell him to run. They told him to hold his ground and see what I had to offer.

I circled him, and he turned, watching me the whole time. When his back was to the desk, I gripped his waist and lifted

him, sitting him on the edge. His sharp intake of breath only made me want him more.

“Wh-what is happening?”

“I’m going to kiss you.”

“You are?”

“Yes, and then I’m going to lay you back on this desk and fuck you until come so hard you can’t breathe.”

“I...I’m...I haven’t ever....”

I froze. Could he seriously mean...I ran my thumb over his bottom lip, so fucking desperate to touch him. I needed to taste him too, but I could force myself to wait. “What haven’t you ever done?”

His cheeks were bright pink, and he looked away. His innocence only made him hotter. If this was real, if I was going to get to be his first....

“Look at me Benjamin.”

When he did, I saw the answer in his eyes. Fear, desire, innocence. He was everything, and I was going to take such good care of him. “I’m a virgin.”

I nodded slowly, not wanting to frighten him more with the reaction I was having inside. I’d never sought out a virgin before, hadn’t fucked one since high school, but I was thrilled Ben was all mine. I didn’t care if that was fucked up, I didn’t care if his motives were still being questioned by my friends, I was going to fuck him, but not tonight. That could wait for later.

“What have you done?”

He blushed even harder. “Some things.”

“Tell me, Ben. Tell me everything you’ve done.”

“I...don’t know....”

I brushed his lips with my thumb again. “Have you kissed a man?”

“Yes.”

That one was easy. “Has a man touched you? Wrapped his hand around your cock and made you come.”

“Y-yes.”

“Have you sucked cock Benjamin?”

He nodded.

“Look at me.” Slowly, he did. “Did you enjoy it?”

“Y-yes.”

“Good. I’m going to kiss you now, and I’m going to make you come. We’ll wait on everything else. I’m going to be your first, but I’m going to take my time getting there.”

“Mr. Montgomery—”

“I think you should call me Miles.”

“I don’t...I’m not sure....”

“I am. I won’t be Mr. Montgomery in bed, not with you anyway.”

“What’s happening?”

“You know what’s happening.”

“You...you’re going to kiss me.”

“That’s right. I sure I am.” I moved closer, my lips just inches away from his.

“Why are you doing this?”

“Because I want you, and I get what I want.”

“But you...you’re my boss...we’re not supposed to....”

“Do you want this, Benjamin? Do you want to feel my lips on you, my hands on you?”

Benjamin nodded. There was no hesitation.

“That’s what I thought.” I lowered my lips to his, brushing them gently at first, then deepening the kiss.

His arms came around me as he kissed me back, surprising me with his strength and intensity.

I cupped his face in my hands, deepening the kiss, invading his mouth. He groaned and opened for me, relaxing in my arms as I nibbled his lower lip.

His reaction was everything I wanted. I was going to be his first. I was going to fully possess him.

When I pulled back. He smiled at me, looking dazed, but a moment later his expression turned serious. “Are you sure about this?”

“I’ve never been more sure about anything, and I’m a man who knows his own mind.” I eased him back onto his feet. “Hold on to the desk.”

“Mr. Mont—Miles. I...”

“Don’t disobey me.”

The way he sucked in his breath made me even harder. He was such a fucking treat. I sank slowly to my knees, and Ben gasped. “What are you...?”

“You know how you said you enjoyed sucking dick?”

He nodded, that adorable blush returning to his cheeks.

“So do I.”

I reached for the fastenings of his pants. He started to take over the job, but I shook my head. “I told you to hold on to the desk. I’m in charge.”

“Fuck.”

I smiled. “You’re going to like this.”

“Too much,” he said.

“How long do you think you can last?”

“I don’t know...probably not long.”

“What if I want you to last a long time so I can enjoy your cock in my mouth and I make you feel like you’re on top of the world?”

“I’ll try.”

“I think you’ll do better than that. I think you’ll do whatever I say.”

BEN

Why had I ever promised him I'd do anything he asked? I would let him seduce me. I wanted him to be the first man to fuck me. I longed to be able to do anything he asked in bed, but there was no way in hell I was going to be able to hold back for long. The very idea of my dick in Miles Montgomery's mouth was too much.

How could any of this be real? Maybe it was a dream. I hadn't had a wet dream in ages, but maybe tonight was the night. Maybe I'd wake up with the sheets damp from my cum, or maybe....

Miles's hand wrapped around my cock, and I couldn't think anymore. All I could do was look down and watch as he stroked me. "Miles?"

"Yes, baby." Fuck that was even sexier than when he used my full name.

"I don't know if I can. Just your hand is enough to—"

He squeezed hard at the base. "Breathe."

"Can't."

"You can. You can do anything, and right now what you're going to do is not come until I'm ready for you to. I want to explore you. I want to touch and taste you everywhere."

He kept the base of my cock in a tight grip, holding me back, but he slid his other hand into my pants. I shuddered when he fondled my balls, tugging gently on them, then pressing further back, fingers stroking my taint and then my hole.

I tensed, ready for him to push inside me, but he didn't. He pulled his hand from my pants and smiled up at me. When he let go of my cock, I sucked in a breath, still not at all sure I could do what he asked.

"Let's get these pants all the way off. I need better access to you."

I glanced at the windows. They were wide open, and anyone could see in.

Miles just grinned. “If anyone can see us way up here. Let them enjoy the show. You’re fucking gorgeous. It would make their day.”

“You...you’re...too much.”

“Do you like it?”

I nodded.

“You’ll like this more.” He swiped his tongue over the tip of my cock, and I gasped. He laughed, his warm breath rushing over me.

“Please.”

“Tell me what you want.”

Even if I wasn’t embarrassed as hell, I wasn’t sure I was physically capable of speech.

“Benjamin, talk to me.”

“I...it’s so good.”

He moved back, and I whimpered, reaching for him. “Don’t worry. I’m not going anywhere; I just need to get you undressed. Step out of your shoes.”

It took me a moment to remember how to do that. I toed off my shoes as Miles pushed my pants to the floor. When I stepped out of the puddle of fabric, he pushed them aside with my shoes.

“Better,” he murmured as he nuzzled my balls. My cock jumped at the sight. I wasn’t at all sure I was going to survive this.

He kissed the edge of my groin, then my hip bones, then finally he took my cock in his mouth. I gripped the desk so tightly I knew my fingers would ache tomorrow.

The exquisite heat of him, the way he swallowed around me, was driving me insane. He wrapped a hand around my shaft and stroked as he slid his lips along my length.

I had to close my eyes, knowing I would come instantly if I kept watching, but when he drew me deeper and began to do things with his tongue that seemed impossible, I opened my eyes. The sight of him with his lips stretched around me nearly made me choke.

He looked up at me. His eyes dark blue were filled with heat. Jesus, he was loving this. This amazing man who could have anyone he wanted was sucking my cock and loving it.

I swayed as the room began to spin. Miles took hold of my hips, steadying me, but he never stopped working my dick. As he kept going, I fought the need to come. I wanted this to last as long as it could. Fuck, I wanted it to last forever, not that I would survive too much longer.

My pulse was going dangerously fast. Could I really hear it? Was it that loud? A moment later, I realized the banging I heard was someone knocking on the door, not actually my heart about to explode.

Panic flooded me, and I tried to push Miles away.

He resisted my efforts, then very slowly pulled off my cock, using his tongue to tease the slit before he yelled, "I'm busy."

"Where the hell is your assistant? I thought he was at the gala."

"He's busy too."

I bit my lip to keep from laughing hysterically. The situation was absurd. It was like something from a movie, not something that would actually happen to me.

"This is important," the man—was it Frank?—yelled.

Miles ignored him and took my dick back down his throat.

When I gasped, he brought his hand up and covered my mouth. He sucked me harder, taking me even deeper, humming around me. I was so close. I was going to come with somebody banging on his door. Someone who thought enough of themselves that they would dare. What if they got in? What if they saw?

Miles used his grip on me to tilt my head down. When I looked into his eyes, he smiled around my dick, and swallowed the last inch of my shaft. I was lost. I pushed at his shoulders, trying to let him know, but he didn't move. Seconds later, my climax washed over me, and the world dimmed. There was nothing but the intense sensation of pumping out my cum down his throat. Down the throat of Miles Montgomery, CEO of Montgomery Enterprises, my boss.

I'm not sure how long it took for me to truly be aware of my surroundings again. The knocking and yelling had stopped, and Miles was looking up at me, satisfaction on his face, like a well-fed predator.

"I...um...what about you?"

He smiled as he came to his feet and one smooth motion. Somehow his tuxedo didn't even look wrinkled, and here I was still wearing my shirt and tie, pants discarded. And no doubt my hair looked like hell, even though I couldn't remember anything happening to it.

Miles walked around the desk again, grabbed his rolling chair, and pulled it around so he could sit in front of me. He spread his legs, unbuckled his pants, and pulled out his cock. It was thick and intimidating, but that didn't keep me from licking my lips. I wanted to taste him, and—God help me—I wanted to feel him inside me. I shouldn't trust him, but I did. Somehow I knew he would make it so good for me. This was dangerous. It was going to blow up in my face. I was going to be sorry, but right then I felt too good with the high of my climax still coursing through me.

He wrapped a hand around himself and started to stroke. I pushed away from the desk, taking an unsteady step, but he shook his head, and I froze. Damn, it was hard to disobey him. "Don't you want me to...?"

"Not yet. Not tonight." His voice was lower and rougher than usual. His throat was probably sore from sucking my cock. The thought made me shiver, and it made my cock stir, wanting to come to life again.

He must have noticed, because his smile widened. “Tonight you’re just going to watch, watch and think about exactly how much you want it.”

“Are you serious?”

“I’m always serious.”

I leaned back against the desk again, not sure I’d be able to stay on my feet.

Miles’s head dropped back against the headrest as he tightened his grip on his cock, groaning as he gave himself a long, slow stroke. My knees threatened to buckle, and I held on to the desk as tightly as I had when his mouth was on me. Not only did I need to steady myself, if I let go, I was going to close the space between us, drop to my knees, and lick the precum that was beaded at his slit.

He’d told me to stay put, and I wanted to please him. What did that say about me? I wasn’t sure, but in that moment I was able to push the thought aside. He was so fucking gorgeous. He looked so filthy splayed out in his chair, pants open, cock out. I imagined riding him like that, straddling him, sinking onto him. I suddenly hated that I’ve never done that. I’d never let a man fuck me. How pathetic was it that I’d waited this long?

Miles brushed his thumb over his slit, then brought it to his mouth. He held my gaze as he licked off the drop of precum. I wanted to kiss him, to taste him off his own lips. He made me want anything and everything. I wished I was more experienced.

“I want to lick you clean. Please let me.” I couldn’t believe I’d gotten those words out, but the wide smile Miles gave me made the embarrassment worth it.

MILES

“Come here, Benjamin.”

Instead of standing up, he crawled across the floor to me. I couldn't take my eyes off him. Knowing that watching me get myself off had him hard again, seeing the hunger in his eyes, and hearing him ask if he could lick the cum off me had nearly driven me mad. He was fucking perfect.

I prayed he had no ulterior motive for applying to be my assistant. I knew he probably did, but I couldn't accept that, not right now.

Ben put his hands on my thighs and slid them back and forth, clearly enjoying the smooth fabric of my tux. It was probably ruined, but if that was all I lost tonight, I'd come out ahead. It was easy enough to have another tux made.

He started with my balls, licking carefully, sucking and moaning as he cleaned up my cum. It was one of the hottest things I'd ever seen. I'd been with plenty of men, some of them had even been professionals, but no one had ever made me feel as out of control as Ben did. He worshipped my cock, licking me carefully, so intent, wanting every drop. I had no doubt he could come again if I jerked him off, but we'd done enough for tonight. I wanted him anticipating, on edge, thinking about me nonstop.

How the hell I was going to get any work done with him in the office? The company needed my focus, but something told me this time with Ben was too special to give up. What I felt for him went beyond lust, and exploring that mattered too, even if it scared the hell out of me.

He lapped up the last of my cum from my stomach, and I pulled him up so I could kiss him, growling into his mouth as I tasted myself on his tongue. I loved that I would send him home smelling like me, with the taste of me in his mouth. I

wanted him covered in my scent. I wanted everyone to know he was mine, but it was too soon.

If there was pressure from his family to betray me, I wasn't about to let anyone else know there was more between us. The fuckers would try even harder to get him to use that against me, or they would hurt him for letting things go this far. Neither was in any way acceptable. I'd considered simply doing away with his family. It wouldn't be that hard for me. I knew people who could take care of it, but I also knew family was complicated. If I did that without talking to him, he might never look at me again the way he was looking at me right now.

Would he ever tell me the truth? If he was here to sabotage me, I wondered if there was any chance he was ready to confess. I doubted he trusted me enough after one rescue and a hot blow job. That wasn't enough to convince a man who'd seen the sort of the shit he had with his family that I would back him up no matter what. Yet, I couldn't resist giving it a try.

I cupped his face in my hands and looked into his eyes. "Is there something you need to tell me?"

His eyes widened, and the color in his face drained away. "I... I'm not sure what you want to hear."

He was terrified, but I needed him to know he could talk to me. "Aren't you?"

"I'm negative for everything if that's your concern and...um... you can't get me pregnant."

I smiled and pulled him to me for a quick kiss. "I could sure as hell try, but like I told you before we're going wait before I fuck you."

"Jesus." He pressed his hands to his face. "How do you make everything sound hot?"

"You're pretty damn good at that yourself."

I could practically hear his mind racing, trying to figure out what else he could say.

“I believe there’s more to your story about why you applied for this job. You can tell me whatever it is.”

Ben shook his head. “I should go home. We have a big day tomorrow.”

“And you will need some good sleep after tonight.”

“I...yeah. Um...is this...we probably shouldn’t have...”

“I told you I am going to be your first, Benjamin.”

“And you are always serious.”

I smiled. “That’s right.”

“But isn’t this...”

“Wrong? Risky?”

He nodded.

“Yes. And that makes it even hotter, doesn’t it?”

He sank his teeth into his bottom lip and color rushed back to his face.

“I’ll take that as a yes.” After a brief pause I tried again. “Are you sure there isn’t something you should tell me?”

“I...can’t.”

“So there is something, but you’re not going to tell me.”

He nodded.

“I will protect you. If you’re in trouble. If you need help. I will make your problems go away.”

“I wanted this job because I knew I’d feel safe here.”

“You are safe with me.” I would make sure of that. I’d hurt someone I cared about in the past, and I wouldn’t let it happen again.

“Thank you. I...appreciate that, but I should go home.”

I studied him for a moment, wanting to push, to insist he come home with me, but that wasn’t the right tactical move. I had to let him make his choice. “I’ll have my driver take you home.”

“That’s not necessary.”

“Yes, it is. You’ve already been assaulted once tonight. I’m going to make sure you get home safely.” I kissed him again, needing to taste him one final time. When I released him, He looked dazed. “You’ll be okay at home alone?”

He ran his teeth over his lower lip before nodding. “I will.”

I texted my driver, and after we dressed, I escorted Ben downstairs, watching until I could no longer see the car.

Nothing in the way he’d looked at me or how he’d responded to my questions made me think he was a willing participant in any of his family’s schemes. He was scared. I wanted to find out what his family planned and make them pay.

I returned to my office and called Carter. His phone rang until it went to voicemail. I immediately called again. This time he answered on the second ring. “Do you know what time it is?”

“I told you this job can be twenty-four/seven.”

“You better have an emergency.”

“We need a better strategy to find out what’s going on with Ben’s family.”

Carter growled. “That’s not an emergency.”

I thought about the soft, innocent way Ben had looked at me. I needed this behind me so I could concentrate on him. “Yes, it is.”

“Miles, I’m a little bit busy right now.”

I heard the rustle of sheets as if he was getting out of bed, then a protesting murmur, but I couldn’t make myself care. “I need this dealt with.”

“Right this minute?”

I hated that he was always willing to call me out. “It’s very important.”

He sighed. “Life or death?”

“No.”

“Personal or business?”

“Both.”

“I’ll meet you tomorrow morning, though you do know it’s Sunday, right?”

“Be there at seven.”

“Nine,” he countered.

“Eight thirty.”

“Done.”

He ended the call. Why had I hired someone who was willing to hang up on me?

Because he’s a good friend. You know you can trust him, and he’s damn good at his job.

I sighed and ran a hand through my hair. I needed to go home and try to get some sleep.

MILES

When I let myself into my office at six twenty the next morning, not only was Carter already there, so were Ford and—more surprisingly—Worth. He must have not been to bed. I'd never heard of him getting up this early.

“Is this an intervention?”

Worth shook his head. “No.”

At the same time, Carter and Ford said, “Yes.”

“Just because I'm anxious to stop my company's secrets from ___”

“You know that's not what this is about,” Carter said.

I glared at him. “That's why I called you.”

“You called him because you want to prove Mr. Beautiful AF Assistant is innocent, but you crossed a line last night,” Ford said.

Carter nodded. “You went too far.”

“I'm sure Ben is fucking hot,” Worth said, “but as fun as it must have been, it's going to be hell for your PR team to explain away you punching Medford.”

I scowled at them. “I don't give a fuck about that. Medford had his hand around Ben's arm after Ben told him no. He was trying to pull him into the garden. How can you—”

Carter held up a hand. “I'm not questioning the need to stop him, and to protect Ben, but Medford would've stepped back with nothing more than a word from you. He's a whiny little bitch.”

“I needed more than words to make my point.”

“This isn't fucking high school,” Ford said.

“Like that's the last time you got in a fight.”

Ford snarled at me. He'd beat the shit out of a guy in law school for bullying an undergrad who was gay. The incident had almost gotten Ford kicked out, but his grandparents had come to his defense and old family money won the day.

"Can you honestly tell me you would've reacted the same way if it had been someone else?" Carter asked. "Someone you didn't know."

Worth interrupted. "What about somebody you didn't like?"

"I would've saved anyone from Medford's attentions. No one deserves to be treated like that. I'm shocked that any of you would question that."

"We're not questioning if you would've helped them," Ford said. "Well maybe Worth is, but I don't know what's wrong with him." Worth had the decency to look sheepish. "We *are* questioning whether you would've gotten violent when you didn't have to. Whether, instead, you would have defused the situation and called security."

I shrugged. "I don't know."

"I think you do," Ford said.

Of course I knew, but I didn't have to admit it to them. "When I saw his hand on Ben, I lost it."

"There has to be more going on here than you're telling," Worth said. "Are you fucking Ben?"

I glared at him. "Don't."

Worth's eyes widened, and he held up his hands in surrender. "I was just joking."

I ran a hand through my hair and sighed. "I like him." Admitting that made my stomach flip-flop.

"Like him?" Carter asked. "It sounds like a hell of a lot more than liking him."

"I'm not going to let anyone hurt him."

"We still can't be sure—"

“Yes, we can!” I yelled. The room went silent for several seconds. In a much quieter voice, I said, “I gave him an access code to a safe with fake formulas in it. None of those have been shared. He’s not involved.”

“That doesn’t mean he’s not connected. Or that he won’t become involved,” Ford reasoned.

“I won’t let him.”

“Oh shit,” Ford said. “You’ve fallen for him.”

I shook my head. No way. I’d sworn I wouldn’t let that happen. I couldn’t hurt someone one, fuck up their life, if I kept it casual. “It’s nothing that serious. I like him, and I owe him my protection.”

Ford raised his brows. “You punched a guy in the middle of a fundraiser over him.”

“I punched an assailant.”

“Medford’s a piece of shit,” Carter said. “I’m not saying he didn’t have it coming. I’m saying you lost control, and that’s dangerous.”

They weren’t wrong, but it didn’t change how I felt. If I thought he’d agree to it, I’d keep Ben at my penthouse and wouldn’t let him out of my sight. I wouldn’t let anyone else lay their hands on him. *You’ve definitely fallen for him.*

“Eudora Weeks adores him. She wants to invite him to a knitting circle.”

Carter laughed. “Does he knit?”

“I’ve got no fucking idea, but he’ll go. He won’t risk offending her.”

“Such a good little employee.”

I grabbed the front of Worth’s shirt and jerked him out of his seat. “*Don’t. Go. There.*”

“Jesus, Miles,” Ford yelled.

“Benjamin is under my protection. No one says anything against him, not even you guys.”

Carter sighed. “You know you’re making my job much harder.”

I scowled at him. “If you can’t take it—”

Carter held up a hand. “You know that’s not what I’m saying.”

I blew out a long breath. “Yeah, I do, I just...I can’t stand thinking about seeing Medford with his hands on Ben. And I can’t stand thinking about his family putting pressure on him.”

“So your gut is really telling you he’s not guilty?” Carter asked. “You’re not just thinking with your dick?”

I might’ve been thinking with my dick last night—and damn had it been good—but I knew Ben wasn’t selling our secrets. “No, it’s not just because I want him.”

I knew he might be getting pressure from his family, but I also knew he was scared. His father had probably pushed him into applying for this job. If Ben came here under false pretenses, that should make me angry, but it only made me angry on Ben’s behalf. I needed to get him to talk to me.

“When do you plan to tell him you did a thorough background check on him?” Carter asked. “When are you going to tell him you’ve been closely monitoring him?”

My heart rate accelerated. I felt sick, but I glared at Carter. Anger was something I knew how to handle. “I don’t know.” I never wanted to tell Ben, but I knew eventually if I didn’t, he would find out on his own and that wouldn’t go over well. Yet did he honestly think I wouldn’t do a thorough background check? That it wouldn’t reveal the potential for him to betray me?

You’re going to hurt him. The thought made me nauseous.

“Are you okay?” Worth asked.

“I’m fine. There’s just a lot going on, and you aren’t making it any better.”

“We’re trying to help,” Ford said. “We want to make sure you haven’t gone off the deep end.”

Had I? Possibly. Maybe all of this bullshit and focusing so hard on pushing to bring profits back up had me losing my mind. But it had felt so good to kiss Ben, better than anything had felt in ages.

“Really, I’m fine. I just want to know why the hell things don’t add up with our profits and losses, and what Ben’s family is after. It’s all making me crazy.”

“And when that’s done, what’s going to happen with Ben?” Ford asked. He’d been the shyest one of us in school, but he’d never been afraid to ask a hard question.

“I don’t know. I can’t predict how I’ll feel.”

“What about how he’s going to feel?” Carter asked. “If he’s not betraying you, then....”

“I did a background check on an employee. I made sure he wasn’t selling secrets. That’s just good business.” I couldn’t admit how bad I was fucking up to myself so I sure as hell wasn’t going to admit it to my friends.

Worth snorted. “Even I know better than to think he’d see it that way, and everybody says I don’t understand relationships at all.”

“You don’t,” Carter and Ford said together.

He rolled his eyes. “Whatever.”

I needed to refocus the conversation. “I don’t have a plan for a long-term relationship.”

“If you care about him, and it sounds like you do, you need to think about it,” Ford said.

I did care. I cared about Ben a lot. I cared about keeping him safe and making sure no one else touched him. I wanted to ensure no one else belittled him the way April had tried to, and I wanted to make sure he understood that he was mine. But what did that mean beyond some primitive need for possession?

It means you’re in love with him.

No. That was crazy. We'd only known each for a few weeks, it couldn't be love. I'd sworn I wasn't going to fall in love with anyone. I never wanted to need someone as badly as I needed Ben, but when I thought of letting him go.... I couldn't just do what I always did and send him off with a great bonus. It drove me crazy knowing he'd end up with someone else, knowing his family would come for him.

"So, what? You think I should just let him go?"

"That doesn't sound like a feasible plan," Carter said. "He's in a great position to already know a lot about the company. You don't want him seeking revenge."

"Is he doing a good job?" Worth asked.

"Yes. He's fantastic at his job."

"Then why the hell would you fire somebody who was hot as hell and good at their job?"

"This," Ford said, "is why you're better off on a yacht than trying to run a company. If only your mother could see that."

"There was no way in hell I'm letting Ben go." I just needed to rethink the plans I'd had for my future. I wanted Ben, and I always got what I wanted.

"So what's your plan?" Carter asked.

"Isn't that your job, to come up with a plan to prove things once and for all, to come up with a better plan to keep this company safe?"

"Corporate espionage was never my area of expertise. If that's what you wanted, you should've hired someone else."

He was right, but it didn't stop me from being irrationally frustrated with him.

"It makes no sense. Frank brought in a forensic accounting team, but they haven't found any evidence of tampering with the financials. Yet my gut still tells me something is wrong."

"We should call in our own specialist," Carter said. "I've got a former SEAL buddy who could do the job."

"You trust him with my company?"

“I trusted him with my life and the lives of all my men, so yeah, I trust him with this too.”

“All right, let’s do it.”

I spent the rest of the day getting caught up on work in my office. In the late afternoon, I got a panicked call from my COO. There was a crisis at our London office. She added my director of operations in London to the call and a few minutes into the discussion revealed a potential scandal between two of the directors. My PR director and I would need to fly to London as soon as my jet was readied for takeoff.

This was terrible timing. We’d be there a minimum of forty-eight hours, which meant two days without seeing Ben again. I’d spent the whole night thinking of him, eventually jerking off during my morning shower to the memory of him licking cum off me.

I went around my desk, opened a drawer, and pulled out a notepad. I wrote Ben a note explaining that I was leaving. I could’ve texted him. I could’ve called him, emailed him, anything that would be normal communication from a boss to his assistant, but I didn’t want to do that. I wanted to leave something more personal.

My friends were right. I was in this far too deep. Was I obsessed? Maybe, but my obsessions had gotten me a lot of good things in my life.

BEN

Monday morning there was a knock on my door as I was getting ready for work. I checked the peephole and saw a delivery man with flowers. Who would be sending me flowers? Surely not Miles.

I opened the door, accepted them, and pulled the card out as soon as I set them down.

They were from Mrs. Weeks. I refused to be disappointed.

The card said: *Meeting you at the gala was a real treat. Can't wait to see you again.*

I smiled. How could I be disappointed by that? I would never have thought I would make friends with a wealthy woman in her seventies, but I'd loved talking to her. She'd made me feel comfortable when I didn't think that was possible. I supposed she'd gotten my address from Miles, though I wouldn't be surprised if she could snap her fingers and know anything she desired. She really was something else.

I had to rush to finish getting ready and make my train. When I walked through the front door of Montgomery Enterprises, everything seemed brighter, fresher. I marveled at the sun shining in through the lobby windows. Could everything that happened after the gala possibly have been real? I sure hoped so.

When I stepped off the executive elevator, I noticed immediately that Miles's door was shut, and his lights were off. That was unusual. I liked to come in early, but he was usually even earlier.

After double checking to see if he'd texted or emailed me, I stopped by Diana's desk. She was the assistant to the COO. "Is Mr. Montgomery in yet?"

"No, I don't believe so. Maybe he took a last-minute breakfast meeting?"

When I reached my desk, I saw a folded piece of paper with my name on it, held down by a paperweight. I recognize the handwriting immediately. It was from Miles. What was he doing leaving me a handwritten note?

I set my bag down, then unfolded the paper and read.

Benjamin, I have an emergency at my London office. I need you here taking care of things. I'll likely be gone for two or three days. I'll see you soon. Miles.

An emergency in London? And he hadn't called me or texted me or anything. What kind of emergency?

I got my computer going and pulled up my email. He'd sent me more information once he landed, but I still didn't understand why he'd left a note like that. Was it meant to be romantic? He clearly didn't need to romance me, but I had to admit I kind of liked it. I rubbed my hand over his signature as if I could feel him by doing so. Then I folded the paper into a tiny square and stuck it in my wallet. I liked the idea of having it with me.

I took a slow, deep breath and reread everything he had sent me before getting to work on my long list of tasks for the day. I was glad I had a lot to keep me busy because I already missed him.

Near the end of the day, I got a call from a number I didn't recognize. I'd communicated with Miles off and on all day via text and email, but I hadn't heard his voice. There was no reason for him to call me from an unknown number, but hope flared in my chest as I answered the call.

"Hello."

"Benjamin?"

Once again, Mrs. Weeks kept me from being disappointed that I wasn't hearing from Miles.

"Yes. It's me. Thank you so much for the flowers. They are lovely."

"I'm so glad you liked them and glad I caught you at work. I have a question."

“I’ll help you with anything I can.”

“Do you knit?”

That was definitely not what I was expecting. “I haven’t in years, but my grandmother taught me a long time ago.” In what felt like another lifetime.

“Excellent. My knitting circle meets Thursday evenings. I would love for you to join us.”

I couldn’t have been more surprised. I would never have thought Mrs. Weeks would be part of a knitting circle or that she would want me there. “I often work late hours.”

She huffed. “Tell that gorgeous boss of yours I said you deserve an evening of leisure.”

I grinned. I really wanted to check out her knitting circle, even though I would surely feel out of place. “Yes ma’am.”

As if she’d read my mind, she added, “And don’t worry. It won’t be a bunch of stuffy bitches. We have fun.”

“That’s...um...great.” I fought not to burst into laughter. I was afraid once I started I wouldn’t be able to rein it in.

“I’ll send a car for you.”

“That’s very generous. Thank you.”

“See you Thursday,” she said before ending the call.

My phone buzzed, and I picked it up immediately. “Come to my office.”

Miles’s rich voice seemed to slide over my skin. This would be the first time I’d seen him since the night of the gala. He’d ended up being gone for four days instead of two. He’d returned while I was out to lunch and hadn’t left his office since.

I’d wanted to page him and ask how his trip went, but I didn’t have the nerve. I kept trying to convince myself the night of the gala had been nothing but a dream.

My hands shook as I opened his office door. As soon as I closed it behind me, I heard the lock engage. Slowly I turned to him, hoping I would actually be able to speak. “What did you need, sir?”

“Come here.”

My pulse sped up even more and my dick twitched at the near purr of his voice. “Why?”

He arched a brow. “I think you know why. I think you know what I want.” He pushed his chair back from the desk and spread his legs like he’d done the night of the gala. “I think you know what I thought about every moment I was gone.”

No way could he be serious. He couldn’t have been thinking about me during the whole trip to London. I imagined all the men and women there who would fall at his feet. No matter what he’d said, I’d been afraid what happened between us was a one-time occurrence.

“Benjamin.” The way he said my name like it was a dirty word made me dizzy. “Come here.”

“You have an appointment in”—I glanced at my watch—“twenty minutes.”

“They can wait. Do you honestly think anyone’s going to have the nerve to interrupt me? The door is locked and only a few select people have a key. They’re not stupid enough to use it without knocking. I call the shots here. If I want to be late, I’ll be late, if I want to lock myself in my office and refuse to see anyone, that’s what I’ll do.”

But he hated being late. “Sir, it’s the middle of the workday, and....”

“I do what I want, and what I want right now is you.”

“Is this what things are going to be like now?”

“Do you mean am I going to call you in here at any time, at the merest whim, and do with you whatever I want?”

I nodded because I no longer had any moisture in my mouth.

“Yes.”

My cock was fully hard now, and my hands were shaking.

“Do you have an objection to that?” he asked.

I shook my head. “No, sir.”

“Good.”

Somehow I managed to make myself move. Miles turned in his chair, giving me better access to him. As I knelt in front of him, he lowered his zipper and pulled out his dick like he had the other night. Reflexively, I licked my lips as I stared at the thick shaft.

“Show me how much you missed me,” he demanded.

The world receded. There was nothing but Miles and what I so desperately wanted. I licked the length of his shaft, pressing my tongue against him and making him shudder.

“More,” he growled. I loved that I had the power to affect him like that.

I opened my mouth, sliding my lips over his head, breathing in deeply, loving the scent and taste of him. I took more of him down my throat, sucking hard. He slid his hands into my hair and gripped my head tightly, which only made me want him more.

I teased him with my tongue, and he pulled me further down onto his shaft until I gagged and pulled back.

“Look at me,” he ordered.

I did, gazing up at him. His eyes were nearly black with desire. “Can you take all of me?”

I hesitated, glancing back down his cock, then up at him again. “I don’t know.”

“I think you can. I think you want to.”

I nodded, mouth hanging open. I really did.

“Come here.” He tugged my head down with one hand and held his cock with the other so he could feed it to me. I opened my mouth, letting spit drip down on him.

He groaned. “That’s it. Make it sloppy.”

For a second, I thought about how we were going to ruin his suit, then I realized I didn't care. He could buy more, and I knew he had a spare hanging in his office. So I did as he said and took him deep, swallowing around him.

He lifted his hips, pushing himself even deeper. I fought to take all of him. I loved having him in my mouth, feeling how hard he was, hearing his sounds of pleasure as I kept working him. I let him slide in and out of my mouth until I finally took every inch and pressed my face into his groin.

“God, that's so good. You're fucking perfect.”

I was far from that. If he knew all my secrets, he wouldn't have me here like this. Or if he did, it would be punishment more than what felt like an offering, like he was giving everything to me. It didn't matter that I was the one on my knees, the one with my throat stuffed full of his dick. He was giving this to me, and it felt damn good.

Miles let go of me so I could pull off and get some air. Tears ran from my eyes as I gasped. He put his hand under my chin and tilted my head up. “You're so fucking beautiful like this, wrecked by my dick.”

“More.” I was the one who said it at this time.

“Take all you want.”

I did. My cock was so hard it hurt. I wanted to tell him, but I couldn't do that with his dick stuffed in my mouth.

I could feel how close he was. Precum slid down my throat, and I reveled at the taste of it, not caring how stretched out my lips were or how much my jaw ached. I needed this, needed to swallow his whole load.

“You've got me so fucking close. I want you to take every drop.”

I hummed around him, trying to let him know how much that pleased me.

He gasped and stiffened, hands tightening against my scalp as he thrust up into me, and I felt the first jet of cum pour down

my throat. I swallowed frantically, trying to keep up with his release, but some still slid down my chin.

Pleasure rushed through me as I felt him let go. The thrill of knowing what I could do to him was too much for me. For the first time in years, I came in my pants.

MILES

It took me a long time to catch my breath. Ben had his head pillowed against my inner thigh, and I was methodically stroking his head. I wanted to stay like that for the rest of the day, but I was already late for my meeting as the alerts on my phone had reminded me countless times. I'd had no intention of stopping, not even if the building was on fire, and I didn't think Ben had even heard any of the buzzing.

I looked down at him, disheveled, gorgeous. It was going to take a miracle to get him in shape for the meeting. Maybe I should let him take the rest of the day off. "Baby, are you awake?"

His eyes fluttered open, and he sat up suddenly. I held on to him, afraid he might be dizzy. He'd gone quite a while without much air.

He blinked a few times and looked me. "Shit, what time is it?"

"Don't worry about that. I'll take care of everything."

When he looked up at me, so sweet, so eager to please, it made me want to cancel everything for the rest of the day and stay right here with him. Sadly, that wasn't possible.

Ben struggled to his feet, and that was when I saw the damp stain on the front of his pants. "Did you come just from sucking me off?"

His cheeks turned even more red than they already were from the heat of his exertions.

"I...um...yeah."

"That is so fucking hot."

"It is?" His pupils were still blown, and he looked dazed. Sucking my dick had done that to him. I couldn't remember ever being with anyone who made me feel like this. The intensity of it scared me when very little did, but there was no way I could stop myself from going down this path.

I tucked myself back into my slacks. He done such a good job of swallowing my load that I wouldn't even need to change. When I stood, I scooped him up into my arms.

He sucked in his breath. "What are you doing?"

"You're not ready for a meeting."

"I can be. I promise. I—"

"It's my fault you're not ready, not that I would change it for anything."

"But you need me there."

"I can manage this time. I needed you here more."

"I don't know if...if I can...."

I put a finger over his lips. "Now isn't the time to talk about what's happening between us." It wasn't the time for me to think about it either. Never sounded like a great time for me to face the implications.

I laid him down on my couch. "Rest. When you feel up to it, change clothes and head home."

"I don't need to go home. I'll be fine in a few minutes."

He would be. I knew that, but he deserved some rest. "You haven't had any time off, and your boss is kind of an asshole. He expects long hours. Go home. Take the afternoon. I'll see you in the morning."

"Are you sure? I could at least work from home. I didn't mean to...." He glanced down at his damp crotch.

"That's absolutely the best thing you could've done, better than taking notes in a meeting. I'll have Diane record it, and you can transcribe the important parts later."

"Thank you," he said, his voice so soft I could barely hear him.

"Don't answer the door if anyone knocks and lock it when you leave. The space is all yours. If anybody sees you leaving and asks, I'll tell them you're not feeling well."

"How often do you let sick employees rest on your couch?"

I smiled at him. “Never.”

BEN

I'd slipped out of Miles's office about half an hour after he left for the meeting. I hurried out of the building, hoping I wouldn't run into anyone who wanted to talk. Luck was with me, and a few moments later I was on the train—much less crowded than usual—headed home. I couldn't believe what I'd done. I'd sucked off my boss in his office. I was a fucking cliché, and tonight I had to face Mrs. Weeks knowing what I was up to with a man she treated like a son.

I'd taken the liberty of showering in Miles's executive washroom, and I'd had to borrow a pair of his pants. From now on, I was going to have to keep an extra suit at work.

I changed again as soon as I got to my apartment. I was terrified of spilling something on Miles's pants, having Felix snag them, or ruining them in some other way. At least I could take them back to work and send them out with his regular dry cleaning. I wasn't going to risk them with the normal-people dry cleaner I used.

Or the one I used to use to before Miles insisted I send my things out with the other executives' clothes. At least I wasn't the only one given that privilege.

Diane was still commenting on how amazing it was that he'd had suits made for me. Most of the others who worked in the C-suite were speculating about the nature of our relationship. For all I knew, rumors about us were flying throughout the headquarters building. I could only imagine how much everyone must love gossiping about Miles.

I put on running shorts and a T-shirt. The window unit in my studio couldn't keep up with the heat, and I had no intention of getting dressed for tonight until I had to. I flopped down on the couch and Felix jumped up beside me, demanding to be petted.

What exactly did a person wear to an elderly society woman's knitting circle?

My first instinct was to text Miles. Why I thought he would even know the answer I wasn't sure, but I was certain he would. Would he be annoyed to be interrupted in a meeting by a text like that? I sent the text off before I could second-guess myself. If he was going to pull me into his office and render me incapable of working for the rest of the day, he could answer a simple question for me.

In less than a minute, he responded. *Nice jeans or other casual pants and a button down.*

I smiled, then my heart nearly stopped when another text came through. It was a heart emoji. What the hell did that mean?

Did he love that I turned to him for fashion advice? Did he love that I was going to Mrs. Weeks knitting circle? Or did he....

No, I wasn't going to go there. He was fond of me. He was attracted to me. I'd even go so far as to say, he respected my work, but more.... No way.

When the driver Mrs. Weeks had sent, dropped me off at her Upper West Side brownstone, my hands were shaking. I had a bag with a knitting project, one I hadn't touched in a long time. She'd said she would be happy to give me a reminder lesson, but I hated that I wouldn't be up to speed.

I expected a butler or some other employee to answer the door, but Mrs. Weeks answered it herself. She was wearing a linen dress that I assumed was one of the most casual things she owned. I felt like I matched her style perfectly, thanks to Miles.

She took my hands and rose on tiptoe to kiss my cheek. "I'm so glad you're here."

"Thank you for inviting me."

She led me to a room she called the lounge. I was certain it would have been called the drawing room in a historical novel. I was expecting all the other attendees to be older women, but I was wrong. Robert, the man who'd sat next to me at the gala,

was there along with a few older women, and one woman who looked around my age. I wanted to know how Mrs. Weeks knew all these people and how she'd pulled them together.

The doorbell rang as she was making introductions. Robert took over for her. When she returned, the man following her was Miles's friend and attorney, Ford Wainwright.

"Ford, do you already know Benjamin?"

"Of course." He smiled at me, and I fought the urge to blush. What had Miles told him about me?

"Good." She tapped an intercom button and asked for refreshments to be brought in. A few moments later, a woman in a basic gray dress brought in a tray with pots of what I assumed were tea and coffee, as well a large plate of cookies."

"Will there be anything else?"

"No, that's all for now."

The woman inclined her head and left. Was I seriously here in a house where my hostess had domestic servants? How was it Mrs. Weeks seemed so down to earth?

I poured myself a cup of tea and placed a few ginger cookies on a plate. I was still nervous as I sat down, but once we started talking, I realized I was as comfortable with everyone else as I was with Mrs. Weeks and Robert. Somehow, the opulence didn't bother me here like it had at the gala.

Ford ended up being the one to remind me how to do the basic stitches on my scarf, but he swore me to secrecy, since none of his friends knew he knit.

I enjoyed myself so much that when everyone started gathering their things to go home, I was shocked at how late it was. As everyone said their goodbyes and made their way to the door, Mrs. Weeks linked her arm with mine. "Do you have to rush off?"

I needed to get some sleep, but I shook my head. "No."

"Good. I wanted to talk with you for a moment."

“Is anything wrong?” I thought back over everything that happened that evening. Had I done something wrong? Had I offended her? She looked so serious.

“No, dear. Nothing is wrong. I had lunch with Miles today.”

“You did?” He hadn’t mentioned it, so I had assumed he’d come straight to the office from the airport.

“I wanted to talk to him about what happened at the gala.”

“Did you scold him for his behavior?”

“No, quite the opposite. I thanked him for taking out that bastard.”

I smiled and couldn’t help but laugh. “So you approve of him punching people at your fundraiser?”

“When it’s necessary.”

“So what happened that you needed to discuss with him?”

“Several things, but his being there with you was one of them.”

“Me?” I wasn’t sure I liked where this was going.

“Yes, you. I haven’t seen him look so happy with anyone in a very long time.”

“I really don’t think that you understand—”

She held it by hand. “Just listen. Miles is not the sort of man who’s going to easily make confessions or talk to you about how he feels.”

Heat rose in my cheeks until my face was burned. All I could think about were the things Miles had said to me earlier that day, things that had left me disheveled and barely able to stand. I remembered waking on his couch and sneaking out of work.

She narrowed her eyes and studied me. “I see things have developed since the other night. I got that sense from him, but he’s a little better at hiding it.”

What if she told him? “Please don’t—”

“He knows my suspicions, and believe me, I don’t intend to be talking about this to anyone but the two of you.”

“Why were you talking about me? I mean no disrespect, but why does anything that happens between us matter to you?”

“Miles means a lot to me. You know he was engaged to my daughter?”

“What?” I was shocked. I would never have guessed he’d been engaged before. I’d assumed he’d always just enjoyed whoever he wanted in the moment.

“I see you didn’t know.”

“No, ma’am.” I wanted to ask what happened, but I held my tongue, waiting to see what she would say next.

“His mother and I have been friends for a very long time. She’d had it in her head that Miles and Emily should marry since they were kids. The fact that they had very different visions for their futures and had never been more than friends didn’t matter. Miles grew so tired of his mother’s pestering him that, despite having a huge romantic streak and wanting to find true love, he proposed to Emily, and she accepted to help him keep the peace.”

“Oh wow. What happened?”

“Emily fell in love with someone else, and they had to confess the truth to Mrs. Montgomery. She’s never forgiven Miles.”

I wasn’t sure I ever wanted to meet this woman. “Oh, God. That’s awful.”

“Miles and his mother had never fully seen eye-to-eye, so he could have gotten over that, but the man Emily fell for cheated on her at their engagement party. It destroyed her, and Miles was the one who helped her pick up the pieces. From that point on, he’s sworn to never fall in love or marry.”

The thought of what they both went through made my stomach churn. “I’m so sorry. About all of it.”

She nodded. “Me too, but I haven’t seen him look at anyone the way he looked at you. I think he’s finally realized falling

for someone could be worth the risk, and I'm so excited for him."

"That's.... Are you sure?"

"I'm very sure. He's proud of his achievements. He has good friends and a good life, but I wouldn't say he was truly happy. Not the kind of relaxed, easy-going happiness I saw on him when he was younger. The other night, when he was with you, I saw true happiness on his face."

"How long have you known him?"

"All his life."

I wanted so badly to ask questions. A lot more questions. What had he been like as a child? Instead, all I asked was, "Why are you telling me this?"

"Because I want to ask that you be gentle with him. I would never try to push you to get involved with him. I would never want you to do anything you were uncomfortable with, but if you're not interested him seriously, don't lead him on."

"I would never—"

She laid a hand on my arm. "I'm sorry that sounded insulting. I didn't mean it that way. I just meant that, he'll act like everything is casual, but I don't think it is this time, and I don't want either one of you to be hurt."

"What would you like?"

"I'd like to see you both happy."

"Together?"

"If that's what you want."

I shook my head. "I don't belong in his world."

"We have to make a place for ourselves in the world. If you want something, go for it."

I started to say something else, but she made a dramatic yawn that I was sure was faked. "It is well past my bedtime. I'll have my driver take you home."

"That isn't necessary."

“It is for me. I like you, and I’d like to spoil you. So let me.”

MILES

I missed Ben being there for the rest of the afternoon and I considered calling him and insisting he meet me somewhere for dinner or just asking him to come to my place. I hadn't had anyone there in a while. Everyone I've been with since my disastrous and short-lived dalliance with April had been a quick and dirty hook up, nothing that lasted all night.

But when I thought of waking up with Ben in my bed...when I thought of him there over breakfast, sipping coffee and looking out at the city, lounging around while I read up on the news of the day...when I thought of him soaking in my giant tub after a long day at work...I wanted all of that.

This was moving too fast. I was feeling too much. I'd promised myself after Emily that I wasn't going to let anything be serious, that I was better off just enjoying myself, but Ben...he made me feel so much more. I should try to hold more of myself back, but I didn't want to.

Instead of calling Ben, I called Ford and asked him to meet me for a drink. When I joined him at our favorite lesser-known bar, he studied me closely. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing you don't already know about."

"That's bullshit. You don't just ask to go out for midweek drinks when there's not something to talk about."

"Can't I simply want to spend an evening with a friend?"

"Miles."

The word held layers of meaning. "Dammit, I think you might be right."

Ford snorted. "Those are words I always love to hear, but what am I right about in particular?"

"Benjamin."

He grinned. "Of course I am."

I drummed my fingers on the table feeling like I was going to come out of my skin. “This can’t be happening.”

“You honestly thought you could go the rest of your life and not feel anything for anyone.”

Had I thought that? “I feel things.”

“Not romantically.”

I hadn’t thought I needed that in my life. “I made a promise to myself—”

“You can’t stop yourself from getting hurt.”

Couldn’t I? “You seem to have done all right.”

Ford laughed, but it sounded bitter. “That’s because for some reason I’m only attracted to idiots.”

For as long as I’d known him, Ford had a series of relationships that seemed to go very well for a few months, then blow up in his face in a dramatic way. I had my thoughts as to why that was, but this wasn’t the time to talk about it.

“You really do care for Ben, don’t you?” Ford asked.

“Yes. I don’t know what it is. He just.... From the moment I saw him, I knew he was mine.”

Ford sighed. “You’re such a romantic. It’s time you stopped closing off that part of yourself.”

“I didn’t want to be a romantic, but now...I don’t think I have a choice.”

“How dangerous is this going to be for the company?”

“He’s innocent, Ford.”

He studied me closely. “Do you have evidence of that?”

“I’ve tested him, given him information no one else has but me. It’s never been leaked.”

“And when he finds this out?”

“There’s no reason for him to—”

“Miles, if you want to make something lasting with him, you can’t leave him in the dark about this. You have to tell him you

know about his background.”

How was I supposed to tell him that and not have him hate me? But how could I not tell him when he would likely find out? “Surely he knows I would’ve done a thorough background check on him.”

“That’s one thing. Testing him is another.”

This wasn’t helping. I should have just gone home after work. “You’re supposed to be making me feel better, not worse.”

“The question is, what do you want to feel better about?”

“Damn, I should’ve just called Worth.”

“He would have suggested you go drinking and hook up with somebody else to see if it felt as good.”

I would never have agreed to that. “I don’t want anyone else.”

“Damn, this is serious.”

“I want to take Ben home for the weekend.”

Ford narrowed his eyes. “He’s not a pet you’re considering adopting.”

I wasn’t really thinking of him like that, was I? “I’m not sure Worth would agree with you.”

“Do you want to match your standards to his?”

I laughed. “Never.”

“So there’s not been anyone else since you met him?”

“No.”

“April didn’t track you down after the gala?”

I shuddered at the thought. “I would have sent her on her way, but I left the gala with Ben.”

“So he’s already been to your place?”

“We went to my office. He needed some time to recover after his encounter with Medford.”

“And you were very willing to help him with that?”

I ignored that jab. “I don’t know how I’m going to get any work done now. I think about him all the time. I just want to stay locked in my office with him.”

“Jesus, Miles.”

I grinned. “I can’t help it.”

“You? With your iron self-control? Really?”

I rolled my eyes. “You know you’re the one who’s all buttoned up and controlled.”

“Keep talking about fucking at the office, and I am going to be the one hanging out with Worth tonight.”

“You know you’d hate that.”

He shrugged. “The next day, yes, but not in the moment.”

“No one really hates it in the moment.”

His mouth turned up in a sly smile. “Except you said you would now, unless you were with Ben.”

“There’s no reason for it to be anyone but Ben.”

“He’s that willing to follow you into depravity?”

Compared to Worth, I’d never even come near depravity. “I’m a rich man fucking his assistant. It’s hardly novel in terms of depravity.”

“True. It’s almost too cliché, and I bet he’s feeling that.”

“I’m not ready to talk to him about...more than what we’re doing right now.” I could barely get the words out.

“You don’t have to be, but make sure he knows the score, whatever that is. If he really is just your obsession of the week then—”

Hot anger burst through me. “He’s so much more than that.”

Ford held up a hand. “Fine. What are you looking for from me? Permission to bring the boy home?”

“Fuck you.”

“Seriously Miles, you asked me to come to out with you. You wanted to talk about this. What are you afraid of?”

My pulse pounded in my ears. “I’m not—”

“Miles. It’s me.”

Somehow I forced the words out. “Hurting him. Losing him.”

“You think you’d do to him what that bastard did to Emily?”

“No! I’m just afraid of fucking it up. I’m not relationship material. I’ve built my whole life around being exactly what people expect me to be.”

“And to some extent you are that, but there’s more inside you. Ben will see that because he’s no fool.”

“He’s innocent, though. He’s not been—”

“Miles, you know who his father is. You know what he’s seen and experienced. It’s why you needed to test his loyalty, and that’s why there’s still an inkling of doubt in your mind about what he really wants from you.”

“What? That’s not true.”

“Isn’t it?”

“Fuck. I definitely should’ve called Worth.”

“Did you really need to be watching him get a lap dance from some lush little dancer while you pine for Ben? You needed straight talk, and you knew I would give it to you.”

I nodded. “Thanks.”

“So, will you have your little weekend slumber party?”

“Yes. It’ll be a chance to see how it goes when we’re together for more than a few hours outside of work. I mean, maybe this is just a passing whim.”

Ford reached out and laid his hand over mine. “Or maybe it’s absolutely not.”

I knew Ford wasn’t going to tell me what to do, and he knew if he did, I wouldn’t necessarily listen to him. I did what I wanted to. I always had. And I’d always taken risks, except with my heart. How much was I willing to risk now? Maybe a weekend together would help me figure things out.

I managed to behave professionally with Ben the next day. I kept my inappropriate attention to long looks across the office and a stolen kiss to the back of his neck as we headed to a meeting. That one was high risk, but just watching him move made me want to drag him into the closest room and forget about everyone around us.

When I walked into my office and saw him bent over, extracting something from a filing cabinet, I couldn't resist closing the door and stroking his beautiful ass. He smiled at me over his shoulder.

"We really can't keep doing this." He said a few seconds later when I had him on my desk, legs spread, kissing him until neither of us could breathe.

"Come home with me tonight."

Ben frowned. "Are you.... You're really...."

"I'm really going to fuck you in my bed."

He swallowed, and I watched the muscles in his throat move.

"You want...."

"I want to show you how good it can feel for me to open you up. I want to push my dick inside you and fuck you hard. I want to watch your face as you come."

"God, Miles, how do you always know what to say?"

"Because we want the same thing."

"Do we?"

I brushed my thumb over his cheekbone. "I'm not going to hurt you."

"I want to believe that."

So did I. "I don't know what to say, but you...I'm not playing with you."

"I would love to come home with you. I would love for you to fuck me."

I closed my hands into fists to keep from grabbing him again. "If you keep talking like that, I'm going to fuck you right

here.”

“No, you’re not. You’ve got your forensic accounting coming in about”—he looked down at his watch—“five minutes.”

“Then you better get out of here because I’ve only got five minutes to get rid of this.” I took his hand and pressed it against my cock.

“Maybe a record fast cold shower would help.”

I groaned. “I wish I could take you in there with me.”

He waved a hand toward the bathroom. “Go. Get yourself ready.”

Ben held some files over his own erection as he slunk back to his desk. I couldn’t help but laugh. Being with him made me happy in a way I hadn’t been in so long.

BEN

Several hours later, after I arranged for my neighbor to feed Felix, Miles escorted me downstairs and held the door for me as I slipped into the back seat of his waiting car.

As soon as Miles was settled in beside me, he put up the privacy screen and pulled me onto his lap. Before I could protest, he was kissing me, and in seconds I was lost to the moment, working my hips against him, twining my fingers in his thick hair. When his tongue slid along mine, I prayed we got to his home quickly. Because if not, I was going to have him right there. I'd never felt so much like an animal with anyone before.

I only vaguely heard the honking of horns, the screech of tires, and the shouts of people in the city around us as we made our way slowly through traffic. Miles pulled my shirt from my pants and slid his hands up my back. I loved the feel of his skin on mine. He teased my nipples and nibbled at my lower lip, then kissed my neck, pushing my head to the side to give him more access.

What the hell was I doing? I was in city traffic in my boss's car. I had no business being here, but there was no way in hell I was going to stop. We made out like crazed teenagers until the driver tapped on the partition. "Mr. Montgomery, we've arrived."

I had to put my hand over my mouth to keep him from hearing me laugh.

"Give us a moment, please," Miles said.

"Of course, sir."

Miles brushed his hands through my hair and straightened my tie. I worked my jacket back onto my shoulders, then rose as much as I could so I could tuck my shirt back into my pants. Miles adjusted himself, and once we were semi-respectable he stepped out of the car and held the door for me.

We walked through the lobby of his building as though we were nothing more than acquaintances, but as soon as we were on the elevator, Miles had me pressed against the wall, his whole body grinding against mine. By the time we reached his penthouse, I could hardly breathe.

I was thankful no one else lived on the top level because there was no way I was going to be able to pull myself together or calm down my dick before we got out of the elevator.

Miles's shirt was hanging out of his pants when the doors opened, and I didn't even remember tugging on it. We raced out of the elevator holding hands and laughing. With the tap of a button on his phone, his door slid open, like some kind of futuristic space station.

When I stepped inside, the expansiveness of the space shook me out of my daze. His penthouse was bigger than any house I'd ever lived in. It was gorgeously decorated in soft shades of brown, green, and cream, but I didn't have time for more than a cursory look as Miles led me to his bedroom. A huge bed, larger than any I'd ever seen, dominated the space. Did he use it for orgies? I pushed that thought away; I didn't want to know.

"Clothes off," he demanded.

As I let my jacket fall from my shoulders, my eyes locked with his. I saw desire burning there as I realized we'd never been naked in front of each other. We'd only known each other a matter of weeks, yet it felt like so much longer. It seemed like he'd touched me emotionally in ways no one ever had, but now that he was going to finally explore my body, I was nervous.

He must've seen the concern in my eyes because he stepped closer and cupped my face in his hands. "Remember what I told you. I'm not going to hurt you. I'm going to make sure you love every second of this."

Truthfully, I'd never meant to stay a virgin as long as I had, but I'd never trusted anyone enough to let them inside me. I wasn't sure why I trusted Miles so much, but somehow I did.

And after the things Mrs. Weeks had told me about him, I felt even better about my decision.

If this was all he wanted from me, then at least I'd have a good experience for my first time, which is a hell of a lot more than most people got. I loosened my tie, then pulled it off and let it drop to the floor on top of my coat.

Miles watched me, his eyes growing darker, his lips parting.

"Aren't you going to undress?" I asked.

"Eventually. Right now, I want to concentrate on watching you."

My heart pounded and my hands were unsteady as I worked to remove the rest of my clothes. So many people craved Miles's attention. Others were intimidated when he turned it fully on them, but now, I had him all to myself. The intensity of his gaze was overwhelming, but it warmed me, made me feel like I was as special as he said I was.

I pulled my shirt from my pants, unbuttoned a few buttons, then yanked it over my head. Miles stepped forward and laid his hands on my shoulders. The way he swept them down my arms made me shiver. He circled my waist and let his thumbs slide over my ribs.

"So fucking beautiful."

His hands moved to open the fastenings of my pants, then he pushed them and my briefs over my hips until they dropped to the floor. I wasn't as graceful as I'd hoped as I removed my shoes and kicked out of my pants, but Miles didn't seem to mind.

He wrapped his arms around me and pressed his hands against my back, stroking down to my ass, then clenching it, pulling my cheeks apart, brushing his fingers along the crease, and making me moan. How could I need him so badly already?

"Undress for me," I said. "Please. I want to see you too."

I knew he was gorgeous. I'd looked him up and found so many pictures of him online, pictures of him in a swimsuit, pictures of him with other men and women that made me feel all

twisted up inside, even though it was crazy to be jealous. I wanted him to be all mine. For tonight, I could pretend he was.

I reached for his jacket, pushing it off his shoulders. He let me push it down to his elbows before stepping back to pull off one sleeve, then the other.

“Sit down on the bed and touch yourself as you watch me.”

My face burned at the thought of jerking off in front of him, but he'd done it as I'd watched, and it had seemed so natural to him. Surely I could do it too. He wanted to watch, so there was no reason to be embarrassed. I settled onto the bed, spread my legs wide, and wrapped a hand around my cock.

“That's it, baby. Show me how you like to be touched.”

“I think you figured it out just fine.”

He smiled as he took off his tie and slowly unbuttoned his shirt, not in a desperate rush to be naked the way I had.

But I knew his calmness wasn't real. I'd felt the wild desire in him in the car, in the elevator, in the way he pulled me immediately into his bedroom. I could see it in the tightness of his jaw and the way he held his shoulders. He was putting on a show because he could, because he had that much control, even as desperate as he was. I loved knowing he was just as unbearably horny as I was.

MILES

I was surprised I was able to manage to unbutton my shirt as I watched Ben lying there on my bed, legs wickedly spread, his hand slowly stroking his cock, mesmerized by the sight of me undressing. It was enough to make me feel like I could come in a matter of seconds. I was going to have to fight for control tonight and make myself last when the time came for me to be inside him, his tight ass gripping me.

I let my shirt join the pile of clothes on my floor and tried not to think about my suit laying there all crumpled. Marisol would faint if she saw how I was treating one of her bespoke creations, but this wasn't time for folding and hanging clothes. That would have to come later. I unfastened my pants, and I smiled at him, holding his gaze as I slowly lowered my zipper. Ben's hand began to move faster and he was gripping himself tighter now.

"Slow down. We have a lot to do tonight."

"Fuck."

"Yes. And look and touch and taste."

I wanted to breathe him in, to have him so close to me I could feel every part of him.

When I pushed my pants down, Ben's hand sped up again.

"Can't go slow. You're so hot and I want...."

I gripped my cock as I stepped out of my pants, sliding my hand in the same rhythm as his. "What do you want, Benjamin? Tell me."

His breathing grew more ragged.

"Do you want this?" I brushed my thumb over my slit.

"I want all of you."

My chest tightened. *Could I give him that?*

I moved to stand between his open legs and pushed his hand away so I could grip his cock myself, working it slowly, sliding my hand over the head with every stroke.

He watched me, chest rising and falling rapidly. When he looked up and our eyes met, I couldn't keep myself from kissing him any longer.

Ben scrambled up onto his knees so I didn't have to bend over. Our cocks pressed against each other, and I wrapped my hand around them both, jerking us together. He moved his hips, thrusting into my tight grip, and I relished the feel of him against me. I loved the way he whimpered into my mouth as I tumbled us back onto the bed, needing to be on top of him, to have our bodies stretched out together.

He wrapped his legs around mine, holding me against him. "I need this."

His words sent in a shiver through me. I needed it too. It was more than wanting, more than simple desire. I needed to claim him. I needed to make him mine. I didn't want anyone else to ever touch him. I wanted to be his first and his last.

I trailed kisses along his jaw and his neck, then nibbled his collarbone. He arched up, whimpering, using his body to beg me for more.

I reached for his nipples, pinching them both, causing his body to bow up off the bed.

"Please. Touch me everywhere."

I loved how he was gaining enough confidence to ask me for what he wanted. I needed more of that, I needed to hear how much he wanted me, I needed to be sure he was as far gone as I was. But if I was going to make this last, I had to slow down. I wanted to make him so ready that he wouldn't mind when I stretched his ass, forced him open, and pressed into him. I also needed to exert some self-control to make sure I could wait long enough. Right then, all I wanted to do was to take my cock in my hand and come all over him, marking him as mine.

I pushed up onto my arms, rising above him. He looked at me, eyes wide and lust-drunk.

“What’s wrong? Why did you stop?”

“I didn’t mean for things to go this fast. I was going to bring you up here, make you dinner, talk to you, slowly seduce you, but I couldn’t even sit in the car with you. I can’t be in the same room and not have my hands on you. What have you done to me?”

He smiled. “You were the one who pulled me onto your lap in the car. I just went with it. I don’t want you to stop. I don’t want to slow down.”

“I want to savor every moment of this.”

“Wild and fast feels so good with you.”

It did, but I wanted more. “I want you to remember every moment of tonight.”

“Trust me, I will. I’m going to remember this forever, the feel of you against me...it’s like I’m dreaming.”

I flexed my hips, sliding my cock along his. “I promise you; I am very real.”

He groaned. “You are, but your world is a fantasy. It’s like I stepped out of time to be with you in this incredible apartment, to join you at your glittering parties.”

“You have a place in my world, Benjamin.”

“I’d like to believe that, but....”

“I’m making you a place, all you have to do a step into it.” I worked my hips against his again, and he let out the softest cry.

“You always get what you want?”

“That’s right, and I want you.”

“Then take me.” He arched against me, and any thought I had of slowing down fled.

I took his hands in mine and stretched them over his head, pinning him to the mattress. “I am going to take you, and I’m going to give you everything you need. I’m going to make you feel better than you ever have.”

“Please.” That one small word nearly did me in. How was I going to hold it together once I felt the tight grip of his body?

When I’d ravished his mouth again, I let go of his hands. “Keep them there. I want you like this, spread out for me to feast on.”

His eyes widened. I loved the flush that spread across his face, down his neck and chest. He nodded, and I smiled. I kissed his chest and stomach, nipping, licking, teasing him. I ignored his cock and focused on his hip bones, his groin, then lifted the heavy weight of his balls, making him moan.

When I pressed my thumb against his taint, he sucked in a breath. I leaned down, drawing his balls into my mouth, then licking them as I pushed his legs up to give me better access. It still wasn’t enough.

“Turn over,” I demanded.

He rushed to comply, rising up on his knees and sticking out his ass. I grabbed his cheeks, pulling them apart, as I swiped my tongue up his crack to the base of his spine.

He cried out. “What are you doing?”

“Has no one ever eaten this gorgeous ass, Benjamin?”

“No. Never.”

“There’s no better way to make you ready for my dick.”

“Oh my God, Miles. It’s too much.”

“No, it’s just right.” I slid my tongue over the tight pucker again and again. He clawed at the sheets as he whimpered. “You deserve this pleasure.”

“Please,” he begged. I pushed the tip of my tongue into him, and he squirmed, lifting his hips, pushing back against me. “I could come just from this.”

“I fucking love how responsive you are.” As I spoke, I let him feel my warm breath against his spit-slick ass. Then I reached under him to stroke his cock.

“If you keep doing that I can’t hold back.”

I flicked my tongue over him again before saying, “So don’t. You didn’t really think you were only going to come once tonight, did you?”

“Fuck. Miles.”

“You were ready to go off in the car and in the elevator. Show me how much you love this.”

I worked my tongue into him, fucking him with it slowly, then adding a finger, opening him up, getting him wet as I stroked his cock. He worked his hips, making frantic whines and whimpers, begging me. He sounded so fucking delicious.

BEN

I've never even imagined anything could feel so good. I'd never imagined any man would want to do this to me. I was so blissed out, so close to the edge. His tongue was unbelievable.

"Miles, please."

"What do you need, baby?"

His warm breath against me, the way he was willing to do anything to make me feel good, was making me need him even more. "I need to come. Please."

"I've got you," he said. And that was all it took. Knowing I was safe, I was able to let go. He thrust his tongue into me again and worked in a finger alongside it. It felt so fucking good. I cried out as I came, shooting my load across the sheets.

When he let me go, I slumped down, knees sliding out from under me. I was thoroughly worn out. Every part of me felt like Jell-O. When Miles spoke again, it sounded like his voice was coming from far away instead of right behind me.

"Turn onto your back," he ordered.

It took me a moment to truly comprehend what he was asking, then I wasn't sure how to make my body cooperate. He took hold of my hips and helped me flip over. When I looked up into his eyes, I knew he was seeing so much. Too much. That was why I'd never done this. "Miles?"

"I got you, baby. I want you to stay right there. I'm going to grab the lube, and then I'm going to fuck you."

"Please." I wanted him so badly. Even though I'd just come hard enough to see stars, I needed more. I needed as much as I could get from him right now, because I knew this could never last.

I glanced around the room, trying to remind my eyes how to focus. Everything in there looking shockingly expensive. It wasn't flashy, nothing was branded, but I bet the vase on the

table by the window cost more than all the furnishings in my apartment. I didn't belong there, except somehow, I did. I belonged in bed with Miles, wrapped around him, kissing him, fucking him.

He stepped out of the bathroom already slicking up his cock. I realized he wasn't wearing a condom. He would put one on if I asked, I was sure of that, but I wanted him like this, bare, raw. I opened my legs so he could settle between them. He took hold of my inner thighs and doubled them up over my chest.

"Don't worry. I'm going to go slowly with you. Are you ready?"

I nodded frantically. I was so ready to know what it felt like to have him inside me. If it felt better than his tongue, I might lose my mind.

"Keep your legs like that. I want to watch as my dick slides in."

"Fuck. Why is that so hot?"

"Because nothing could be hotter than seeing you stretched around me. I want to see you open for me, like you've never been before. I want to watch as your hole lets me in all the way."

"Please." I'd never beg a man like this. I'd hardly ever talked during the quick hand jobs or blow jobs I'd gotten before. It had just been about getting off, about getting that quick rush of sensation, but this...this was all consuming. Soul shattering.

I took hold of my thighs as Miles guided his dick to my hole.

I tensed, waiting, knowing it would probably hurt like hell, but I would take it. I wanted it. Eventually it would get good. That's what everyone's said, at least. And this? This was Miles, not just anyone.

"Relax." He ordered.

"I...I don't think I can."

"Remember how it felt when my tongue was inside you?" He slid his hand up and down my chest. "Remember how loose

and open you were. That's what I need now. Breathe for me, baby."

I took a deep breath, as he toyed with my cock. It was already hardening again.

"That's it. Now exhale."

I did, slowly letting out all the air.

"Perfect. Do it again." My cock was harder now, and he was starting to stroke it.

I inhaled deeply, and when I exhaled, he pushed forward. I gasped as his cock moved into me, pressing past the resistant muscle.

"That's it. Yes. Push out against me."

I did what he said as he shoved himself further in, making me whimper.

"Too much. It burns."

"It's okay, baby. It's going to get better. You're going to take my whole dick. I'm going to ride you and make you feel so good."

I whimpered again as he pressed in further, but when he tried to pull out, I wrapped my legs around him. "No, I need it. I want you. I don't care if it hurts."

"We're going to go slow and easy until you're used to it, then I'm going to fuck you as hard as I want."

"Please. Do that. I want it all."

"I know, baby." He leaned over and kissed me as he pushed deeper, drawing my gasp into his mouth.

I let go of my death grip on my pillow and wrapped my arms around his neck, sliding my fingers into his hair. He growled and drove in. I cried out against him as he kissed and licked my neck. I didn't know if I wanted him to stop or if I wanted more. I just wanted him, wanted to be surrounded by him.

He pulled back and pushed in again. He kept going so slowly that it was torture, not because it hurt but because despite any

of the stretch, the burn, the fear, I wanted him to take me, to use me. “If I’d known how good this would be...I wouldn’t have waited.”

Miles growled. “No. You had to wait because you’re mine.”

He pulled out, then pushed in and didn’t stop until he was buried all the way inside me. He felt so big and like he gotten deep enough to fill me to my throat. I couldn’t help but struggle.

“Relax.” The command in his voice startled me out of my panic.

I open my eyes and looked at him. “Your ass feels so good. The way you’re squeezing my cock. I’m not going to last as long as I want to.”

“I... Fuck me, Miles. Please.”

He pulled back and drove in again, rougher this time. I cried out.

“Like that? Is that how you want me to fuck you?”

“Yes, please. I want you to do whatever you want. I want you to love this too.”

“Benjamin.” His voice was rough and raw. He grabbed my chin in one of his hands, supporting himself on the other arm. “This has been the most incredible experience of my life already and coming deep inside you may kill me, but I don’t fucking care.”

I made a strangled noise as he drove into me again. Then I wrapped my legs around him, lifting my hips, trying to meet strokes. There was no pain anymore, only pleasure, and when his cock slid over the sweet spot inside me, I thought I would lose my mind.

“More, please. Don’t stop.” I was arching up, letting my cock rub against his stomach. It was hard as hell and dripping precum.

“Open your eyes, Benjamin. I want you looking at me when I bring you over the edge.”

“This is too much. It’s too good.”

“Nothing is too good for you.”

He wrapped his hand around my cock, giving me tight, rough strokes as he fucked me harder and harder. I felt like I was having an out of body experience, like I was watching us, like I was nothing but pure sensation. Then a wave of pleasure that was nearly pain washed over me. I wasn’t sure I was going to survive.

I cried out as my climax kept going. Miles kept fucking me and stroking my cock until I collapsed against the bed, exhausted and unsure if any of this was real.

“Benjamin. Look at me.”

I hadn’t even realized I closed my eyes. What I saw in his expression made me suck in my breath. “Miles?”

“You’re perfect.”

I started to smile, then gasped because he pulled out and pushed into me again, still rock hard, still needy. He was going to come inside me, and I was ready to feel all that heat and wetness. I was trusting him in so many ways, but I loved the idea of feeling his seed dripping out of me.

MILES

I groaned as I buried myself as deeply as I could inside Ben.

He looked up at me and licked his lips. The mix of innocence and seductiveness was so hot. “I want to see you come. I want to watch you like I did the other day, but I want to feel it inside me.”

“God, you’re so filthy. I love it.”

I couldn’t believe I had been able to hold myself back as I felt his ass squeeze my cock during his orgasm. It had felt like pure heaven. Now I could focus on filling him up, letting him know in one final way that he was mine.

“You feel so good inside me. I didn’t think...I’d thought I had all the pleasure I could have for one day.”

I looked down at him. “Jesus, do you think you could come a third time.”

He shook his head. “Not right now, but maybe later.”

“There will definitely be a later.”

“I might actually need dinner first,” he said.

“I’ll give you anything you want. Right after I give you this.” I pushed into him again harder this time, making him slide along the mattress.

I bent him double again. He arched up, fighting me just enough to make it fun. But I saw the spark in his eyes. “You like this.”

He nodded. “I didn’t know I did, but I do.”

“I have so many things to show you.”

After that, I couldn’t talk anymore, I worked myself in and out of his tight ass until there was no more holding back, until the whole world was filled with my need to come. I let go, driving

against him, spilling myself into his body and collapsing on top of him.

He wrapped his arms around me to hold me there.

I protested. "I'm too heavy for you."

"No, you're just right."

We lay like that for a while. Ben petted my hair as I rested against him, and we breathed to the same rhythm. Being here in bed with him, relaxed and not having to pretend to be anything else but a man with a guy he cared about, felt almost as good as being inside him. I knew he found my world overwhelming, but somehow we would make it work, because after all, I got what I wanted.

When I began to worry that the cum on his chest would dry and stick us together, I forced myself to sit up. He gasped when my cock slipped out of his ass.

"Sore?"

He shook his head. "It's not bad."

"Let's run you a bath. You can soak while I cook dinner."

He frowned. "You really cook?"

"I do. I learned when I was a kid. We had an awesome cook. She was...a lot warmer than my parents, so I spent a lot of time with her. She taught me, then it became something I did as stress relief.

He laughed. "I can see you taking something many people find stressful and using it as a stress reliever from your high-powered job."

"Come on." I took his hand and pulled him to his feet. He wavered, and I steadied him with my hands on his waist.

"Are you all right?"

His gaze met mine, his eyes still dark with desire. "I don't think I've ever felt better."

"Good." I brought him in to my bathroom, and his eyes widened as he looked around.

“Wow, I guess I should’ve assumed you’d have an orgy-sized tub to match your orgy-sized bed.”

“Only the best for me. Orgies are messy though.”

He grinned. “What we just did was messy?”

“True.”

“And surely you don’t wash your own sheets?”

“No, it’s not that. It’s just...I’d don’t want that many people to focus on. I like to dedicate all my attention to just one man or woman. I want the person I’m with to feel special.”

“You do a good job of that.”

I kissed him, just a gentle press of my lips, but it made him shiver. Before I forgot what I was doing, I turned on the shower. “Let’s get rinsed off, and then I’ll run a bath for you.”

He smiled. “You take luxury very seriously.”

“What would be the point of all the money I have if I didn’t?”

When the water was warm, we stepped in, I squirted some body wash in my hand and started washing off Ben. I’d showered with several people before, but it had always either turned sexual or we’d only focused on getting clean. With Ben, it was different. I enjoyed cleaning him carefully, gently. I wanted to take care of him. And then, when he did the same for me, it was almost more intimate than I could take. I felt like I was sharing much more than my body with him.

When we stepped out, I insisted on toweling him dry, then I handed him one of the fluffy white robes I kept in the bathroom.

“You keep a spare robe in here?”

“I like to be prepared for guests. Or rather, I like my housekeeping service to keep the place prepared for guests. I’ve never really had to do much for myself.”

He nodded, but he didn’t say anything. Had I just made him feel more uncomfortable?

“Have a seat.” I gestured toward the bench built into the tub surround. I could feel him watching me as I adjusted the water and started to fill the tub. I added in some citrus bubble bath, knowing it would smell wonderful against his skin.

When I turned and met his eyes, they were filled with wonder. “What is it?”

“I never thought I’d see you like this, taking care of me, doing something as simple as running a bath. I mean when people talk about you—” He stopped abruptly and looked away.

“It’s okay, baby. I know people talk about me. I’m sure you’ve heard plenty, some good, some bad, some absolutely outlandish like how I’ve supposedly fathered a few alien babies and led some sort of sex cult.”

He giggled. “Nothing quite as outrageous as that. Maybe I haven’t been on the right websites.”

“Possibly not. I’ll see if I can direct you to something more entertaining.”

“Are you sure you don’t want to get in the bath with me?”

I looked at the water, considering. “As nice as that would be, I do need to feed you.”

“Yeah, but I...”

I could feel his hesitation. “Whatever you want, you can ask for it.”

“I’d like to watch you cook.”

I smiled. “You have a cooking fetish?”

“With you I might. But I just enjoy...I enjoy seeing you doing things you’re good at, and I know you wouldn’t have offered to cook for me if you weren’t good at it.”

“You’ve got me there. I don’t like to do anything in front of people that I’m not good at.”

“Are there things you’re not good at?”

So many. But instead of letting myself go to a darker place, I smiled. “Skateboarding.”

His eyes went wide. “Surely you never tried to be a skater boy.”

“I went through a strange phase in college, but we won’t talk about that.”

He laughed. The sound was rich, and so very real. I wanted to think of every humorous thing I could tell him just to hear that sound again.

“I cannot see you, Mr. Bespoke Suits Only, on a skateboard.”

“It’s a good thing you haven’t, because I assure you, I’m lucky I didn’t crack my head open.”

“You can’t leave me with nothing but that.”

“Fine. I met this guy, and that’s what he was into. I was going through a phase where I thought it would be very cool to be as different from myself as I could be.”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

“It’s hard to imagine you not being completely confident, not wanting to be exactly as you are.”

“The first few years of college were tough.”

He frowned. “If you want to tell me more....”

I shook my head. “Maybe someday I would but not tonight. Right now I want you to relax and let the warm water soothe your sore muscles.”

“You know I don’t mind the soreness, right?”

“I know, and I like that it’ll make you think of me every time you move.”

“I always think of you.” He froze as soon as he said it.

“I think of you all the time too. I almost came back yesterday, even though they needed me to stay. I wanted to see you so badly.”

“I...that’s....”

I held out my hand, and he took it, letting me pull him back to his feet. “You really want to watch me cook?”

“I do.”

“All right then. I’m sure I have plenty of things we can nibble on if we’re hungry after our bath.”

I stepped into the tub, and he joined me. I leaned against the side and settled him between my legs, letting him lay back against me. “This feels so nice. I guess if you don’t like orgies, you could always use the tub for a swimming pool.”

“You know it’s not that big, but it is a really nice being able to share it like this. I don’t use it like I should.”

“How much time do you spend here? I know you’re at the office a lot and even though the trip to London is the only one you’ve taken since I started here, I assume you travel a good deal.”

“I’ve traveled less in the past few years than I used to. Before my father retired, I traveled at least half the time. But now, I want to be on top of things at our New York headquarters. I have people I trust in London and LA.”

“I guess you’ve probably been all over the world, haven’t you?”

“I have traveled extensively, one of the privileges of coming from a family like mine. What about you? Have you had much chance to travel?”

“No. I’ve been to Florida and to see family in Boston, but that’s about it. I’ve never been out of the country.”

“We’ll remedy that, sooner rather than later.”

I felt him tense.

“Miles—”

“You’re not afraid of planes are you?”

“No, but I’m afraid of...of expecting this to last.”

I wrapped my arms more securely around him.

“I know there aren’t any guarantees, but I like you, Benjamin. I don’t want this to end.” That was as close as I could get to telling him how I felt.

“I get that you feel that way right now, but this isn’t.... It’s not realistic.”

“I don’t worry too much about what’s realistic and what’s not, I just make things happen.”

“You use money to make things happen.”

“I do, that’s true, but that’s not all I do. I work with people to find solutions, create new ways to do things, create paths that haven’t existed before. That’s what I enjoy about running my company.”

After a brief pause, he whispered, “I like being with you.”

“I can tell.” I was rewarded by watching a flush rise up his chest.

“Let’s not think too much about the future for now; let’s just enjoy this weekend together.”

“Weekend?”

“Is there a reason you need to leave?”

He shifted to look at me. “You want me to stay here all weekend?”

“Yes.”

“I thought...I thought I’d be leaving after dinner.”

“The only place you’re going after dinner is back to my bed.”

He laughed. “Very confident of that, are you?”

“Yes.”

“All right. I’ll stay the weekend, and I’ll try not to think beyond that. I don’t know how well I’ll do though.”

“Baby, all I ask is that you try.”

When the bathwater began to cool, we drained the tub and rinsed the bubbles off our bodies. After we dried off, I offered Ben a pair of my running shorts. They were big on him, but he

folded the waist over and made do. I put on shorts as well, then led him to the kitchen where I opened a bottle of wine and threw together a quick charcuterie board with olives, cheese, and crackers.

“Try this Albariño with the Manchego,” I said handing him a slice of cheese and the glass I’d just poured.

He seated himself at the island, tasted the cheese, then took a tentative sip of wine.

His eyes lit up. “Wow, that’s really good. I keep trying to like wine, but I haven’t really gotten into it.”

That was something I could help with. I’d studied wine extensively and recently invested in a vineyard. “Tell me what you like about this wine.”

He frowned. “I don’t really know.”

“Taste it again and tell me what strikes you.”

BEN

I took another sip and considered. I didn't know all the proper terms used by wine experts, and most of them didn't make sense anyway. What did it mean for it to have mineralogy or be sharp on the finish?

"It tastes a little like citrus fruit, especially lime. I know it's made from grapes but...."

"I get that," Miles said. "It definitely has lime as well as other citrus notes. I think that's part of why it pairs perfectly with Manchego."

I took a bite of a different cheese, then another sip. "It tastes different with this one."

Miles smiled. "It does. That's Port Salut, not as great a pairing, but I wanted to put out some variety."

"This is all perfect. What are you making?" So far he'd grated some Parmesan and placed almonds and sun-dried tomatoes in the food processor.

"Bucatini with Sicilian almond pesto and burrata. The burrata will also go wonderfully with this Albariño."

"Wow. I have never had any of that, but I'm sure it will be delicious."

"You don't have any food allergies, do you?"

"No. I'm open to trying new things."

"I certainly got that impression earlier."

I looked down, suddenly too embarrassed to meet his gaze. When I thought about the things we'd done, the way I had shamelessly begged him, the look on his face when he came, it was all too much.

I focused on the cheese and crackers as he whirled the ingredients in the food processor. By then, water was boiling in the large pot on the stove, so he added the pasta.

Sitting here in his kitchen with him cooking for me, answering normal, everyday questions was as strange as being naked in front of him. Being here made more sense when everything had felt like a fantasy in the giant tub and his enormous bed. Not that his kitchen wasn't the thing a fantasy for anyone who enjoyed cooking, but there was something so normal about preparing a meal, even if it was a fancy one.

“What’s your favorite thing to eat?” Miles asked.

“My favorite for a special occasion or for every day?” I asked.

“Both,” he said.

“For every day, a bacon cheeseburger. If I’m going all out, anything involving scallops and pasta.”

“Good choices.” His smile made my heart flutter.

“What about you?”

“For a special occasion, nothing is better than a perfectly medium-rare filet. For every night, a simple pasta like this one.”

I studied him to see if he was serious. “That’s simple to you?”

“Sure. I just put ingredients in the food processor, make the pasta, and top it with the pesto and burrata.”

He certainly had made it look simple. “And when do you shop for all those ingredients?”

“I have my groceries delivered. All of these items are staples.”

“Wow.”

“So, what do you cook at home?” Miles asked.

“Ramen noodles, macaroni from a box, frozen dinners. That’s what simple means to me.”

He looked horrified. “That’s not food.”

“You really haven’t ever lived in the real world, have you? Did you always have your own cook? Even in college?”

“Maybe, but I had to eat cafeteria food in boarding school, and it was horrible. We had canned vegetables and pizza with nothing on it but sausage that didn’t even seem to be seasoned.

I couldn't wait to be fed properly at home during the holidays.”

Miles drained the pasta and stirred everything together. It smelled amazing and looked equally as beautiful. As a garnish, he sprinkled pieces of fresh basil over the top, then set a plate in front of me and refilled my wine glass.

“Go ahead and try it. Tell me what you think.”

I took a bite, conscious of him watching me, but I didn't have to pretend to like it. It was amazing. Everything was so flavorful, and he really had pulled it together quickly. “It's delicious. You really are good at everything.”

He joined me at the bar with his own plate and wine. “Remember, I only let people see the things I'm good at.”

Later, we snuggled up on the couch on his balcony, enjoying a nice breeze from the fans blowing on us, as we looked out at the lights of the city. I'd had enough wine—we'd finished the bottle he'd initially opened and another—to ask him. “What things wouldn't you want to do in front of an audience—besides skateboarding?”

He studied me for a moment. I thought he would refuse to answer, but after he pulled me tighter against him, encouraging me to rest my head against his chest as he lay back, he said, “I don't tell anyone my secrets, no one wants to be around me when I don't get what I want, and I'm incapable of relaxing.”

I rose up enough to look at him. “You seem fairly relaxed now.”

“This is probably the most relaxed I've been in a very long time.”

“What do you usually do when you aren't working?”

“Not much now that I have you.”

I considered protesting, that yes, I'd let him fuck me, let him be my first, but that didn't mean he had me in any bigger sense. We had this weekend, then he could go back to his billionaire life, and I'd still be his assistant.

“What do you want, Ben? What would make you happy?”

“Security.” The word was out before I could stop myself.

Miles frowned. “Is someone threatening your safety?”

My heart pounded and the room began to spin, but I couldn't look away. This question was more pointed than when he'd asked me if I needed to tell him something. Did he know? Surely he had to, but if so, why was I here? Was this all a game? It sure as hell hadn't felt like it when he was tongue-fucking my ass.

“Benjamin?”

I didn't want to lie to him, not when we'd been so open with each other tonight, but I didn't have a choice. I shook my head. “No.”

He held my gaze for a while longer. I waited for him to challenge me. I knew it wouldn't take much for him crumble my resolve. I wanted to tell him everything, but if I did, all of this would disappear. He'd know I'd been lying from the beginning, and the fantasy would be over.

What if he already knows everything? Think of all the resources he has. You know he checked your background.

I was sure he knew who I was, but did he know why I'd come there? Did he know my father put me up to it? He knew how little experience I had, and yet he brought me to his home. There was no way I would ask, and I couldn't confess.

“You're safe here, Benjamin. You have all the security you need while you're with me.”

Except I wouldn't be with him for long. Either I'd have to give in and tell him the truth, he'd figure it out and fire me, or he'd simply get tired of me. I couldn't count on him for security, even though I desperately wanted to. “There must be other things you want other than me. What are they?”

He narrowed his eyes, obviously annoyed I was changing the subject, but he didn't protest.

“There's an island off the coast of Ireland I'm looking into acquiring.”

“An island? The whole thing?”

“It’s not a particularly large island. I mean, I could have said I wanted to buy the entire country of Ireland.”

“You couldn’t actually buy a whole country.”

“Well, not if it isn’t for sale.”

We both laughed at that.

“Seriously, what do you want?”

“I can buy anything that’s available to be bought, so I don’t have to bother wishing for those things, but what I want is for Montgomery Enterprises to continue to be one of the most successful businesses in the world. I want my friends to be happy. I used to think I wanted someone to share my life with, a grand romance, but after Emily I dismissed that dream. Now I’m thinking I might have been wrong.”

I could hardly breathe. He looked at me, then pulled me tighter against him.

Before I could say anything, he pulled me into a kiss. I gave into the rush of desire. Letting our discussion go any further was too dangerous. Miles might yet pull a confession out of me, and if not, my heart was still in peril because this relationship wasn’t going to last. I needed to keep this fantasy to the realm of desire and pleasure, and not wish for something more, no matter how afraid I was that I’d already fallen for him.

Miles took hold of my thigh, encouraging me to straddle him. When I did, he gripped my hips, rising up, and pushing against me. He was already half hard, probably had been while we sat there and touched each other. It felt so good rocking against him.

The kiss grew rougher, his tongue thrust into my mouth. I clutched his shoulders as he held my hips, sliding his dick against mine. We were both fully hard now. How could he get me so desperate, so fast? He gripped the back of my borrowed shorts, and they slid down easily. I rose up on my knees so I could pull them down further, then contorted myself, working

them off my body. He lifted his hips, and I helped him slide off his own shorts. Then he held out his hand to me.

“Get it slick,” he ordered.

He held my gaze as I licked his palm, then sucked each finger, slowly running my tongue over each joint, pulling them into my mouth just like I would his cock. I drew several digits into my mouth at once and groaned, sucking harder as spit ran down his palm. Finally, he pulled away.

“God that was fucking hot.”

I whimpered as I worked my hips, desperate for friction.

“You’re everything,” he said.

I wanted to protest, but he wrapped his hand around our cocks, and I couldn’t say anything, all I could do is feel.

This was so fucking filthy. I felt like he could make me do anything. Everything I’d done with men before him had been quick with the goal of getting off, but with Miles, every touch was incredible. He made me feel sexy and special, and I wanted to explore every possible kink with him.

“Fuck, Ben. You feel so good.”

“Please.” It was all I could manage to say.

He slid his free hand into my hair, holding my head so I was forced to look at him. “I’m going to give you everything you need, every fucking thing.”

I wanted to believe that, but there was one thing I was sure of. He’d already given me more pleasure than I’d ever imagined.

He moved his hand faster now, squeezing us both tightly. I was so close. Soft whimpers escaped me, and the sounds made him growl as he rubbed his thumb over the head of my cock, spreading my precum to get me even slicker.

“Come for me, Benjamin. You’re so fucking beautiful.”

I was close already, but his words were all I needed to go over. I cried out as I thrust against him, cum shooting out and running over his hand.

He kept stroking us. It hurt now, the friction too much, but I didn't try to stop him because I wanted our cocks to be touching when he came. Seconds later, I got what I wanted.

MILES

When I was done, I dropped my head back against the sofa.

We were a sticky mess. I knew I should go and get something to clean us up, but I let myself wrap my arms around Ben and pull him to me until he relaxed fully against my chest. We sat there in silence, both breathing hard.

When I finally gathered the energy to move, I started to lift Ben off of me, but he didn't stir. He'd fallen asleep, and I wasn't ready to wake him yet. I took the opportunity to just look at him as I stroked the softness of his hair and caressed his neck. I loved that he felt comfortable enough to fall asleep on me. Somewhere deep inside, he trusted me. For most people, that would be foolish, but for him, it was exactly the right thing to do because I was going to fix his problems. I was going to take care of him.

Eventually, I grew so tired I worried I might fall asleep as well. I stroked his cheek. "Ben? I'm going to take you to bed now."

He made a muffled sound and started to sit up. "Did I fall asleep?"

"Yes, baby, but that's fine. It's time to go to bed."

I picked him up, holding him against me. He wrapped his legs around my waist and lay his head on my shoulder for the short walk to my bedroom. I placed him on the bed and promised I'd be right back.

I quickly cleaned myself up enough that I'd be comfortable enough to sleep. Then I brought a washcloth and did the same to him before climbing into bed and spooning around him. He sighed, still not really awake.

"I will keep you safe," I whispered, lips next to his ear.

"Mmhmm." At least in sleep he agreed with me.

I was going to find out which of his family members were threatening him and make them pay, slowly and painfully.

And I was going to keep him because he was exactly the person I wanted. I hadn't thought I'd ever feel like this again. When I'd seen how badly Emily was hurting, I'd decided I wasn't going to give my heart to anyone because I didn't want to ever feel that kind of pain. But with Ben, I couldn't stop myself. I wasn't going to let anything happen to him. I could protect him, and I was going to do whatever I had to do to make that happen.

The rest of the weekend was as perfect as it could be. We spent a lot of time in bed. We cuddled on the couch, and I learned about his taste in movies. When I asked him his favorite flower, he frowned.

“That’s an unusual question.”

“How can I send you flowers after our first night together if I don’t know?”

He laughed and shook his head. “Dandelions are my favorite, actually. I don’t really like perfect bouquets from a florist. I like things that grow wild.”

The answer fit him perfectly. Later, I put on music, and we danced. We didn't leave the apartment the entire. Normally, such a quiet weekend would make me antsy, but not with Ben. When Monday morning came, I didn't want him to leave, but I had my driver take him home so he could dress for the day. I also messaged Marisol asking her to make another suit for him, which I planned to keep in my closet.

No way in hell was this going to be the last time he spent the night with me. If I had my way, I'd move him in right now, but I knew he'd never accept that. And I knew I'd have to keep him under surveillance. Carter could think we were doing it in case he was committing corporate espionage, but I was doing it for his safety.

BEN

The next week should have been heaven. Miles was professional when he needed to be, tender when I was feeling the stress of his professional demands, and always ready to pull me into his office for a make out session—or more. But the daily threatening calls from Jesse ruined my bliss. The night before, he'd told me if I didn't have something for him in twenty-four hours, I would regret it.

I didn't know exactly what Jesse would do, so I was on edge all day. Miles as well as others I worked closely with kept asking me what was wrong. I ended up making an excuse and saying I had a headache.

Miles insisted I go home early to rest, not knowing that was far more dangerous for me than being at work. And as I'd feared, when I arrived at my apartment, Jesse was waiting for me.

He was sitting on the couch, one leg crossed over the other, ankle resting on his knee. He spread his arms across the back as he looked me up and down. I didn't bother to ask how he'd gotten in.

“What have you got for me, little brother?”

I surveyed the room, looking for Felix before I answered, but he always hid when Jesse came around. “I told you I haven't been able to learn anything. I'm too new there. Mr. Montgomery doesn't trust me with anything as important as the formulas for new products or the code to his personal safe. I'm not sure anyone has that code.” That wasn't true. I felt certain Ford and Carter had it, but not any of the executives.

Jesse shook his head. “You're his assistant. You have access to his office. You could get us something.”

“You want specific information, not just anything.”

“Information we could blackmail him with would work just as well.”

No way in hell was I going to let them hurt Miles. “I don’t have anything. I told you I wouldn’t.”

“And I made it clear that you’ve stalled enough.” He rose to his full height, towering over me.

I stood my ground. Things would only get worse for me if I showed my fear.

“What’s it going to take to convince you how serious I am?” Jesse asked.

I sighed, trying to look like I was bored with him. “I understand you’re serious about needing information, but this kind of thing takes time.”

“You’re lying.”

“I have to be there long enough to be trusted with the type of information you want.”

He wrinkled his nose in disgust. “You’ve never been any good at this.”

I’d never wanted to be good at it. “Then send someone else.”

“Not an option. It’s clear you’re going to need some more convincing.”

His fist slammed into my gut, and I doubled over in pain.

“I can’t mess up that pretty face of yours, that would draw too much attention. But I can hurt you.” He beat me until I was curled in a ball on the floor.

They need you; you’ll survive this. I kept repeating that to myself. Jesse wanted me to do the job, so he wasn’t going to kill me. He wouldn’t have avoided my face otherwise.

“Take care of business,” he yelled as he gave me one last kick, sending pain searing through me. “Our contact will be watching you, making sure you aren’t allying yourself too closely with the enemy. We know about your little stunt the other night, getting Montgomery to show you sympathy.”

I nodded, knowing there was no point in trying to explain what had actually happened at the gala.

“We want results, or it will be worse next time.” He laughed as he walked out, banging the door shut behind him.

Felix ran over and curled up next to me as I lay on the floor, assessing my injuries. I was going to be bruised and stiff, but I’d manage. I longed to call Miles and have him come care for me, but that was the last thing I could do. Unless I healed miraculously, he’d notice I wasn’t moving well and I’d have to come up with a story for him. At least he was flying to the LA office the next day, so I wouldn’t see him tomorrow. That also meant I would mostly be at my desk doing paperwork. I could handle the day if I didn’t have to move around much.

Once I’d figured out the practical arrangements, the invisible wall that held back my emotions crumbled. Tears poured down my cheeks, and I held my sides as I sobbed, each jerk of my body sending pain spiraling through me.

I was going to have to give my family something. I could take what I knew and alter it to make up something that looked plausible. I wondered how long it would take for their contact to figure it out I’d passed along fake information. Probably not long, but what else could I do? I wasn’t going to actually betray Miles, especially not after the weekend we’d had. But even before that, from the first morning I’d worked for him when he insisted I accept the suits he’d had made, I’d known that there was no way I was going to turn over information about his company.

Somehow I made it through the next day. I was sore as hell and covered in bruises. I seriously considered not going to Mrs. Weeks’s knitting circle that night, but I was afraid I’d get more questions if I didn’t go than if I did. I would simply tell her the same story I’d used at work—I got dizzy from my headache and fell down the stairs. There wasn’t any reason for her not to believe me. My story sounded completely plausible—if you didn’t know about my circumstances or that I’d never had a headache at all.

MILES

I wanted to ignore my alarm the next morning. My flight from LA had gotten in later after a hell of a busy day, but my desire to see Ben had me dragging myself out of bed. I'd missed him like crazy the day before, more than I even wanted to admit. How the hell was I incapable of going a day without seeing him?

My phone rang as I was looking out at the city and stretching. I glanced at the screen and saw Eudora's name. What on earth was she doing calling me this early? "Hello?"

"Miles, I'm so glad I caught you." What time did she think I went to the office?

"I wanted to call last night, but I knew you would get in late."

"What's going on? Do you need help with something?"

"It's Ben."

I tensed. "What about him?"

"Last night at knitting circle he was obviously in pain. I asked if he was okay, and he said he'd fallen down the stairs at his apartment when he was dizzy from a headache."

I immediately wondered if that was what really happened. I should have been there for him. Why the fuck hadn't Carter had someone watching who could help him? "Is he okay?"

"He swears he is. I just wanted to make sure someone was taking care of him."

I knew she also wanted me to solidify my relationship with him. She didn't know how close we'd gotten and I was sure Ben wouldn't have told her a thing. "How badly is he hurt?"

"He was reluctant to say much, but from what I can tell, he has bruised ribs and a sore arm. Didn't he mention anything to you?"

“No. I messaged with him several times, but he didn’t mention anything about a fall.”

She sighed. “He probably didn’t want to bother you.”

“I’m going to make it very clear that he is to bother me in future.”

“I bet you will.” I could hear how happy she was. “Have you made your feelings for him clear?”

“Eudora.”

“He should know. I don’t know what’s going on, but I can tell something is bothering him. I think he’s afraid, and I know he’s not afraid of you.”

The thought of him being afraid, of him being hurt, made me want to tear someone apart. “Thank you for telling me. I’ll figure out what’s happening, and I’ll take care of him.”

“And you’ll admit to the attraction between you two?”

“I already have.”

“Good.”

I sighed. “You have to let me take this at my pace. It’s been... it’s been a long time since I felt like this.”

“I know, dear. Please know I’m here for you.”

“I do. Thank you.”

As soon as I ended my call with Eudora, I tapped on Carter’s number.

He answered with a cheerful “good morning” which wasn’t like him at all.

“You sound disgustingly happy today.”

“I had an entire day and a full night’s sleep without being bothered by my boss. Imagine that.”

I scowled at the phone. “I’m bothering you now. Why the hell aren’t you watching Ben like I told you to?”

Carter snarled. “I’ve had someone watching him constantly.”

“And yet they didn’t know he’d been hurt?”

“What happened?”

I paced my living room as I spoke. “Mrs. Weeks just told me Ben was in pain last night. He told her he’d fallen down the stairs.”

“At work?”

“No. At his apartment after he went home the other day.”

After a pause, Carter said, “And you’re worried he’s lying. You think someone in his family hurt him.”

“Of course I’m fucking worried.”

“How badly is he hurt?” Carter’s voice remained perfectly calm. I knew that was part of what made him great at his job, but it only made me want to yell more.

“He went to work yesterday and to Eudora’s knitting circle, other than that I don’t really know anything. I told you to have a guard on him.”

“And I did. He’s not been out of sight unless he was at the office or in his apartment.”

“You should have been watching inside his apartment too.”

“That wasn’t part of the plan. My man watched him go in, but someone could have been waiting for him in his apartment. Is it possible he did fall?”

I snorted. “What do you think?”

Carter sighed. “Probably not.”

“You were supposed to keep him safe.”

“We were watching him to see if he was passing information to his family.”

I didn’t care what the initial objective was. “Someone in his family got to him and you weren’t there to protect him.”

“Neither were you and that’s what this is really about.”

I hated how right he was. “I told you I was worried about him. I told you he was being threatened, being pushed into this, and now he’s hurt. I want his family eliminated.”

“Miles. Take a breath.”

“I’m not going to let anyone else touch him. I’m going to keep him with me from now on.”

“Miles, we still can’t be sure what his motives are.”

“If he was giving them what they wanted, they wouldn’t have beaten him.”

“Just because he hasn’t satisfied somebody’s orders doesn’t mean—”

“Carter, he’s scared. Eudora thinks so, too.”

He sighed. “So you’re saying even if he is here to steal your secrets, you want to take care of him.”

“He’s not passed anything to them.”

“Not that we know of.”

“How good are your people?” I expected my security guards to be aware of everything that happened at Montgomery Enterprises.

“They’re the best.”

“Then he hasn’t passed on anything. I want to know exactly who’s threatening him, and if someone hurt him....”

“I’ll see that they’re taken care of,” Carter said. “You care for him. That’s obvious. I’m no longer in this to find out what he’s up to, I’m going to find out who sent him here. We’re going to take care of the problem.”

I let out a long breath. “Thank you.”

“You know I had to push. I had to make sure you weren’t just thinking with your dick.”

“I’m not Worth.”

“No but you have been led astray by a pretty face before.”

That was irrelevant. I’d never cared for anyone like I did Ben.

“So you trust me now?”

“I trust that this is what you want, and I trust you to see that clearly.”

“Good. Then let’s get these bastards.” I ended the call and scrolled to Ben’s number.

I glanced at the time as the phone rang, hoping he hadn’t left his apartment yet. I had no intention of allowing him to take the train. I wanted him at my place, under my observation, and I didn’t care how psycho that sounded.

He answered quickly. “Miles? Was I supposed to be in early today?”

“No, baby. I heard you were injured.”

“Oh yeah. It’s just some bruises. I’m fine.”

I wasn’t going to let him dismiss this. “Mrs. Weeks said you looked like you were in pain last night.”

“Did she call you to tell you that?”

“She did. She was worried about you.”

“Truly, I’m fine.” His voice was shaky, and he did not sound fine.

“I’m sending a car for you.”

“You don’t have to—”

Yes, I did. “You said you want security. Let me give it to you.”

He started a protest, but I ended the call. When Ben had said he wanted security, I was sure he’d meant generally feeling safe, not literally having someone guard him, but I was going to give him both.

I hurried to get ready, wanting to be at the office before Ben with breakfast and coffee waiting for him. On the way in, I called my favorite bakery and made a rush delivery order. They knew how well I tipped, so I was confident they’d have it there before either of us arrived.

I left my office door open, so I would see Ben come in. When he stepped off the elevator, I could tell he was trying his best to hold himself straight and walk normally, but I knew he was in pain. If it had been almost two days and he was still having trouble walking, he never should have come to work yesterday.

“Benjamin, I need to see you.” I kept my voice level and professional. I was sure there were plenty of people in the office who suspected all the time Ben and I were behind closed doors wasn’t spent going over paperwork, but I wasn’t going to be blatant about it.

When Ben walked into my office, I motioned for him to shut the door. He looked between me and the door nervously, then closed it. Was he worried I was going to push for details of his “accident”?

“Come sit down. I have breakfast for you.”

“You didn’t need to do that. I ate some toast before I left the house.”

“That’s not enough. I know you love chocolate croissants and anyone who works for me always needs more coffee.”

“How did you know I love chocolate croissants?”

“Every time we’ve had pastries in the office, that’s what you choose.”

His mouth dropped open, but he closed it quickly. “You noticed that?”

“I notice everything about you, Benjamin.”

He smiled and sat down slowly, gripping the arms of the chair.

“Why did you come to work yesterday if you were injured?”

He frowned. “Because there was no point in sitting at home.”

“You have sick days here. I offer a generous leave package.”

Ben sighed. “I know that, but there was work that needed to be done and—”

“You could’ve done a lot of it from home.”

“I work better here.”

I studied him for a moment. Had he come in because he wasn’t safe at home? I would absolutely not stand for that. I’d already been worried about where he lived. There was no security beyond a deadbolt and a chain on the door.

“You shouldn’t be here. How badly are you hurt?”

“I’m just bruised. I’m stiff and sore but—”

“Did you see a doctor?”

He shook his head. “I didn’t need to.”

“You have a very good health plan here.” Not that it mattered, I’d pay any medical bills he had.

“I don’t like doctors. I’ll be fine.”

“Let me see how bad it is.”

“What?”

I raised my brows. “Don’t tell me you’re going to be shy with me now.”

He looked away, fidgeting with his hands in his lap. “Miles, really, you’re making too big a deal out of this.”

“Then I’m going to ask you again like I did the other night. Is there something you need to tell me?”

“No. And you don’t need to ask that again. I’m fine.”

“I won’t have you making yourself worse. Either you need to go back home for the day, or you need to let Sheila, our staff nurse, take a look at you and clear you for work.”

“Fine. The nurse can check me over. I’ll go down to the clinic.”

I shook my head. “She can come up here.”

“Miles, you can’t keep treating me differently from everyone else here.”

“I certainly can. I can treat you any way I want.”

He looked up at me, eyes wide, and I realized how those words sounded. “Baby, I didn’t mean it like that. If I choose to take care of you, then I can do that. I own this company. I make the rules.”

I sent a message to Sheila, and she responded almost immediately.

Ben continued to protest. “It’s not fair, and other people are going to notice if they haven’t already.”

“I don’t care who notices. If they dare, they can come to me and complain—”

“It’s not that, it’s....”

I frowned. What wasn’t he saying? “What is it? What’s wrong, Ben?”

“Nothing. I just don’t want to be treated differently because....” He waved his hand back-and-forth between the two of us. “You know.”

“Because you were in my bed all weekend? Because I need you the way I need air to breathe?”

“Jesus, Miles. I don’t need to be hard when the nurse comes to check me out.”

“You’ll be fine. She said it would be a few minutes before she gets here.”

He frowned. “Here, like right here in this office?”

“Yes.”

“And you’re going to stay here?”

“Of course I’m going to stay here.”

“That’s not necessary.”

“Benjamin, I’m not leaving you.”

He sighed. “Okay. Fine.”

When Sheila arrived, she introduced herself, then glanced at me. “This would be more appropriate if you left us, Mr. Montgomery. Or if you allowed me to escort Mr. Allred to the clinic.”

I shook my head. “There’s no reason for me to leave.”

She turned to Ben. “Mr. Allred, are you comfortable with this?”

Ben glanced my way and nodded. I knew he was still uneasy. I hoped that was because he didn’t want me to know the truth about how he was hurt. I wasn’t going to miss the opportunity to see his injuries and assess for myself whether I thought they fit his story.

I knew what a man looked like when he had been beaten. If that's what had happened, they'd been careful to make sure nothing would show, but they'd gone too far. It was too damn obvious how much pain he was in. I wanted to pick him up, carry him downstairs, and take him home. I wanted to do everything I could to take the pain away.

When she unwrapped the bandage Ben had placed around his ribs, the sight of the horrible bruising made me want to rip someone's head off with my bare hands. I didn't believe for an instant that he'd fallen down the stairs, especially not when I noticed one of the marks was in the shape of a shoe. Someone had kicked him, viciously, and they were going to pay. They were never going to kick anyone again.

Once the examination was complete. Sheila rewrapped his ribs and said, "Everything should heal just fine, but you shouldn't be doing anything strenuous."

"I'm not," Ben assured her. "Just desk work."

She nodded. "That's acceptable, but you need to get plenty of rest and drink lots of water. Let me know if the pain gets worse or if it doesn't continue to improve over the next few days."

"I will," he said.

He winced as he slipped his arm back into his shirt. I wanted to punch my fist right through the wall because I couldn't punch the bastard who'd done this to him, but I stayed calm and smiled at Sheila. "Thank you."

"You have a good rest of your day, Mr. Montgomery." When she left, Ben met my gaze.

"See. I'm fine. There was no need for me to spend all night at the ER."

"I would never ask you to do that. If you have another emergency, call me. I'll have someone tend to you at your house, or better yet, at mine."

"Miles, I don't need—"

“Yes, you do. You need someone to take care of you. I’m here, and I’m going to do it.”

BEN

I could see how serious Miles's expression was. He meant everything he'd said. He was much too stubborn to back down, but how long would his interest in me last? What would he say if he found out how I'd actually been hurt? I knew it was only a matter of time before he figured out the whole truth. He had to know some of it already. I kept looking for signs that he was toying with me, trying to trap me, but I hadn't found any. Either he was a damn good actor, or he really did want me, despite whatever he already knew. Still, if —when—the truth came out, he'd send me away. I couldn't allow myself to rely on him.

"I should probably get to work now."

Miles shook his head "Not yet. Don't go anywhere today unless someone is with you. Tonight, you're coming home with me."

"Miles, I need to go by my apartment. I don't have any clothes for tomorrow, and my cat—"

"I had another suit made for you. It's at my place, and I'm happy to have one of my guards feed your cat, or we can stop by on the way home."

"I really don't think...."

"You're supposed to rest. Someone needs to take care of you. Someone needs to make sure you're doing exactly that. You're coming home with me. It's not an option."

I wanted to go home with him. I wanted him to coddle me, to cook for me again or order us a fabulous dinner. I wanted to pretend this was real, but the more I did, the harder I was going to fall for him in the end.

If this was a trick and he was luring me in, I was headed for a big crash...but I'd rather crash with him than be beaten to death in my apartment by my fucking brother.

For the next few days, I only returned home to feed Felix and give him some attention, and to gather more clothes for the rest of the week. My bruises continued to heal and by Sunday afternoon, I was feeling much more like myself.

Miles and I didn't have any of the vigorous sex like we'd had the weekend before, but he jerked off, spilling himself over my body, making me come almost untouched. It took nothing more than a few strokes of his hand, then he gently cleaned me up and put me in the bath again. The next day he sucked me off, and I begged him to let me do the same to him, assuring him I was more than up for it.

After we had lunch on Sunday, Miles said, "Pierre, my hairstylist, is coming in a few hours. Would you like a haircut as well? He gives amazing head massages during the wash, and I've never found anyone who knows how to cut hair as well as he does."

"I'm sure I wouldn't be able to afford—"

"This is my treat. You're my guest. I'm not going to have you sit here and watch me get pampered and not offer you the same."

"Wait a minute, what do you mean he's coming here?"

"He has a mobile service. He even brings a washing basin and a comfortable chair."

"How does he get all that around the city?"

"You'd be amazed at how small it folds down, and I doubt he sees clients anywhere that doesn't have an elevator."

I bet not. Probably, his clients also all had doormen or domestic staff who could assist with the setup. That thought made me question Miles's arrangements. "How come you don't have any live-in staff?"

He laughed. "What made you think of that now?"

"I was just thinking how if you did, they could help Pierre with the setup."

"I promise the setup is easy, and the answer is that I like my privacy."

I frowned. “You’ve had me here for days.”

“I want you here. I chose to invite you. If I had staff, they’d be here all the time, even when I didn’t want them. I’d rather have people who come in when I need them. Then I can have privacy whenever I choose it.”

I wondered how soon he’d want privacy from me. I had to keep reminding myself that this wasn’t my home.

When Pierre arrived. I decided several things very quickly. One, I did not like him touching Miles so freely. Two, Pierre was definitely not his real name, his French accent was one hundred percent fake. Three, I liked the way Miles kept looking over at me. I had intended to leave the room while Miles had his hair cut so I could go through some emails or look over Miles’s calendar for the coming week, but I decided to stay right where I was.

It was somehow both erotic and infuriating watching “Pierre” give Miles a head massage, then work his long fingers onto Miles’s neck and shoulders. I knew Miles was wearing nothing but a tiny pair of briefs under his robe. I didn’t want to think about how easy it would be for Pierre to untie it and try to take what was mine. Had he done that before? He certainly acted overly familiar.

When Miles’s hair has been cut, dried, and styled, he looked even more incredible than usual. Pierre knew his work, not that Miles would hire someone who didn’t.

“What do you think?” Miles asked.

“You look gorgeous.”

“Of course he does,” Pierre purred.

“It’s your turn,” Miles said.

At his insistence, I’d changed into a robe while Miles was having his hair blow-dried. I settled into the chair and Pierre guided my head into the sink. I didn’t know if I could have gotten into this position a few days ago but now my ribs only twinged as I lay back. And it was worth it, the warm water felt divine.

When Pierre began working the shampoo into my head, I realized exactly what Miles meant. His fingers were magical. The massage felt like pure heaven. I closed my eyes and let myself relax.

MILES

I started to protest when Ben winced as he lay back. I didn't want him doing this if it hurt, but he seemed content once he was situated with his head in the wash basin.

Pierre got the water temperature regulated, wet Ben's hair, and began to wash it. I knew there were plenty of things I could do besides watch, but I was going to indulge myself. Ben had watched me, after all.

As Pierre began Ben's head massage, I watched Ben slowly relax, sinking deeper into the chair. He let out a small sigh, a sound he often made in bed with me. I tensed, my hands balling into fists. I didn't want him making that sound for anyone else.

I told myself Pierre was a professional, that he was doing exactly what he did for me. Of course, Pierre had also done everything he could to work his way into my bed, only managing to succeed one time.

He moved his hands further down, working into Ben's temples. Ben sighed again, and I saw red. I didn't want another man's hands on Ben. I didn't want another man giving him pleasure. He was mine.

"That's enough," I said standing up.

Pierre smiled at me. "Don't you like watching us together? I thought perhaps you'd like to watch us do other things too."

That arrogant little shit. Did he actually think he was going to be invited to join me and Ben? "Out." I pointed at the door.

"I'm not finished. I have to rinse out the shampoo and then—"

"I'll finish for you."

"You cannot," Pierre yelled. "Do not touch his hair. It's so soft and beautiful and you will ruin it."

“Miles?” Ben had raised up in a position that had to be hurting his sore chest. “What’s wrong?”

Before I could try to answer him, Pierre screeched. “Tell me you will not touch his hair.”

“I have no intention of cutting Ben’s hair, but I don’t want you doing it either.”

He looked like I’d stabbed him. “Why not? I am the best.”

“Not for Ben.” I knew how crazy I sounded, but I didn’t care.

Ben sat all the way up, wrapping his arms around his chest. “Miles? What’s going on?”

“I don’t want him touching you. You’re mine.” I knew how over the top that sounded, but I couldn’t help myself.

“Miles, I think you’ve gone crazy,” Pierre said.

I barely refrained from commenting that his fake French accent had suddenly disappeared as I pointed to the door again. “Leave.”

“I have to pack up my things.”

“I’ll have them delivered to you in a few hours.”

“What? You can’t—”

I stepped into the bathroom long enough to grab my wallet from my discarded pants. When I’d counted out a thousand dollars, I handed the bills to Pierre.

He huffed. “I will still bill you for your cut.”

“Do that,” I said.

Pierre took his scissors from his cart and scurried out. I wasn’t sure if he trying to make sure I didn’t cut Ben’s hair or if he was that attached to them. It didn’t matter either way. Ben was mine now.

“What the hell was that?” Ben asked.

“Me being jealous.”

“He was just washing my hair.”

“You think he wasn’t flirting with you?”

Ben frowned. "I..."

"You heard him. He thought he was going to join us in bed."

"He was joking."

I shook my head. "I don't think so. I know him."

"Have you slept with him before?"

My jaw tensed. "A long time ago, and it was not at all serious."

"I knew Pierre wanted you when I was watching him wash and massage and make you even more devastatingly gorgeous, but I thought it was kind of fun knowing he couldn't have you."

"Because you know you're the one I'm obsessed with."

Ben's eyes widened, and he stared at me. "Are you really?"

"Obsessed with you? Obviously. Now, let me help you lie back again, so I can finish washing your hair."

"You were serious about that?"

"Yes, I saw how much you enjoyed it. It's my turn to help you relax."

Ben smiled as I eased him down against the chair. The sleeves of my robe were in the way, so I slipped out of it and tossed it toward the sofa.

"You're washing my hair naked?" he asked.

"I left my underwear on, but I'm happy to take that off if you'd prefer."

He laughed. "It's fine. This just may be the most ridiculous thing that has ever happened to me."

"Me making you feel good, stripping down so I can massage the shampoo into your head?" I slid my fingers into his hair and started working it, digging my fingers into his scalp.

"No. The fact that I have a billionaire CEO is washing my hair in his underwear. This is...insane."

"See, the thing about being a billionaire is that you can do whatever you want, and right now this is what I want to do."

Ben groaned as I pressed my fingers more firmly into his scalp. He tilted his head back, pressing into my hands, lifting his chin. I shifted one hand to work the base of his neck as I reached out, untied his robe, and spread it open. I watched his cock harden as I kept going, loosening the muscles of his neck, massaging his ears, moving up to his temples, then using my short nails to scrub his scalp.

He was squirming by the time I checked to make sure the water was still warm so I could rinse the shampoo from his hair. I slicked up my hands with conditioner and worked it through each strand, tugging slightly and making him gasp.

“Miles?”

“Yes, baby?”

“How much longer are you going to do this?”

“Well, I’ve got to rinse out this conditioner, and I’m sure there are some lovely products here I could work with.”

“I don’t need them.”

“What do you need, Benjamin?”

“I need you. I need you to fuck me.”

“So you do like this?”

“Yes. It feels so good, so much better when it’s you.”

His words made me smile. He’d relaxed with Pierre, but with me, he had let go completely. He could really get into it, and I was able to touch him exactly the way he wanted and watch for the slightest response. There was something special between us. The strength of my feelings scared me half to death, but I wasn’t going to run from them, no matter how much safer I’d be.

BEN

I sighed, loving the feel of Miles's fingers as he combed them through my hair. As he rinsed out the conditioner, he dragged his nails along my scalp and teased them along the sides of my head.

"So good," I murmured. I had enjoyed the head massage with Pierre, but I'd had no idea something so simple could be so erotic. The way Miles touched me like he knew exactly what to do was making me so hot.

He finished rinsing me off and towel-dried my hair before coming around the chair and supporting my back as I sat up.

I didn't need to ask to know where he was leading me once I was on my feet. We went into his bedroom where he stripped off my robe and my briefs, sinking to the floor as he pulled them down my legs, then bit my ass, making me squeak.

"So gorgeous." He gripped my ass cheeks, firmly kneading them before helping me lie down on my back. He looked me slowly up and down. "I love having you laid out like this, all ready for me."

"I'm ready for anything."

He looked pointedly at my still-bruised chest. "Not yet. You need to heal more, but I am going to make you feel so good."

"I want..."

"What? Tell me."

My face burned. I didn't want to have to say it. "I want to please you. I want to make you feel good."

"You do, every time you touch me."

"I...um...I want to...use my tongue on you."

His mouth curled up in a smile. "Where Benjamin? Where do you want to use your tongue?"

“I want to eat your ass. I want to know what it’s like. I’ve never....” he studied me closely, and I got more and more nervous when he didn’t speak. “I mean, if you don’t like that, if you don’t want—”

“I like it. I want it. I’m just trying to figure out how we can do it without hurting you.”

“I’ll be fine. We can—”

“I’m going to straddle you, facing your feet, but I won’t set my weight on you. I’ll give you access to my ass, and you can do anything you want with it.”

“O...okay.”

He propped me up with pillows, then got into position. I ran my palms over his ass, reveling in the warmth of his skin. Then I pulled his cheeks apart and stared. I felt like I’d been granted an incredible wish. Miles was at my mercy.

I flicked my tongue over his hole, and he gasped.

“Fuck, I don’t know if I can stay still.”

I groaned as I squeezed him tighter, loving the desperation in his voice. “I thought you could do anything.”

He chuckled, but when I licked him again, he bent over and took my cock in his mouth.

I sucked in a breath. “I can’t concentrate if you’re going to do that.”

“Do your best.” He took me down his throat again and I couldn’t stay still. He was sucking me so deep, so hard, that I couldn’t think. I tried to focus on teasing his ass, I pushed my tongue into him and nearly lost my mind when he spasmed around me.

He doubled down on his efforts to make me come, and when I did, he swallowed every drop of my load.

When he pulled off, I made a sound like a wild animal as I gripped his ass hard, exposing his hole. I wanted to push my tongue in as deep as I could. I wanted to drive him as crazy as he did me.

I worked him, licking, thrusting, adding a finger along with my tongue the way he'd done with me. He pushed his hips back against me, making incoherent sounds. When he started to beg, I wrapped my hand around his cock, working him until, with a rough shout, he came all over me.

I loved it. I wanted to be fully covered in his cum. Moments later, he rolled off me and collapsed. He could hardly catch his breath, and I loved seeing how affected he was. "That was... the most fucking amazing thing ever. If that was your first try, I can only imagine how damn good you're going to be with more experience. You might kill me."

"I just want to—" I stopped myself before I let the words "love you" slip out—"please you."

Miles shifted position so he could lie down facing me. He softly traced his fingers over my chest, never pressing hard enough to hurt me. "You please me more than...more than anything in a very long time. I...."

I lifted a finger to his lips, pressing it there to stop him from speaking. "Don't make any promises you can't keep."

He closed his eyes, and I took his hand in mine and did the same.

I woke up a while later. Miles was no longer in the bed, but I could hear him in the next room talking on the phone. He sounded angry, probably something to do with work.

I was still sticky from what we'd done, so I carefully got off the bed and headed for the bathroom.

I cleaned up, slipped my robe back on and had my hand on the doorknob when I froze. I heard my name. I knew I should open the door and walk out, let Miles know I was awake, but I didn't. I stayed there and listened.

"I already told you I tested him. None of the information I gave him was leaked. There's no evidence he's been passing anything along. We've had him under observation ever since we hired him."

My stomach churned and bile rose in my throat.

I was torn between running back into the bathroom to throw up and staying to hear the rest of what he had to say. I'd known there was a damn good chance this was all a game.

I wasn't shocked Miles knew far more than I wanted him to, but he'd been deliberately testing me, making sure I had false information to see if I passed it on. The fact that that's exactly what I'd been sent to do ceased to matter. He'd called me baby, said sweet things to me, acted like he cared. And all along he'd been spying on me, testing me. I had refused to betray him, refused to give over anything even when I was threatened, even when I was hurt.

Through my turmoil, I heard Miles say, "I'm not going to do that. This has gone on long enough."

I moved away from the door. I couldn't stand to listen anymore. I needed to get out of there. I got dressed as fast as I could, trying to block out anything else he was saying.

MILES

“You’re wrong about all of this, and I won’t have you say anything derogatory about Ben again. I care about him. I’m dating him. That is not going to change. Your position in the company, however, very well could if this continues. We have a plan. It’s in place. If you have any further questions, talk to Carter.”

I stabbed my finger on the red button to end the call.

Frank was damn good at his job, but he was a fucking asshole. He always had been. He was stuck up and pretentious, and I was not going to put up with him challenging me like this. No matter how good he was. I’d find someone else.

I heard Ben moving around. He shouldn’t have gotten out of bed without help. Why didn’t he call for me?

When I stepped into the room, I saw him standing there, fully dressed, cradling his side with one arm as he stuffed things into a bag.

“I’ll return this the next time I come into the office,” he said gesturing toward the bag. “I needed something to gather up my things.”

“Ben, what are you doing?”

“Why didn’t you just tell me you knew? You didn’t have to play games with me. You didn’t have to seduce me. You didn’t have to do anything this elaborate. If you’d just told me you knew, I would’ve told you everything.”

Oh God. He’d overheard my conversation. I should have hung up on that son of a bitch as soon as I realized what he was after. Because now.... Everything I’d feared was coming true. “Ben, none of this was a game.”

“Testing me? Seeing if I would pass on information?”

“I needed to know. I gave you a chance to tell me. I asked you.”

“I couldn’t tell you. It would....”

“Who hit you, Ben? Who did this to you?”

He didn’t try to deny what had happened, but he shook his head. “It doesn’t matter. Just leave me alone. I want to go home.”

“Baby, I didn’t—”

“Don’t call me that!”

He was going to walk away and never come back. I had to tell him everything. I’d sworn I wouldn’t hurt him. “This isn’t a game.”

“You have me here so you can watch me.”

“No. I have you here because I want you here.”

“You said you had me under surveillance so you could be sure I wasn’t passing on your secrets. I haven’t, and I’m not going to no matter what you really think of me.”

“Someone hurt you because you wouldn’t betray my company, and I am going to see that they are punished for that.”

“No, just stay out of it. Let me handle things.”

I could never do that. Even if he ended up hating me, I wouldn’t let them harm him. “Ben, I’m not going to let you get hurt again.”

“All you’ve done is hurt me. You’ve been watching me, keeping me with you, I thought...” He shook his head. “I knew better, but I let myself hope....”

“Benjamin. Nothing that’s happened between the two of us was about this, and it wouldn’t have happened if I didn’t trust you.”

“After you tried to trick me? I heard you on the phone talking about how you were watching me.”

“I had one of my guards watching you.” His eyes widened, and I knew I’d said the wrong thing.

“You had me followed?”

“It was as much for your own safety as—”

“Well, it didn’t help. Where was this guard of yours when I was being beaten?”

“I’m furious that they weren’t there, that they didn’t see.”

“I should never have applied for this job. I should never have agreed to—”

“Did you have a choice?”

“No. I guess I should’ve passed off the information, then disappeared.”

“Absolutely not.” I grabbed his arm trying to force him to look at me, but he pulled away with a grimace, and I let him go. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.”

“Am I supposed to believe that? I can’t believe anything you say now.”

I was torn between horror at what I’d done to him and anger at the way he was questioning my honesty. It was exactly what everyone had done back in college. “You came to the company under false pretenses. What did you think was going to happen?”

“I never thought you would hire me.”

“I needed to know what you would do, and I needed to keep you there. From the moment I met you—”

“Don’t make this worse.”

“You infiltrated my company.”

“No. You chose to hire me because you wanted to play a game instead of calling me out on what I was doing. You wanted to use me, and you have in every possible way.”

His words were like a slap to the face. “Ben, please. I want to protect you.”

“I don’t want your protection.”

I’d fucked everything up. Ford had told me this would blow up in my face. I was furious with myself, but the angrier Ben got, the more my anger built. He wasn’t completely innocent. He’d been hiding things from me.

Because he's scared. Because he's being threatened.

“Tell me the whole story. Let me understand how you ended up here.”

“No. You don't need to know that. I never did anything to harm you or your precious company.”

He moved toward the door again, and I stepped out of his way. I didn't know what else to say. I'd lied to him. I'd spied on him. And he'd only done what he'd had to stay safe. “I expect you at work in the morning.”

“I can't—”

“It's not safe for you to quit.”

I saw the resignation on his face. “Fine. I'll be there. I'll do my job. But that's all. There's nothing between us anymore. This is strictly professional.”

“Ben, I didn't mean—”

“You said you wouldn't hurt me, but you lied about that too.”

He walked out the door, not even slamming it behind him, just quietly closing it. I heard the elevator open. I wanted to chase after him, but what was I going to say? He was right. He shouldn't have kept things from me, but I'd done worse.

I was going to have to do find a way to fix it. And the first thing I needed to do was find out exactly who gave him those bruises.

BEN

I fought back tears as I left Miles's building, walked to my stop, and rode the train home. By the time I was back at my apartment, I was too numb to cry. What was I supposed to do now? I either had to do what my family wanted to save myself from harm or beg Miles to take care of things after all. What would I owe him then? I was furious with him, but I also already missed him terribly.

There were too many emotions to feel at once, so I locked them down inside me and felt nothing. Until a text came through and I saw it was from Miles. Tears began to fall before I even read it.

My car will pick you up at seven thirty tomorrow morning.

I'd told him I'd come to work, but there was no way I could see him and hold myself together. I could barely see through my tears to type. *No. I quit.*

That's not safe for you.

As if I didn't know that. I wasn't physically safe with my family, but I was going to fall apart emotionally if I saw Miles again. *I can't work for you.*

Yes, you can. Until you figure out an option that keeps you safe, you are my employee.

Why are you so fucking arrogant?

Why are you so stubborn?

Fuck off. I'd had it with Miles, with my family, with everything about my fucking life.

You will come into the office.

Or what, you'll report my crimes to the police?

You haven't committed any crimes.

But I'd been sent there to do just that. My résumé was false as hell.

That's not a crime.

Why do you still want to protect me?

Because you matter to me.

There was no way I could believe that. *Don't do this.*

The car will arrive at seven thirty, and my security guards will either stay there with you or accompany you to the office. I will not let anyone else hurt you.

Other than you, you mean?

I watched the oscillating text bubbles appear and disappear for several seconds, but no reply came.

I sighed. Was I being fair? Knowing what he knew about my background, wasn't he right to follow me, to test me? And really, what choice did I have other than letting Miles protect me? Jesse might kill me next time. At least with Miles it was only my heart that would break.

I'll be here. I immediately turned off my phone. I didn't want to see any more texts. I'd already given in to going back to work, to having to spend all day with him. If he kept texting me, what else would he get out of me?

You could listen to him, or better yet, tell him your whole story.

No. I'd let myself hope our relationship could be real. I never should have done that.

I lay there, curled up on my couch, wishing there was someone I could talk to, someone who could help me through the heartbreak. I ended up spilling out all my contradictory feelings to Felix. Eventually, as I lay there stroking his soft fur, I fell asleep.

The next morning, I woke feeling hungover and my neck ached from the odd position I'd slept in. I went through the motions of getting ready without really thinking. I turned my phone back on in time to receive a text letting me know my car had arrived. I hadn't even had a chance to make coffee.

Could I do this? Could I spend all day around Miles? What if I broke down and started crying in the office? What if I confessed everything to him and begged him to love me?

No. I would not do that. He'd toyed with me and—

But had he?

I wasn't sure of anything anymore, except that I was a mess, and this was a terrible idea.

MILES

After Ben left, I went for a long run, then punished myself further by burying myself in work. I sent Carter a message telling him to use any available resource to find out who hurt Ben. When he asked me how hard I wanted him to push, I told him he had carte blanche. We made a plan to meet in the morning to discuss anything he found.

I worked until long past midnight, and even then, I only stopped because the numbers in front of me had ceased to make sense.

I tossed and turned for the rest of the night. Around 5 AM, I woke drenched in sweat from a dream of Ben telling me he never wanted to see me again, then disappearing into thin air. At that point, I gave up on sleep.

I showered, dressed, and headed into work. I left my office door open because I wanted to see Ben when he arrived. How pathetic was that? I would take a single glimpse of him if that was all I could get. If only Frank hadn't called when he did. I'd told him not to bother me at home. Maybe I would have found the right time to tell Ben the truth later that day.

Would you really?

Maybe. It's possible.

It was torture to leave Ben alone and let him work through the list of tasks I'd sent him. I wanted to go full throttle with a plan for getting him back, but I needed to give him as much space as I could. But I also I wasn't going to risk him getting attacked again. I would see that he was safe; that came first, before either of our feelings, bad or good.

Martin, the security guard who was accompanying Ben to work, texted me like Carter had instructed him to to let me know they'd arrived. I filled one of the mugs in my office with coffee, added sugar and cream, and set in on Ben's desk, then I returned to my desk.

A few moments later, the elevator slid open, and Ben walked down the hall. I forced myself to look at my computer screen as he approached. Once he was seated, I indulged myself, watching him take a sip of coffee. He glanced my way. He had to know I'd left it for him. I smiled, and he quickly focused on the folders in front of him.

My concentration was even worse now that Ben was mere feet away from me. I needed to convince him that I hadn't been playing with him, that what I felt for him was real. I was in love with him; I knew that now. I wasn't going to let him go on thinking I had been playing with him. How could he truly think that?

He was scared and hurting from his attack. You were supposed to be his protector and you fucked up.

Carter had perfect timing. If he hadn't stepped out of the elevator when he did, I would have broken down and ordered Ben into my office so we could talk. Carter closed my office door behind him and took a seat.

"Do you have answers for me?"

He shook his head. "Not yet. The main players are Ben's father and brother, but they have plenty of associates who could have been sent to attack Ben." He glanced toward the closed door. "I guess you don't want to just ask him?"

"I did, and he refused to tell me."

Carter raised his brows. "You didn't ask him again? You didn't use your charm to get the answer out of him."

I ran a hand through my hair and sighed. "No."

"Would you like to tell me why? Along with why you didn't have him stay at your place since you're so worried about his safety."

"If he had his way, he'd probably never see me again."

Carter's eyes widened. "Fuck."

"Yeah."

Carter stood. "Come on. I'm taking you out to brunch."

“I have work to do.”

“You have seething to do here or moping or both. I know how you are when things don’t go your way.”

“You make it sound like I’m some fucking spoiled little brat.”

Carter grinned. “I mean....”

“Goddammit.”

“Let’s get out of here.”

I reluctantly stood. Carter was right that I wasn’t going to get any work done.

We headed to a diner a few blocks away. It had been there since the forties, and they had the best pancakes I’d ever eaten.

Carter and I found a booth, asked for coffee—not my usual quality, but since they didn’t serve brunch cocktails here, I’d have to make do—and ordered pancakes for me, and eggs, sausage, and hash browns for him.

Once the waitress walked away, Carter met my gaze. I knew that look of determination in his eyes. He wasn’t going to relent until I’d spilled everything.

“Ben’s the one who’s hurting. I’m just the asshole who fucked up. If you want to do some good today, you should be talking to him, not me.”

Carter snorted. “You don’t look like you’re doing too well yourself. I think you need to talk. You know I’m not the best at this, but you’ve listened to me through a hell of a lot, and I want you to know I’m here for you.”

I sighed. “I know that, and I appreciate it, but I don’t think Ben has anyone he can talk to. I think his family kept him isolated, and he was scared to make friends once he moved out. In a family like that, friends become targets.”

“Yeah. I know a little bit about that. It’s not the same but....”

“It’s similar enough to your situation. I knew you’d understand.”

“Hang on.” Carter pulled out his phone and made a call. “Ford...I’ve got a favor to ask...Ben needs someone to talk to. He doesn’t have anyone, not like us...Right. I thought he’d be more comfortable with you since he’s met you several times... Okay. Thanks.”

He ended the call and focused on me again. “Ford’s going to take Ben to lunch.”

“Ben will assume I sent him.”

“Maybe, but you know how good Ford is at talking people around.”

I rolled my eyes. “Right. There’s a damn good reason he’s an attorney.”

“Now, instead of worrying about Ben. Why don’t you tell me what the hell you did to piss him off.”

I glared at him. “What do you think I did?”

Carter whistled. “I could go through a very long list, or you could just narrow it down and tell me.”

“I had him followed and gave him false information to test him.”

“And he found out?”

“He overheard me on the phone with Frank.”

“He would’ve eventually found out if you kept this up.”

“I know. Ford told me to tell him, but how was I supposed to do that? It didn’t matter how or when it came out, it was always going to be the same result. He was going to decide this was all a setup. He thinks everything was just a game to me. He thinks....”

“That you used him.”

I nodded. “But he lied to me too.” I sounded petulant as hell.

“True, but you had all the power.”

He was right. Ben couldn’t have confessed to me, because if I fired him, his family would probably have hurt him, maybe even killed him.

Carter laid a hand over mine. “I won’t say what you did was wrong. He needed to be monitored. I agreed with that. I didn’t even want him here, but your instincts were spot on.”

“I fucked this all up. I wanted him. I told him it wasn’t game, but is that really true? At first, I saw something I wanted, and I went after it because that’s what I do. But things changed. I started to feel more, and then I did exactly what I’d sworn to myself I wouldn’t do. I hurt him when I wanted to protect him. We’ve got to get him out of that apartment. He’s not safe.”

“I’ve got someone watching him 24/7 and another person watching his building when he’s not there.”

“He’d be safer at my penthouse.”

“Would he agree to go there?”

Would he? “Maybe if I stayed somewhere else.”

Carter raised his brows.

“Maybe not. He doesn’t want my help now.”

“That’s not completely true. He came to the office today. He might have said he didn’t want to be there, but he was working and I noticed he was drinking the coffee you left for him.”

“How did you know I got him coffee?”

Carter grinned. “Martin keeps me very well informed.”

“So you’re spying on me.”

“I’m keeping you safe. That is, after all, my job.”

“You were totally against me hiring him, and now you’re trying to come up with ways to help me keep him?”

“I’m trying to come up with ways to keep you both from regretting walking away, and I’m trying to keep you both safe. I was wrong. Is that something you’ve admitted?”

“Fuck. Why do you always have to come right to the point like that?”

“Because you need someone to. Did you try apologizing?”

“I don’t...I’m not....”

Carter raised his brows.

“Fine. I was wrong to keep all this from him for so long.”

“Great. Now why don’t you try telling him that.”

Because it scares the shit out of me. “Because he won’t talk to me unless it’s about business.”

“You’ve never let that stop you before.”

“The stakes have never been this high before.”

BEN

Being around Miles at the office was hell. The only time we spoke during the morning was when it was absolutely necessary for work. I tried to avoid looking at him as much as I could. Miles glanced my way frequently as he brooded in his office, before abruptly leaving with Carter.

I was trying my best to make sense of the spreadsheet in front of me, but I couldn't seem able to comprehend anything today. All I could do was think about Miles. Should I try to talk to him once he returned? If it had all been a game, why would he care now? Why would he have insisted I come to work? Why did he keep trying to talk to me? But even if he hadn't meant to hurt me, how would anything ever work between us?

"Ben?"

I hadn't even heard anyone approach my desk. I looked up and saw Ford. "Sorry. I got lost in thought and...."

"It's fine."

I glanced at Miles's door. "He's gone out with Carter."

"I'm not here to see Miles. I'm actually here to see if you'd like to go to lunch."

I studied him for a moment. "Did Miles send you?"

"No."

"Is there any reason why I should believe that?"

He tilted his head, seeming to consider his answer. "Probably not, but it is true. Come on. We can go anywhere you want, and it's on me."

"You don't have to do this."

"I want to."

I glanced around. I couldn't say too much here where someone might overhear, so I simply stood and followed Ford to the

elevator.

“What would you like for lunch?” he asked once we stepped out onto the sidewalk.

“I’m not very hungry.” I hadn’t felt like eating since I’d left Miles’s penthouse.

He studied me for a second. “Has Miles ever taken you to Bistro Noelle?”

“No.”

He grinned. “It’s fabulous. I’d love to introduce you to it, and the menu is varied so I’m sure you’ll find something you’d like to eat.”

Ford texted someone as we walked along, and I contemplated how I was going to get through an entire lunch with him. He was personable and not hard to talk to, but he was Miles’s friend. What was I going to say? *Your friend is an asshole who pretended to want me so he could see how far I’d go to help out my worthless family?*

When we reached Bistro Noelle, a blond man in form fitting white pants and a blue linen button-down was seated in the waiting area. He stood as we entered and gestured toward me. “I assume this is Ben.”

Ford nodded. “Ben, this is Worth. He’s also one of Miles’s closest friends.”

Worth held out his hand, and I shook it. His eyes lingered over me longer than they should have. “I see why Miles is so obsessed with you.”

“Worth,” Ford scolded. “That’s not helpful.”

Miles had told me a little about his friends. They’d known each other since they were in boarding school. Worth was a flirt but a solid friend. I’d wanted to meet him, but that was when I trusted Miles and thought.... Shit. I was not going to cry here.

“Come on.” Worth put his arm around me. “Let’s get a table and get you a drink.”

Normally I would have refused the offer of a drink this early on a workday, but I thought I might need it to get through this lunch. I already wanted to bolt, and we'd just been seated.

“So,” Worth said once our drink order was in. “What did Miles do to piss you off?”

The question shocked a strangled noise out of me. “I don't... I'm not....”

“Don't worry,” Ford said. “We both love Miles, but he can be a complete ass. Neither of us think he's perfect.”

“And he'd be happy to tell you all our flaws, mine especially,” Worth added.

“How much do you know already?” I asked.

“We know why you applied for the job as his assistant.”

“I didn't—”

Ford held up a hand. “And we know you didn't do what your family expected, and that you've suffered for it.”

“I truly didn't, but....”

Ford frowned. “What?”

“I should tell Miles this. I just don't want to talk to him right now.”

“Understandable,” Worth said. “We can pass along anything you tell us.”

I studied Ford for a moment. “You're his attorney. I'm already compromised enough.”

Ford smiled. “Right now, I'm just his friend, and yours if you'll let me be.”

“My family has a contact within the company. I passed along some false information to them, but they'll eventually realize it's fake.”

Ford nodded. “Who is the informant?”

Before I could answer, our server returned. I hadn't even looked at the menu, so I let Ford order for me. Once the server left, I knew I had to come up with an answer.

“I know you probably won’t believe me, but I don’t know. My father said they demanded anonymity.”

Worth’s expression turned fierce. “Is your father the one who hurt you? I will track him down personally and—”

“What?” Ford asked. “Intimidate him with your abs?”

Worth flipped him off.

“We should let Carter handle the more violent side of things.” Ford faced me again. “And we will.”

“It doesn’t matter. I just need a chance to make a plan to get away.”

“No.” Ford’s tone was as implacable as Miles’s usually was. “We’re going to take care of this problem, and then—”

Worth broke in. “And then you should give Miles another chance.”

“He was never really interested in me.”

Ford narrowed his eyes. “Do you truly believe that?”

I let out a long breath. Last night, I was sure he’d just been using me. Now? “I don’t know.”

Worth shook his head. “Miles wouldn’t do that. Using people is what I do.”

Ford rolled his eyes at this statement. “If all Miles wants is a hookup, he’s going to be straightforward about that. If he wants to bring you down, he’ll do that without getting personal.”

I frowned and looked over at Ford.

“He’s right.”

“You want to know what he did?”

They both nodded.

“I overheard him on a phone call. That’s how I found out he’s known all about my family since before he hired me, that he’d tried to trick me by giving me false information to pass on, and that he’s having me followed.”

Ford sighed. “I told him to tell you as soon as he started to have feelings for you.”

“What do you mean?”

“He told me he cared for you, and I told him he couldn’t—”

“Wait. He actually said that.”

Ford held my gaze as he said, “Yes.”

“I don’t know what to say.”

“You don’t have to say anything now but let him help you. Trust us and allow us to help too. We want the best for him, and according to him, you’re it.”

I tried to push down the excitement rising in me. Miles really did care. His attention wasn’t all to get a confession out of me or to find out what my family wanted me to steal. “He really wasn’t using me?”

“No, Ben. He never was.”

Could I be okay with what he’d done? Could there really be a chance? Did I dare risk my heart again?

MILES

As soon as Ben arrived back in the office, I called Ford.
“How did it go?”

“Aren’t you supposed to be working?”

I was not in the mood to play games. “Fuck off.”

“It went as well as could be expected. Worth and I did our best to convince him you’re exactly what he needs.”

“You brought Worth with you?”

“Yes, he’s good at this kind of thing.”

I knew exactly what Worth was good at. “Flirting with a man who’s feeling down?”

Ford chuckled. “Yes, but I meant cheering someone up and talking them into seeing his perspective.”

“And seeing him naked.” The thought of Worth flirting with Ben made me want to wring his neck.

“Ben had no interest in seeing Worth naked, and since when have you ever been jealous of any of us?”

“I haven’t. I’m not really. It’s just.... Damn it, Ford. I’m in love with Ben.”

“Yeah. No shit. And I think there’s a significant chance he’s in love with you.”

“So you think....”

“That you might get a second chance? Yes, I do, but not if you hide things from him or if you are as pushy and demanding as you usually are.”

“That’s...not going to be easy.”

“I can imagine. Just let him be for the rest of the day and probably tomorrow too, let him come to you.”

“Will he?”

“I think there’s a good chance.”

“I’m not good at being patient.”

“You think I don’t know that?”

“I’m not that bad.”

“No, you’re not, but you’ll need something to distract you. Come with me to my book club on Thursday.”

“You’re still going to that?”

“Yes, why wouldn’t I?”

I smiled. “No reason.” It fit him perfectly to sit around and discuss pretentious books. I did need something to keep my mind off Ben. “What are you reading?”

When he told me the name, I groaned. “Isn’t that one of those novels that makes no sense, but everyone pretends to grasp the deep meaning?”

“Possibly.”

At least reading it would give me something to do that night, and lately everything seemed incomprehensible to me. “Fine. I’ll come with you. What time?”

“Eight. I’m not sure where we’re meeting yet. Let’s have dinner before and go together.”

“All right.” Anything to distract me was good. As it was, I already needed something to keep me from walking out to Ben’s desk and insisting he tell me how he feels.

“Call me if you need me before then,” Ford said.

“I will.”

“You can call Worth too, you know?”

“I do. Really.”

“Bye, Miles.”

When I ended the call, I tried to look through some documents my research team had sent, but they might as well have been written in hieroglyphics. Was this really what it was like to be in love? How did anyone get any work done? All I could think

about was Ben. Even before he found out what I'd been hiding from him, he'd been an incredible distraction.

If only there was something I could do for him, some gesture. I thought for a few moments, but everything seemed too much. More clothes? Some jewelry? A car?

No, that was all way too much. He'd liked the coffee even if he hadn't said anything. Flowers? Too cliché. Unless....

BEN

The next day, I kept looking at Miles's door after I returned from lunch. I even started to get up a few times to go talk to him, but I sat right back down each time. I wasn't sure what to say.

I believed Ford, but would Miles still feel the same way after I'd walked out and refused to talk to him? Did I really want to risk trying again if he did? Was it easier not to know?

I thought about the coffee that had been waiting on my desk the day before. I was sure Miles put it there. The mug was from his office, and the coffee was the special blend he insisted on. He used it at home too. I remembered drinking it while he'd made breakfast and had to blink back tears.

Midafternoon, Miles stopped briefly at my desk to say he was going out.

I checked his calendar. "You have a meeting with Lisa in thirty minutes."

"Cancel it."

"When will you be back? I can try to reschedule."

"I don't know how long my business will take. Clear my calendar for the next few hours."

Where was he going? I wanted to ask, but I didn't. Talking to him was still hard. I felt too many things: anger, grief, desire, love. I needed to think before saying anything else. Even asking a simple question could lead to me topics I wasn't ready to discuss.

He didn't come back for over an hour. When the elevator opened and he stepped out, I stared. And not just because he was gorgeous and magnetic and always drew my attention. No, his tie was askew, he had dirt on his pants, and he was holding a small bouquet of dandelions. I'd never seen him look so disheveled, not even after a ten-mile run.

He approached my desk and held out the bouquet. “These are for you.”

“Did you...did you go pick these?”

“You said you didn’t like perfect flowers from a florist, so I had to search for these.”

“You seriously picked these yourself?”

“I did.”

I studied him. He was sweaty, and his face was flushed. “Did you go on a walk?”

“Yes.”

“In this heat?”

“I started walking toward Central Park. I looked in some courtyards and anywhere there was grass, but I reached the park before I saw any.”

“So you were just going to pick them anywhere you saw them?”

He nodded.

“You can’t just go in someone’s courtyard and—”

“I’d get them more. I’d pay for natural landscaping. I’d buy them a new building, I don’t fucking care. I wanted these flowers to give to you.”

Laughter bubbled up inside me, and I couldn’t keep it in. “I love the thought of you walking around in your million-dollar suit trying to find some dandelions. You know you can be arrested for picking flowers in the park.”

He snorted. “I’d like to see someone try that.”

“I suppose you’d just pay them off on the spot.”

He shrugged. “I’d do whatever was necessary.”

“You’re....” I shook my head. “I don’t know what to do with you.”

“I have some suggestions, if you’re interested.”

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. “Not yet. Not here.”

“This was never a game for me.”

I nodded but didn't say anything else.

Miles walked into his office and softly closed the door.

The next day, I had to accompany him to a board meeting and try not to let everyone there see how shitty I felt.

Afterward, when he tried to talk to me, I told him I had work to do. Thankfully, he didn't try to stop me when I walked back to my desk. It almost killed me not to turn around. I'd seen the hurt in his eyes, and I did want to talk to him. Every time I thought about him picking dandelions for me, my heart melted for him all over again. He'd hurt me, but had I deserved it? It wasn't like I'd been honest either.

Miles tried to talk to me again at my desk, but I told him I had to focus on work or I wouldn't be able to stay for the rest of the day. He didn't push things, and I wondered if it was because he understood I needed some time or if it was too public a place—fucking in his office was one thing, arguing about what we'd done to each other was something else.

On Thursday, I was supposed to go to knitting circle. I'd been avoiding Eudora as much as possible, answering her texts with single words or short phrases. I knew she would try to get the full story out of me, and I also knew that as right as I was to be upset, I'd done exactly what she'd asked me not to do. I'd hurt Miles.

I wanted to fix things, but I didn't know how. I didn't know how anything could be like it was.

I considered a million excuses for why I couldn't attend, but between Ford insisting I needed to get out and Eudora telling me she'd personally come get me if I tried to skip, I gave in and told her she could send her car for me as usual.

MILES

During dinner, I told Ford I didn't want to talk about Ben or work, I just wanted to hang out. Otherwise, I knew I might walk out and never go to the stupid book club. I'd hated the book; it was just unlikeable people saying nonsense to each other. I had no desire to discuss it with Ford's law school friends.

The problem was, if I went home, I would mope and seethe just like Ford had accused me of doing. I'd been so desperate to stop thinking of Ben the night before that I'd gone drinking with Worth, which had made this morning even worse.

Ben had loved the dandelions. He still had them on his desk in a water glass even though they were wilted now. I was contemplating what else I could do for him that would make him happy when the car stopped at the curb.

I looked out to see where we were. "What are we doing at Eudora's house?"

"She's hosting."

"Wait, I thought Thursday nights was when Ben had knitting club. I know Ben—" I turned to Ford. The fact that he wouldn't meet my eyes told me everything. "You brought me to knitting circle."

"Maybe."

"Is he in there?" I gestured toward the house.

"Who?"

I narrowed my eyes at him. "You know who."

"I'm not sure if Ben is here yet or not."

"But he's coming."

"Unless Eudora failed to convince him."

Eudora never failed at anything. “He’s coming, and he doesn’t want me here.”

“Do you want to be here?”

“No. Yes. Fuck, what am I supposed to do.”

“Go in there and be civilized and see how things go when you two are outside the office.”

“I’m always civilized.”

Ford raised his brows. “You stalked him like prey, then claimed him as yours.”

“And he—”

Ford held up a hand. “Don’t give me more details than I want to know.”

I smiled and followed Ford to Eudora’s door.

She greeted us, kissing me on the cheek and linking her arm with mine. When we stepped into her living room, Ben’s eyes widened as he asked, “What are you doing here? Eudora, you said—”

“A woman my age is allowed a few little white lies.”

Ben looked back at me. “You knit?”

“What? No. I thought this was....” I ran a hand over my hair.

Ford grinned. “I might have said book club instead of knitting circle.”

“And I....” I looked down at the book in my hand. “I actually read this shit.” Heat filled my cheeks as I realized how thoroughly I’d been had by Ford, and that pissed me off. I never blushed.

“It’s awful, isn’t it?” Ford said with a laugh. I wanted to punch him.

“Good for you,” Eudora said. “Everyone should read daily. Now, have a seat. Would you like a glass of wine?”

Everyone else in the room was pretending to focus on their knitting, though Robert hadn’t been able to keep from laughing.

When I chose a chair on the far side of the room from Ben, Ford cleared his throat. “You’re in my seat.”

“You have assigned seats for knitting?”

“That’s where I always sit.”

The only other place to sit was next to Ben. He glanced my way, but I looked down quickly.

Ford gestured for me to get up. “This seat has better lighting, and you’re not even knitting.”

“But you are?”

“He’s been here every week.” Ben looked surprised he’d spoken, like he hadn’t meant to jump into the conversation.

I glanced back at Ford. “You told me you had a book club on Thursdays.”

He huffed. “I don’t have to share everything.”

“Do you mean you’ve only been pretending to read pretentious shit like this, and you’ve actually been knitting?”

Ford nodded.

“Did you think I would make fun of you?”

“Maybe, more Worth and Carter than you, but....”

I glared at him. “Don’t do that again.”

“I won’t.”

“Good. Have your damn seat.”

I sat down next to Ben. I could feel him looking at me, but I had no idea what to do. I hadn’t been shy or unsure like this with anyone I’d been interested in since I was in college.

I’d seen him just a few hours ago at the office, but there, with him at his desk in the lobby, I couldn’t say much to him, certainly not anything vulnerable. This was different. I could easily ask him to step out of the room with me. Eudora would encourage it. I forced myself to turn his way, but the words I’d intended to say stuck in my throat.

After a few moments of awkward silence, Ben held up his knitting. "I'm making a scarf. It's a little wonky, but I'm relearning how to do this."

I nodded as I reached for the end of the scarf, holding it out to see it better. "I like the pattern, and the yarn is really soft."

Ben smiled. "Thanks. It's called a basketweave stitch."

"It doesn't look wonky to me. It's beautiful."

Ben frowned at the scarf. Sure, it was a little wiggly on the sides, but I would wear it without a second thought if he was making it for me.

After breaking the ice with each other, we joined in the general conversation. I realized after a while that I'd started to relax. Sitting next to Ben here in Eudora's house felt natural. I wanted this to be my future. I would even learn to knit if it was the only way I could see Ben outside the office.

When everyone began to say their goodbyes, I turned to Ben. "Would you let me see you out?"

He gave me a soft smile and nodded. "I'd like that."

When we stepped outside, we stood to the side of Eudora's front steps. I took a deep breath, looked Ben in the eye, and said, "I need you in my life."

"I'm in your office every day."

"And barely speaking to me."

He looked away, suddenly very interested in passing cars. "I'm performing my job quite well."

"You are, but..."

"I don't know if I can do this, Miles."

As he said the words, he looked up and our eyes met again. I heard him suck in a breath. Neither of us spoke. The tension between us was so thick it was tangible.

My hand came up and brushed his cheek.

I wasn't angry anymore, just achingly sad. I'd always thought the term "broken heart" was melodramatic, but my chest hurt

all day and all night, keeping me from sleeping. “Ben....”

“Yes.”

Was he acknowledging that I'd spoke or giving me permission? I prayed it was the latter as I slowly moved closer, pulling him to me, then pressing my lips to his again. As soon as I did, it was like I'd ignited a fire. Ben gripped my upper arms, pulling me even closer as he kissed me back with all the passion I'd longed to feel again.

“I missed you,” I said against his lips as we both tried to catch our breath.

“I...Miles....” The sadness in his eyes felt like a punch to the gut.

“We can make this work.”

He sighed. “You believe that because everything works out for you.”

“Then I can make it work out for you too.”

“I....”

“You want me.”

“Of course I do.”

The confession came so easily it gave me hope. “Then why....”

“Because you're going to break my heart.”

“You already broke mine.”

He looked truly stunned. “What?”

“Jesus, Ben, don't you know how much I care for you? I haven't felt alive since you walked away.”

“You can't mean....”

“I...don't make me say it if you're not going to give us another chance.”

“I don't belong in your world. That hasn't changed.”

“This...” I gestured toward Mrs. Weeks's house, “is my world, and you fit in there as well as I do.”

“But at work—”

“Most of those people are jackasses.”

“What about April and anyone else you’ve been with before?”

“I wish I could say she’s the only bitch I’ve had a fling with. She’s not, but none of them matter. I’ll send them away just like I did with her. And I hope you know I don’t usually associate with people as awful as her.” Ben seemed to be considering that. “Not on my own time, anyway.”

“You hardly have any time of your own.”

I couldn’t argue with that. “I could have more.”

“But you really do love running your company.”

“That doesn’t mean I can’t turn some things over to others.”

Ben frowned. “Miles, I’m not asking you to—”

“I’m offering.” I took his hand. “Come home with me.”

He shook his head. “Not tonight. I need to think.”

“I want to drag you home and tie you to my bed.” His eyes widened. “Damn. Don’t look at me like that or I’m going to do it. It’s been far too long.”

“I’m sure you’ve had your choice of partners to comfort you.”

“What?”

“I...I just assumed....”

“Benjamin, there’s been no one but you since the day you walked into my office.”

“Really?”

“Yes. Would you at least let me drive you home?”

He frowned. “I thought you came with Ford.”

“I did, but we came in my car.” I tilted my head toward Eudora’s car that was waiting for him. “Eudora’s driver can take Ford home.”

“All right. You can drive me home but—”

“I’ll see you safely to your door. That’s all. I’ll only be there to protect you.”

BEN

When we pulled up to my apartment building, an alarm was screaming into the night.

Before we even got out of the car, I recognized one of the security guards who worked for Miles rushing toward us.

“There’s a fire,” he told us. “I just called 911.”

I glanced up and saw smoke pouring out of my window.

“Oh my God. It’s my apartment. Felix is in there, we have to get him!” I wrestled with the car door, trying to get it unlocked.

When I jumped out of the car, the guard grabbed me, holding me back. “Don’t go in there. Help is on the way.”

“No, you don’t understand. Felix has no way to get out. I can’t leave him in there.”

Miles was right behind me. He tossed his jacket onto the roof of the car. “I’ll go.”

“Mr. Montgomery,” the guard protested. “You can’t. It’s too dangerous.”

Miles ignored the man and took off running toward the entrance before either of us could stop him. I fought the guard’s hold on me. “I need to go after him. He doesn’t know where—”

“No. One of you in there’s bad enough.”

Seconds later, Carter ran up to us. “Did Miles just go into the building?”

“Yes, he’s gone after my cat. I wanted to go. I don’t want him in danger.”

“I’ll handle it.” Carter ran toward the building.

“No. Wait.” I started to go after him, but the guard pulled me back once again.

“Carter will get them out of there. You know he used to be a Navy SEAL, right?”

“Yeah, I know that, but he not fireproof.”

The guard laughed. “I wouldn’t tell him that.”

People poured out of the building, but none of them were Miles or Carter. I watched the entrance, pacing back-and-forth. The street was filling up with all of my neighbors. Everyone stared up at the building, trying to figure out how the fire had started.

“Why aren’t they back out here?”

The guard awkwardly patted my back. “Don’t worry, they’ll be all right.”

“You don’t know that.”

Sirens blared as fire trucks approached, blasting their horns to move traffic out of the way. Just as the firefighters pulled up and began assessing the situation, Carter and Miles stumbled out of the building. Relief rushed through me. Miles had Felix cradled in his arms and everyone looked okay. A few of the firefighters reached them at the same time I did. One of them clearly knew Carter.

“Unit 3A is where this started,” Carter told him. “I think I successfully put it out, but I’m certain it was deliberately set.”

The man nodded before he and his men headed into the building.

“You put it out?” I asked as Miles handed Felix to me.

Miles and Carter nodded.

“Are you both all right?” the guard asked. When they said yes, he turned to me. “I’ll find you something to use as a cat carrier.”

I nodded. “What happened?” I asked once he was gone.

“I found your extinguisher under the kitchen sink,” Carter said. “Thank God you had one in a logical place. I was able to put the flames out, but there is serious damage.”

I hugged Felix to me. “All that really matters is that he’s safe. I didn’t want either of you risking your lives.”

Miles wrapped an arm around me. “I wasn’t going to leave your cat trapped in your apartment.”

“I was going to go after him myself.”

Carter snorted. “Miles would never have let you do that.”

Miles pulled me tightly against him. “I promised to keep you safe. I fucked that up already, I’m not going to do it again.”

Tears stung my eyes. I glanced toward my window, which was covered in soot, then I looked back at Miles, taking in his ruined clothes. I reached up and wiped a smudge off his face.

“Ben, who did this?”

“Probably my brother, Jesse. I can’t believe...but, yeah, it had to be him.” My father preferred doling out punishments face-to-face, and he wouldn’t have ordered this stunt since it could get him in trouble if any other tenants were harmed.

Miles brushed the back of his hand over my cheek. “Is he the one who beat you?”

I nodded. I didn’t know why I’d been so hesitant to tell him before.

“I’ll take care of him.”

Carter frowned. “My sources said he’d left town. Your father is very displeased with your brother’s inability to control you.”

I laughed humorlessly. “Yeah, Dad would be. Jesse is probably just hiding. Dad always gets over his anger and brings him back.”

“We’ll find him.” Carter said. “He won’t be bothering you again. I should’ve taken more aggressive action.”

“Wait...do you mean...?”

“Jesse will not bother you again,” Miles said.

I decided not to question them further.

The guard returned with a box and some tape. We made holes in the box, placed Felix inside and taped it shut. Felix made

his disgust loudly known, but at least he was safe. I wasn't about to risk him running away after the effort Miles had made to save him.

Once we'd all talked to the police and were free to go, we put Felix's makeshift carrier in Miles's car. I leaned against the door and sighed. "I don't know where I'm going to go. I have no idea how long it will be before I can get back into my apartment and find out what's salvageable."

"You're coming home with me," Miles said.

I started to protest, but he pressed a finger against my lips.

"You can stay in one of the guest rooms if that would make you more comfortable. We don't have to decide anything about what's happening between us right now, but you will be safe at my house, and I can get you anything you need."

"What about Felix? Your place isn't..."

"Felix is just as welcome as you are. If he scratches something, I'll replace it. Your protection is my top priority, and you're safest with me. Even if your family figures out where you are, they wouldn't dare come at me directly. If they do, they won't survive the encounter."

I wasn't going to turn him down. "Thank you. I..."

Miles shook my head. "You don't have to say anything."

"Okay."

BEN

My mind spun as we drove. Jesse beating me up hadn't been unexpected, but I was shocked at the thought of him setting fire to my apartment. I'd known he was cruel and probably somewhat crazy, but there were others who lived in my apartment complex, families, children, pets—and Felix had been our family cat until I'd taken him with me. How could he do that?

The most immediate problem was, where was I going to live? And how much, if anything, was I going to be able to salvage once I could get back into my apartment?

You can live with Miles, and he can take care of everything.

Could I though? Did I dare hope for that again?

“Pull over here.” Miles's voice startled me from my thoughts.

I looked around. We were double-parked by a fast food place. “What are you doing?”

“Getting you a bacon cheeseburger.”

“Seriously? Looking like that?” I gestured at his soot-covered shirt and slacks.

“Yes. You said it was your favorite everyday meal, so I'm getting it for you.”

I smiled for the first time since I'd seen the flames. “You really are something else.”

“Damn right I am.”

Miles's driver idled at the curb as traffic backed up behind us. Motorists laid on their horns as Miles calmly stepped out of the car and walked into the burger place.

When the car began to move forward, I started to protest.

The driver must have seen my distress in his mirror because he quickly assured me, “We'll circle the block, sir, and then pick

him up.”

“Oh. Of course.”

When Miles re-entered the car. He handed me a bag and set drinks in the holders in front of us.

I opened the bag and the scent of burgers and fries hit me. I was suddenly starving. “Are you even allowed to eat fast food in a car as fancy as this?”

“I’m allowed to do anything, remember?”

I frowned. “I should probably wait, though.”

“No, you need to eat something. You haven’t been eating well, and you didn’t have anything at Eudora’s.”

“How do you know I haven’t been eating? Are you still fucking spying on me?”

“I know because Ford told me, though as you saw, I did have a guard stationed by your building to make sure you’re safe.”

I wanted to be mad about that but....

“Ben, I care about you. That was never a game to me. I know I hid things from you, but how could I tell you?”

Just like I couldn’t tell him.

Miles laid a hand on my arm. “I’ve wanted you from the moment I saw you in the interview.”

I wanted to believe that so badly. “The interview was a game.”

“I suppose you could say that. I knew who you were. Did you really think I wouldn’t do a background check?”

I shook my head. “No.”

“Mrrrow.” Felix yowled from his spot beside me, but I barely even heard him.

“It’s okay, Felix.” Miles said, his voice as gentle as I’d even heard it. “You’ll be out of the car soon.”

Miles extracted a burger from the bag and handed it to me, then he took one for himself. I grinned at him as he took a bite.

“I didn’t think you’d eat fast food.”

“I can rough it as well as anyone.”

“I doubt that.” For the next several minutes, we both focused on eating. I was thankful for the food, not just because I was hungry, but because it gave me something to do with my hands and kept me from feeling like I needed to talk. Miles was a warm presence beside me. I wanted to snuggle against him, but I wasn’t sure exactly how I felt, and I didn’t want to let him hold me again until I did.

When we reached his building, Miles insisted on carrying Felix’s box. I still had fries to eat and part of my drink to finish, so I carried those. We were rather conspicuous with the screaming cat and Miles’s soot-covered clothes as we walked through the lobby of his posh building, but Miles wasn’t the least bit ruffled by it. He really did expect to get away with whatever he chose.

That had amazed, frightened, and angered me at various times, but right then I loved it. I looked around the lobby that had intimidated me the first time I’d been here. Now all I saw was an open, airy space, decorated with marble and gold, nothing that should scare me. The only thing that mattered was whether Miles wanted me here.

We were silent during the elevator ride. When we got to his penthouse, I was shocked to see a self-cleaning litter box set up and ready to go, as well a bag of expensive cat food and dishes for food and water. “Where did all this come from?”

“I had someone bring it while I got your dinner. Should I put Felix in a guest room until he gets settled?”

I loved how he just glossed over that like it was something anyone could do. I chewed my lower lip, trying to decide. I wanted to curl up with Miles in his bed, kiss him, and let him help me forget how scared I’d been, but I was a mess. I should get myself together first. He’d overwhelmed me with the things he’d said as we stood by Eudora’s house. Then the fire had happened, and now I was here. When I walked out the other day, I hadn’t thought I’d ever be in his penthouse again, but being here felt so right.

“Ben?” Miles looked up from where he’d been petting Felix through the holes we’d made in the box. “Are you okay?”

“No. I’m...scared and confused and....”

“Why don’t we take Felix to one of the guest rooms, then you can decide where you want to sleep when you’re ready to go to bed. You’re welcome in my room any time, but it’s your choice.”

I followed him to the nearest guest room and closed the door as he set Felix’s makeshift carrier down on the floor. When I untaped the flaps and carefully pulled them back, I expected Felix to jump out and take off, but he climbed out slowly. He wandered around for moment, then jumped up on the bed and stretched out on his side like he did when he wanted belly rubs.

He’d always been a chill cat, but this was almost miraculous after what he’d been through. He started purring as soon as I petted him.

“I think he likes it here,” Miles said.

“He sure seems to.” Was that a sign? “Thank you for letting me bring him.”

“Benjamin, he—and you—can stay here as long as you like. I want you here, remember? You’re safe with me. From now on, I won’t hide anything from you.”

“Why are you being so nice to me?”

“Do you still not understand how much I lo—care about you?”

I stared at him. Had he been about to say he loved me? Did he? “I believe you. Would you...um...would you hold me for a moment?”

Miles pulled me into his arms. I clung to him and buried my face against his neck. My breath caught when I inhaled the acrid smell of the smoke on his shirt. “I’m so sorry about your clothes.”

He hugged me tighter. “It doesn’t matter, baby. Nothing matters but you standing here, alive and safe and willing to let me hold you again.”

Somehow, his kindness made me cry. Tears poured down my cheeks, soaking his shirt. He ran his hands up and down my back and kissed the top of my head. “I’m here and I’m not going to let you be alone until we take out every person who wants to harm you.”

“I lied to you. I applied for the job because my family wanted me to spy on you. I passed on fake information.”

“You did that to protect yourself. You didn’t give away anything important. And I was testing you, tricking you.”

“You were right to.”

“I wasn’t right to keep doing it once I knew how I felt about you. I should have told you what I knew and asked how I could help you. I’m sorry.”

With his apology, the last of my uncertainty drained away. “I want to stay in your room tonight. I want you to keep holding me.”

He scooped me up in his arms. “I want that too.”

“Should we close Felix in here?” I asked.

“Will he be scared if he can’t get to you?”

He looked as content as ever, but I didn’t want to risk it. “Maybe.”

“We’ll leave the door open so he can come find you.”

“Are you sure? He might get on your bed.”

“That’s not going to bother me.”

I studied him for a moment. “I wouldn’t have thought you were a cat person.”

“I’m not, but I can learn for you.”

“Miles—”

He put his finger on my lips. “You don’t need to say anything. Let’s get ourselves cleaned up and go to bed.”

We showered together. As tired and overwhelmed as I was, my body couldn’t help but react to Miles naked, wet, and so close. But Miles focused on washing me, going no further than

placing kisses on the back of my neck. When he'd gotten us both clean, he bundled me into a towel and carried me to bed.

"Are you spoiling me so I'll never want to leave?"

"Maybe."

He handed me a set of pajamas and underwear.

"Are these...."

"I had them sent up along with the cat supplies. Wear as much or as little as you want."

I considered my options. What did it say that it hardly even phased me that he'd had pajamas in my size sent here for me? I pulled on the underwear but laid the rest aside.

Miles grinned. "Nice choice."

He pulled on some underwear as well, and we climbed into bed. If I'd tried to sleep on my own, I might have lain awake worrying all night, but it took only moments of Miles's warmth spooned around me to soothe me to sleep.

MILES

I was in the middle of the best dream. Ben was sucking my cock, using his tongue in creative ways, taking me deep, clearly enjoying himself. I arched my hips up, pushing myself deeper as he hummed around me. His hands gripped my hips, pushing me back to the mattress.

The sun was shining through the window, making me squeeze my eyes shut. I couldn't let it wake me. I needed to see where this dream would go. But when Ben took hold of my balls, pulling them enough to make me gasp, my eyes flew open. I was in my room, and holy fucking shit, it wasn't a dream.

“Ben?”

He pulled back long enough to push the covers off his head and look up at me. “Yes?”

“You...you're...this is real?”

“Yes, I needed to taste you.”

“Fuuuuck.”

He went back to sucking me. His mouth felt like heaven. I fought the urge to hold his head and push him all the way down. He was here, in my bed, and he wanted me. That was enough.

He swallowed around me, and I groaned. “Don't stop. I want to come down your throat.”

“Mmm. So good.” He whispered against my slit before taking me back in his mouth and sucking even harder.

I only lasted a few more seconds before I cried out and let go. Ben swallowed convulsively, taking everything I had to give.

“Come here,” I growled as he let my softening cock slip from his lips. I pulled him up my body and kissed him, loving the taste of myself on his tongue.

Finally, I let him catch his breath. He smiled down at me. “That was so fucking hot.”

“Yeah. It was. Now jerk yourself off. I want you to come on me.”

His eyes widened, but he obeyed instantly, rising up onto his knees and gripping his cock. I watched, mesmerized as his hand moved faster and faster, then he cried out my name as cum shot from his cock, making a mess on my abdomen.

“You’re so beautiful.”

He smiled as he looked down at his handiwork. “Miles, I want you. I want this. I’m scared but...”

“I want you here with me. I need another chance to show you that I would never toy with you. I—”

My phone interrupted me. I would have ignored it, but it was Carter.

“I’m sorry.”

Ben smiled. “It’s fine.”

I wiped off my hand on the sheets, reached for my phone, and answered it. “What!”

“Jesus. You stay up all night to help a friend, and that’s the reception you get.”

I sat up, and Ben moved off my lap. “You found something?”

“The identity of the fucker Ben’s family is working with.”

“Who is it?”

“Frank.”

Burning hot anger boiled up in me. “That son of a bitch. I’ll kill him.”

Ben’s eyes widened.

“Carter found you dad’s contact. It’s fucking Frank.”

“Oh my God. No wonder they didn’t tell me. I had no idea it was anyone that high up.”

“Take him out.” I ordered Carter.

“Slow down and think carefully about exactly how much carnage you want to have to cover up. I’m sending over photos and the evidence I’ve gathered. We need to come up with a plan to deal with him. If you want to go the more legal route, then we need concrete evidence that will hold up in court. That’s going to likely consist of Ben passing him more information and us catching Frank in the act of taking it.”

I glanced at Ben. He was now up and pacing anxiously. “I don’t want him in any danger.”

“It would all take place in Montgomery’s building. We’d have people watching. It will be the same kind of drop he’s already done on his own. That means very low risk.”

“And if I choose to go to the not so legal route?”

“We’ll have to handle that after the end of the business day.”

“You can manage it though.”

Carter huffed. “I’m insulted you even asked that but think about it. You don’t want bodies stacking up.”

Carter was right. Jesse was as good as dead as soon as he showed his face again, but I could send this guy to jail.

“I don’t want you killing anyone for me,” Ben said.

“If I had my way, I’d kill them all.”

“Miles. No.”

“Let’s talk about how to handle bringing down this asshole,” I said. My eyes were on Ben, but I was speaking to Carter.

“You can always change your mind later on,” Carter said. “It will be a long time before any legal action is settled, and even once it is, we have resources wherever he ends up.”

I knew Carter was right, and I knew that the more time that elapsed between bodies showing up, the less likely anything would be traced back to me. I wasn’t worried about myself. No matter what the DA tried to throw at me, I’d get off, but my relationship with Ben...I didn’t want anything to fuck that up.

“Talk to Ben. Let me know you both decide and we’ll put something in place.”

“I want it done today.”

“We can handle that.”

“Thanks, Carter.”

“Always.”

I ended the call and set my phone back on the nightstand.

“What else did he say?” Ben asked.

“Are you up for faking another drop off? If we want to do this through the justice system and press charges, we need to catch him in the act.”

“I can do that. I don’t even have to see him, right?”

“No, all you have to do is exactly what you did before. We’ll have someone there as backup the whole time.”

“Are you sure he’ll be there today? Are you sure he hasn’t figured out you’re onto him?”

“We’re covering our tracks, and he’s already in the office.”

Ben frowned. “What time is it?”

“It’s almost nine.”

“Seriously? How did we sleep that late?”

“I didn’t set an alarm. I wanted you to get all the sleep you could.”

“You’re going in late today just because I’m here?”

“When this is over, baby, I’ll take a week off, maybe even two or three. I’ll take you wherever you want to go. You are the most important thing to me right now.”

“I just...this is real, right?”

“It’s very real, Benjamin. Now, let’s get this plan together. We’re going to take this asshole down today, then we’ll go to work on the rest of your family.”

“What are you going to do to them?”

“Some of that depends on how they react to the pressure I put on them. Except for Jesse. Jesse is going to disappear. No one’s going to hear from him again.”

“You can just do that and know you won’t get caught?”

“Yes, I can.”

“Have you done it before?”

“Only in a situation equally as serious as this.” Thankfully, Ben didn’t ask any more questions. I didn’t want to go into detail.

Felix came trotting into my room as we put together a plan. He hopped up on the bed and rubbed his head against Ben’s leg, then against mine. I reached out to pet him.

Ben smiled. “He likes you. He’s easy-going, but he doesn’t usually come up to strangers like that.”

“I rescued him from a fire; that should count for something.”

“I don’t think cats really care about things like that.”

“Well, I care about you, and so does he.”

His smiled widened. “Maybe that’s it.”

BEN

I stood next to Miles in the security office. Carter had Frank on the observation screen. He was seated at his desk, scrolling through spreadsheets.

“Let’s get this done quickly,” Miles said. “If I have to look at him for long, I’m going to go up there and handle this myself.”

“You’re in luck,” Carter said. “My team is ready to go.”

Miles put his arm around me. “Are you ready?”

“Yeah. I want to get this over with too.”

“Then let’s get to it.”

Using Carter’s computer, I logged in to my email and sent a message to the address Jesse had told me to use. I let the contact know I had new information, solid information this time, no more games. I told him I’d leave a zip drive at the drop point in five minutes.

We watched the screen as something drew Frank’s attention. When he opened up his email, I knew we had him. We all watched as he read my message.

“Let’s do the drop,” Carter said.

Miles kissed the top of my head. “Be careful.”

“I’m just walking through the building, Miles.”

“I know.”

Carter clapped Miles on the shoulder. “We’re watching his back. Trust us.”

I rode down the elevator with one of Carter’s men. The drop went as quickly and easily as it had before, and I was back up in the security office watching on the monitors as Frank retrieved the information.

It really was him. He wasn’t just an asshole, he was trying to sabotage Miles’s company. “He needs to pay for this.”

Miles smiled as he hugged me to him. “Trust me, he will.”

“Are you going to....” I couldn’t quite bring myself to voice the idea of murder out loud.

“Not immediately. We’ll take this to trial. After that, who knows what might happen to a man like him in jail.”

I looked up at Miles. “You’re really that powerful?”

“I really am.”

I shivered, but I was also embarrassingly turned on.

We watched as Carter and Martin stopped Frank. We didn’t have audio on them, but at least we could see their reactions. Initially, Frank appeared annoyed and dismissive, but as Carter spoke, he began to look panicked, then he took off.

“Motherfucker,” Miles snarled.

Carter caught him easily, shoving him against the wall. He handcuffed the asshole and marched him toward the elevator.

Miles and I were both smiling as we watched. “Do you wish you’d been the one to take him down?” I asked.

He squeezed my hand. “Not if it meant leaving you.”

“Will Carter bring him here?”

Miles nodded. “You don’t have to stay if you’d rather not witness this confrontation.”

“I’m not leaving. I already hated Frank for being such an asshole every time I had to interact with him. Now that I know he’s been working with my family, working against you after you put up with his shit, I want to watch him go down.”

Miles grinned. “Then by all means, stay and feel free to ask questions of your own, but do not admit to anything. Do not answer anything he asks.”

Ford stepped into the room as Miles finished. “Neither of you needs to say a thing. I’ll handle the questioning.”

Miles shook his head. “Ford, you know how this is going to go, and you know there will be no record of anything we want to conceal.”

“There’s security video of him being apprehended and being brought to this office unharmed.”

“There’s video of his apprehension, but unfortunately, none once he’s in the elevator. You know how these systems aren’t always reliable.”

Ford sighed. “Fine, but as your legal counsel, I would be remiss not to warn you.” He focused on me. “Ben, listen to what he said. You do not want to incriminate yourself even if there won’t be a record.”

I looked between the two of them. “I just want to know why he did it.”

“So do we,” Ford said.

When Carter and Martin entered the security office with Frank, Miles pointed to a metal chair. “Sit.”

“Fuck you,” Frank said.

Miles grabbed him by the shirt and slung him down. He slid from the chair, hitting the floor. “How clumsy of you,” Miles said. “Would you like to try that again?”

Frank fought to sit up with his wrists tied behind him. “Get these fucking cuffs off me.”

“No,” Carter said. “You’re a flight risk.”

“You have no right to detain me here.”

“Yes, we do,” Ford said. “You have stolen information in your possession.”

“I have information that I have every right to.”

“You’re the CFO,” Ford said, “you have no need for formulas of products we’re developing.”

“I don’t have any formulas.”

“Bullshit. I know what you have, because I left it for you,” Miles said.

“You fucking set me up. Allred said—”

I stepped in front of Miles. “So you admit to working with my father?”

“He said you were too much of a pussy to get what he needed, and now look at you, whoring for this—”

Miles lunged for him, but I was faster. I punched the son of a bitch in the jaw, and the shock on his face alone made it worth it.

Miles grabbed my arm, holding me back like I had him when he'd attacked Medford. But I didn't need him to restrain me. One hit was enough. I'd proved my point. I could defend myself and Miles, and I wasn't going to take shit off of anyone anymore.

“What the fuck?” Frank's voice was slurred and blood ran down his chin. “You'll pay for that.”

“No, you and my father and brother are the ones who are going to pay.”

Frank snarled. “I deserve of piece of this company. It would be nothing without me.”

“That is objectively untrue,” Ford said.

“In other words,” Carter added. “You're full of shit. There are plenty of people who could do your job.”

“That's right,” I said. “Miles grew this business along with other people who are smarter and better than you. So sit there and shut up. You've been caught and you're going go to jail.”

Carter nodded. “The police are already on their way.”

“May I?” Miles asked, gesturing to Frank.

“We all needed a chance to talk for once,” Carter said.

As he focused on Frank, Miles's smile let me know he didn't actually care. “Did you actually think you were going to get away with this stunt?”

“I've gotten away with altering the books for months.”

“And depositing the unreported profits into your own offshore account?”

He nodded. “And you never knew.”

I watched Miles take a slow breath. “I know now.” He turned to Ford. “I assume you’ve got that recorded.”

“Of course.” He tapped the pocket of his suit jacket, and I realized he’d been making an audio recording the whole time. I was sure it would be edited before he turned it over to the police.

“You can’t do that.” Frank tried to rise from the chair, but Carter pushed him back down.

“We have every right to record this conversation,” Ford said calmly.

Miles snorted. “You’re already fucked. You might as well as tell us the rest of your plan. I assume when your constant attempts to get access to proprietary information so you could ‘help me strategize’ failed, you turned to theft.”

“I not saying anything else without a lawyer.”

Ford huffed. “I feel sorry for whoever has to work up that defense.”

“Can you take it from here?” Miles asked.

Carter and Ford both nodded. Miles wrapped his arm around me and escorted me through the door.

I walked on ahead of him, passing the elevator and moving toward the large window at the end of the hall. I needed a moment. My head was reeling from everything that had happened. I leaned against the glass, trying to catch my breath.

I heard Miles’s footsteps behind me. “Are you all right?”

“Yeah, I just needed a moment. I’m a little overwhelmed.”

He wrapped his arms around me and pulled me back against him. “You were amazing in there, Benjamin.”

“Thank you. It felt good to just let some of my anger out.”

“Good. What do you need now? You can have absolutely anything.”

I laid my hands over his. “You are all I need. I wanted to find security, not only so my family wouldn’t be a threat to me, but

so I could feel safe enough to fight back. You taught me that there are people who care.”

He kissed the top of my head. “I do care about you, Benjamin.”

“You and your friends have treated me more like family than any of my biological family ever have. I don’t care what my father or Jesse say or do. They mean nothing to me. I just want to be here with you.”

We stood there, looking out over the city, side by side, and I let myself truly hope again.

BEN

Once all the business with Frank was over, I was eager to get back to Miles's penthouse and celebrate our victory, but Carter had gotten word from his friend at the fire station that we were allowed inside my apartment. I wanted to see how extensive the damage was, gather some clothes to take to the cleaners, and get Felix's favorite toys if they hadn't been lost.

Miles insisted on going inside with me. Things weren't as bad as I'd feared. Everything smelled like smoke, but my bedroom hadn't suffered much damage. I got the clothes I wanted for now and packed everything in a suitcase.

"My laundry service can make these smell like new," Miles said.

"I...I don't know what I'd do without you helping me."

"I don't know what I'd do if you'd been harmed. If you'd been home...."

I squeezed his hand. "I wasn't, and it's going to be okay."

He got a call from one of his directors in LA, and I encouraged him to take it. While he was talking, I decided to take out the kitchen trash. The place smelled bad enough, I didn't need rotten food and bugs to deal with when I came back for the rest of my things.

I signaled to Miles that I was going to take the trash downstairs, he frowned but didn't protest. I mouthed that I would be right back.

I tossed the bag into the dumpster, but when I turned around, Jesse was there in front of me, pointing a gun at my chest. "It's so nice to see you again."

He looked rough, like he hadn't slept in days. His clothes were torn, and he smelled like he'd been rolling around inside the dumpster.

"Are you happy to see me?" he asked.

“Jesse, what are you doing here?”

“I’m here to kill you, you fucking traitor.”

“Dad won’t like it if—”

“Dear old dad kicked me out, so I don’t give a fuck what he thinks. This is all your fault. You just had to be a slut and sleep with Montgomery, didn’t you?”

My mind raced as I tried to think of anything I could say to stall for time. Miles would worry when I didn’t return. “Jesse, I—”

“Shut up.”

“Please. I can help you.”

He stomped his foot and yelled louder. “I said to shut the fuck up.”

“Ben!” It was Miles. He burst from the back door and started to rush Jesse, but Jesse grabbed me, yanking me against him as he raised his gun, aiming at Miles.

No. This wasn’t going to happen. My family had done enough to hurt me. I wasn’t going to watch Jesse kill the man I loved. I slammed my elbow into his gut.

When he doubled over, I kicked his arm. The gun hit the ground.

Jesse recovered quickly and grabbed me in a chokehold. I dug my nails into his arm, fighting to keep him from cutting off my air.

“Let him go.” Miles had the gun now. It was pointed at Jesse’s head. “I said, let him go.”

Jesse tightened his arm around me. I kicked back at him, trying to force him to loosen his grip.

His body jerked before I registered the pop. I only realized what had happened when his grip on me relaxed. I stared at Miles. “You shot him.”

I started to turn around, but Miles pulled me to him. “Don’t look. It’s messy.”

“Is he....”

“He’s dead.”

“I....” My knees felt weak. The world was starting to go dark.

“Ben? Are you all right.”

“I...I think—” Miles helped me sit down on the pavement.

He wrapped an arm around me and pulled me against him. “You’re fine, baby. I’m right here, and Jesse is never going to hurt you again. If anyone else tries to touch you, I’ll shoot them just like I did him.”

“You...you killed him.”

“I did. He was going to hurt you.”

“Yeah, but then I thought he was going to shoot you.”

“I’m sure he wanted to, but you saved me. You risked yourself for me.”

I nodded and pulled I’m tighter to me. “I can’t let anything happen to you either. I love you, Miles.”

“I love you too, baby. I didn’t mean to tell you like this. I wanted to say it last night, but you were so overwhelmed, and I didn’t want to push you. Then this morning the damn phone rang and—”

“Now is the perfect time.”

“Good, because I love you so fucking much.”

I started to look at Jesse, needing to see the proof that we were no longer in danger, but Miles cupped my cheek turning me back to face him. “Please don’t. I feel bad enough that I let him get to you, I don’t want you to have nightmares.”

I smiled at him. “I’m only going to see you.”

Seconds later, I heard sirens in the distance. “Oh shit. What are we going to say when the police get here?”

“The truth? I killed him to save you.”

“I didn’t even know you could shoot.”

“In my position, it’s wise to know how to protect yourself.”

“Have you killed someone before?”

“Not personally.”

“But you....”

“Do you really want to know about that? I do what’s necessary to protect the people I care about.”

The sirens screamed into the night. They were close now. “What if the police don’t believe you?”

A car pulled up, and Carter jumped out along with two other men. Miles waved his hand toward them. “Now we have witnesses.”

“But they didn’t see anything.”

Carter assessed the situation and nodded. “Yes, we did.”

Miles hugged me tighter. “Let me take care of this.”

“Okay. I would really like that.”

MILES

By the time we got back to my penthouse, I felt like I'd been waiting to be alone with Ben for days, rather than hours. Talking to the cops, then going over everything that had happened with Ford and Carter, took forever. Worth even showed up, wanting to verify for himself that Ben and I were safe.

There was so much I wanted to say to Ben, but by the time we reached my apartment, I had too much pent-up need to do anything but pull him into my arms and kiss him until neither one of us could go a second longer without oxygen.

As he drew in ragged breaths, I held him to me, wishing I could touch him everywhere at once. "I want to do all your favorite things. I want to fucking worship you."

"God, Miles."

"You could have died."

"So could you, but that's over now."

I nodded. It was time to forget about his family and focus on each other. "I want you on your hands and knees so I can eat your ass."

"Here?" Ben looked down at the floor, then over at the couch.

"Anywhere, but the bed would be most comfortable." He took off for the bedroom and I raced after him.

We both stripped in record time and then I was there, kneeling behind him, pulling his ass cheeks apart so I could get to the core of him.

I needed this so badly. I needed to touch him and taste him, to hear him whine and whimper, to have that visceral reassurance that he was alive and here, that he was mine.

I wasn't afraid of loving him anymore, but I was sure as hell afraid of losing him. I was going to protect him no matter

what. No more threats, no more chances for anyone to get to him. If I had to tie him to my bed to accomplish that, then I would.

I used my tongue on him until he was begging and thrashing, seemingly unsure if he wanted to get away or get even more of my tongue inside him. When I let go of him, I slapped his ass. “Turn over.”

He whimpered again, and I reached for his hips to help him obey.

“Please. I want you to take me like this.”

“Like this, on your knees, ass in the air, biting the pillow to keep from screaming while I take you like an animal?”

He wiggled his ass as he whined. “Please. It’s so good having you pound into me from behind.”

“Anything you want, baby.” I couldn’t get my dick slicked up fast enough. Ben cried out when I drove into him. I didn’t stop until I was buried as deep as I could go. I held myself there as he worked his hips, trying to get me to move.

“Fuck me, Miles. Now.”

I chuckled. “What if I want to make you wait? What if I want you to beg?”

“I’m begging now. Please, I need this. Need you. Need to know....”

“What do you need to know?”

“That you’re mine.”

I pulled back and thrust in again. “I am completely yours.” I began fucking him with deep, rough strokes. “You can have anything from me. Anything.”

“Just...this. Fuck me.”

I did, harder and faster than I ever had until we were both panting, groaning, desperate. I reached under him and worked his cock until we both came within seconds of each other. The room spun around me as I collapsed on top of him.

When I regained the ability to move, I slowly rolled off him and he turned to face me.

“That was unbelievable,” he said.

I nodded, not ready to speak yet.

His expression turned serious, and I tensed. “I have something to confess.”

Please don’t let there be anything else to fuck this up. “What is it, Benjamin?”

“Eudora told me about what happened to you in college, with Emily.”

I let out an audible breath. “I’m so glad that’s all it is.”

“You don’t mind that I know?”

“Absolutely not.” Of all the things he might have said, that didn’t worry me at all. “I would have told you myself, eventually. I want you to know that you changed everything. I’m sure Eudora told you that I decided I wasn’t going to have any serious relationships. If I’d been with anyone more than once, I made that clear.”

“Except with me.”

“I hated the thought of you with anyone else from the very beginning. I couldn’t let go of you. I couldn’t hold my feelings back. I fell so hard, so fast.”

“I fell fast for you, too. I think maybe as soon as you made me try on those absurdly expensive suits, definitely from the moment you got all dominating with me in your office after I was late.”

“Your family caused you to be late, didn’t they?”

He nodded. “But that doesn’t matter. My father is being investigated and Jesse is....”

“Gone.”

“Right. And my mother was never a threat, just never a help either.”

“And if anyone else who worked with them takes one step out of line, I will make sure they are brought down one way or another.”

“So you’re ready to risk it all with me?” Ben asked.

“More than ready. But I don’t consider this a risk any longer.”

“You don’t?”

“No, I consider this my future.” I kissed him then, and he relaxed into it, held securely in my arms.

EPILOGUE

ONE MONTH LATER

MILES

I checked the time. Ben would be back from Eudora's soon. I'd rushed him out the door to the knitting circle so I had plenty of time while he was gone to practice searing scallops to perfection so I could make him some the moment he returned home. I'd been wanting a chance to make him his favorite meal, and today I'd decided to forget about all the pressing work that needed to be done and simply enjoy being with Ben.

I managed to have everything ready when Ben stepped through the door. Felix ran up to him and circled his legs, purring, like Ben had been gone for weeks.

As he bent down to pet the cat, I realized Ben was holding a gift bag. When Felix decided he'd been properly attended to, Ben took a seat at the kitchen counter and set the bag in front of him. "What are you making?"

I smiled. "Your favorite meal."

His eyes widened. "You got scallops?"

"I did, and I'm going to sear them as soon as you're ready to eat."

"Wow. Is there an occasion I've forgotten?" He looked down at his watch like it might tell him.

"The only occasion is that I'm ignoring work tonight, and we're taking tomorrow off."

"Really?"

"Yes, really."

"You're the best, and I'm ready now. I'm starving. You told me you were making dinner, so I didn't eat any of the snacks at Eudora's, but first...."

"Yes?"

“I have something for you. I’m not sure—”

“Ben, whatever you have for me, I’m going to love it.”

“Okay. Here it is.” He pushed the bag across the kitchen island to me.

I opened it and pulled out a scarf. It was made with the same basketweave stitch he’d shown me before and with the same super-soft yarn, but this scarf was navy and gray, perfectly straight on the edges, and he’d added tassels. “I love this! I can’t wait until it’s cold enough to wear it.”

“It doesn’t exactly match your wardrobe.”

“You made this, Ben. It’s beautiful and I have every intention of wearing it. It will look perfect with my Burberry coat.”

Ben rolled his eyes. “Of course it will.”

I studied him for a moment. “What? You’ll need a winter coat as well, but I’m still deciding what color I’d like to get you.”

He sighed. “Nothing I say will stop you, will it?”

“No, Ben, I have more money than I can spend. You know I’m going to keep buying you things.”

“As long as you keep cooking for me.”

“I’ll do that too.”

BEN

Miles served the scallops over linguini with a white wine cream sauce, and they were the most delicious things I’d ever tasted. “How did you get them cooked so perfectly?”

“Practice.”

“You’ve made scallops a lot?”

He grinned. “I’ve made them a lot today.”

“You don’t mean you bought—”

“Dozens. I was going to get this right.”

“Miles, tell me you didn’t waste all the others?”

He shook his head. “Worth and Carter served as my tasters.”

“So I guess they are well fed.”

“Not as well as you’ll be by the end of the night.”

I rolled my eyes. “Let’s see how good dessert is before you get too cocky.”

Dessert—the kind that involved actual food—was an assortment of tiny pastries from Miles’s favorite bakery—quickly becoming my favorite as well. I insisted we eat on the balcony since there was finally a crisp breeze in the air.

We cuddled on the balcony couch, feeding each other and simply enjoying the night before moving onto the second part of dessert, where we devoured each other.

We began with light kisses that grew hungrier, then Miles gripped my thigh and encouraged me to straddle him. “I want you to ride me, Benjamin.”

“Fuck, yes.” I didn’t even try to protest that we were outside. We were too high up for many people to see, and all I really cared about was having Miles inside me.

He pointed to the side table. “There’s lube. In the drawer.”

“You keep lube on the balcony.”

“I do now. I keep it everywhere. Haven’t you figured that out?”

I laughed and realized that was true. I had intimate knowledge of him stashing lube in the kitchen as well as a drawer he could reach from the shower.

“Maybe I should help you make sure you’ve been thorough enough.”

“Are you challenging me?”

“Maybe.”

“Your ass is going to be very sore tonight.”

I laughed as I drizzled the lube onto his cock and worked it in, loving the way he closed his eyes and leaned his head back. “Feel good?”

“Fuck yes, but your ass will feel better.”

I straddled him then, thinking about how I’d been in the same position the first night I’d stayed here. He’d cooked for me then too, after exhausting me in his bed. It had taken only a few hours to recover enough to need him desperately again.

Miles narrowed his eyes at me. “What are you smiling about?”

“I was thinking about the first night I spent here, how I couldn’t get enough of you.”

“And now?”

“I think I need you even more.”

He gripped my hips, maneuvering me into place. “Take what you need.”

I lowered myself onto his cock, gasping as he filled me. When I was fully seated against him, I met his gaze. “I love you.”

“I love you, too,” he pulled me down for a kiss that started out soft and turned ferocious as I began to move up and down.

“This is real, right? I get to stay here and keep doing this.”

He gripped my hips tightly. “You damn well better not stop.”

I laughed, fighting against his hold and rising up until only the tip of his cock was inside me.

“Damn it, Ben. Fuck me.”

“Answer me first.”

“This is real, so fucking real. You are everything to me and we’re going to do this at least once a day for the rest of our lives.”

I groaned as I sank down again, taking all of him once more.

“That sounds perfect.”

Want an additional bonus scene?

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Thank you for reading *The Billionaire's Assistant*. I really enjoyed writing Miles and Ben's story. Next up is Ford's book, *The Billionaire's Rival*, coming December 2023.

If you love bad boys, have you checked out my Marchesi Universe where the bad boys are oh so good? Start from the beginning with *Lucien*.

I offer a free book to anyone who joins my mailing list. To learn more, go to silviaviolet.com/newsletter. You can chat with me on Facebook in [Silvia Violet's Salon](#), and you can email me at silviaviolet@gmail.com. To read excerpts from all of my titles, visit my website: silviaviolet.com/books.

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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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The Theriot Family

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