



The OFFICE

Guest

A
Sexy Boss
Novella

NEW YORK TIMES & USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

WHITNEY G.

THE OFFICE GUEST

HOLIDAY HOMECOMING

WHITNEY G.

WHITNEY G.

The Office Guest

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CONTENTS

Synopsis

A Note from Whitney G.

Prologue

One

Dominic

Two

Georgia

Two (B)

Georgia

Three

Dominic

Three (B)

Dominic

Four

Georgia

Five

Dominic

Six

Georgia

Six Months Later

Seven

Georgia

Five & a Half Months After That

Eight

Georgia

Nine

Dominic

Nine (B)

Georgia

Ten

Georgia

Eleven

Dominic

[Twelve](#)

Georgia

[Twelve \(B\)](#)

Georgia

[Thirteen](#)

Dominic

[Thirteen \(B\)](#)

Georgia

[Fourteen](#)

Dominic

[Fifteen](#)

Georgia

[Sixteen](#)

Dominic

[Seventeen](#)

Georgia

[Eighteen](#)

Dominic

[Nineteen](#)

Georgia

[Nineteen \(B\)](#)

Georgia

[Twenty](#)

Georgia

[Twenty-One](#)

Georgia

[Twenty-Two](#)

Dominic

[Twenty-Three](#)

Georgia

[Epilogue](#)

Georgia

[Prologue](#)

Me

[Part 1](#)

Back then

1

Me

[A Free Holiday Audiobook](#)

For the best readers ever & the holidays.

Thank you for reading.



SYNOPSIS

This could possibly be the worst holiday season ever...

My ex-boyfriend just booked the best suite at the resort where I work (with his new girlfriend, not me), half the staff has called in sick with the flu (they're lying so they can attend a huge festival in town), and my sister is driving me crazy with her incessant wedding planning.

These things wouldn't normally be a big deal during any other season, but "Christmas" changes everything.

And this Christmas, my 'little big lie' about a non-existent fiancé is finally in danger of being exposed to my family ...

To prevent that from happening, I decide to download The Office Guest.

It's an app for anyone who needs to hire a "fake & attractive businessman" to impress close family and friends.

At least, that's what I was hoping for.

When the guy I selected bails on me at the last minute, the app promises to send me "an even sexier replacement."

They must've meant "the devil wrapped in red," because this guy is not some random actor.

And he's definitely not a "fake" businessman...

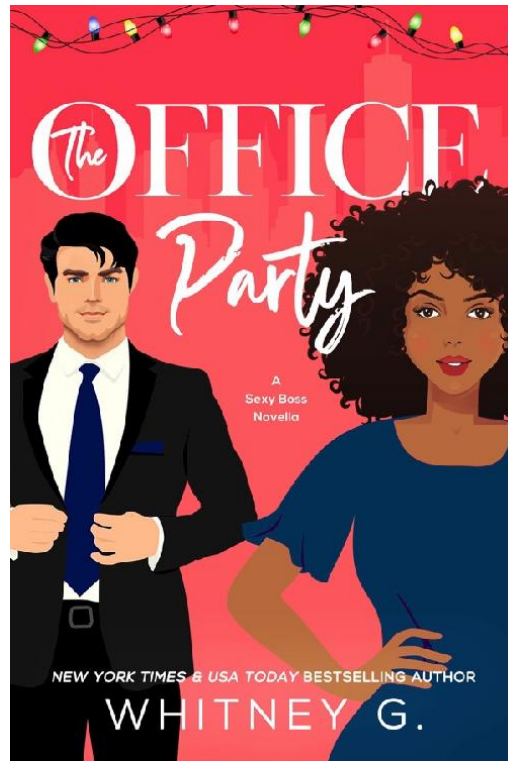
He's my former boss.

The asshole who fired me last Christmas.

*Okay, now it's **officially** the worst holiday season ever...*

This is the second standalone novella in The Holiday Homecoming Collection.

If you missed the first book in this series, [THE OFFICE PARTY](#), read the synopsis below to check out Savannah & Garrett's holiday romance!



Hey there!

A NOTE FROM WHITNEY G.

Dear Awesome Reader,

Thank you so much for picking up *The Office Guest*! This steamy holiday novella was a total joy to write, and I hope you love Georgia and Dominic!

If you want to be the first to learn of my upcoming releases, sales, and special things that I only offer to my readers, be sure to [sign up for my Exclusive F.L.Y. List](#). (F.L.Y. = Effin Love You. Because whether you love or hate this story, I still love you for giving it a chance!)

Sincerely,

Whitney G.



PROLOGUE

Urgent Notice: Termination of Account

Dear Miss Georgia Grey,

We are writing to inform you that your account with *The Office Guest* app is officially terminated **as of today**.

Due to repeated violation(s)—some of which are addressed below—you may no longer browse our stellar candidates or request temporary stand-ins for business and familial occasions.

As a reminder, you are not allowed to ask our “guests” to show up to your job *for you*, “stand outside [your] bastard boss’s window and throw up a middle finger while blasting that ‘*I Don’t F*ck with You*’ rap song,” or “deflate the tires of whatever overpriced sports car is parked in the CEO spot.”

Please revisit our terms & conditions.

You may reapply for access after one (1) calendar year.

Sincerely,

The Office Guest Team

P.S. Your “secret” accounts—Bee Bee Grey, Georgia on Your Mind, & Please Help Me (I Hate My Boss & My Life)—are terminated as well.



ONE

PARK CITY, UTAH

DOMINIC

Two Months Before Christmas

2 o'clock a.m

“**I**ntruder alert!” “Call to authorities in progress!”
“Intruder alert!”

Sirens are blaring in my condo, drowning out my dreams with every passing second.

I pick up my cell phone to turn it off, but the system sings louder, and the words “Wrong password! Home lights are deactivated!” flash across my screen.

What the hell is going on?

Groaning, I roll out of bed and head to my bathroom in utter darkness. I splash my face with cold water and brush my teeth, anxiously awaiting the system to come to its senses, but my condo remains black.

Before I can attempt to turn off the system again, heavy footsteps hit the hallway.

“Over here!” a deep voice yells. “He’s not in his bed!”

“Check the library and the kitchen! *Move!*” another says.

The door suddenly swings open, and someone shines a flashlight into my eyes.

“He’s right here!” The guy’s voice is louder than the alarm system. “Mr. Reiss is safe!”

“I’m sorry to wake you up at this hour, sir.” Walsh, my head of security, shines a blinding light into my eyes. “We need to move you to a secure location as soon as possible.”

“Is the world ending or something?”

“Sir, we have reason to believe that someone is plotting to murder you.”

“*What?*”

“I’ll explain everything in the car. Let’s go.”

“Can I get dressed first?”

“You don’t have enough time for that.” He tosses me a robe. “This will have to do.”

“You could at least let me put on a shirt.”

Without another word, he herds me onto the private elevator, and I convince myself that this is a twisted dream. That there’s no way anyone would fuck with me when I’m months away from closing the biggest deal of my career.

When we reach the car, the driver speeds onto the street.

“We’ve noticed a spike in searches on the company IP address.” Walsh hands me a tablet. “And tonight, someone breached your personal laptop.”

“That’s impossible,” I say. “It needs my fingerprint approval to work.”

“See for yourself.” He motions for me to look at the screen.

“How much arsenic can you put in someone’s coffee to make them sick, but not sick enough to die?” “What about antifreeze?” “Are 9 to 5 jobs cruel and unusual punishment?”

“These searches intensified recently, sir,” he says. “We believe that someone is trying to sabotage you.”

“I can’t believe you dragged me out of bed for this.” I roll my eyes. “Can you have my assistant bring a suit to the office, please?”

“Ten steps ahead of you.” He refreshes the screen. “We really need to take this seriously, sir. This is more of what we found.”

I resist the urge to toss the tablet out the window. Then, I look over the results.

“How long do Audi Spider tires take to deflate?” “Hitman for hire but just for small tasks, not the murder part, at least not immediately.” “Can I bribe a barista to add a pinch of rat poison to a coffee order? Would I go to prison for that or just the barista?” “Dominic Reiss has a very ‘stabbable’ neck.” “How to unblock Pinterest on my work computer.”

“Interesting.” I smile. “When exactly did these searches start?”

“Two weeks ago, sir. I can promise you that this is *nothing* to smile about.”

I hold back a laugh.

The timeline molds perfectly to when a certain employee was demoted from ‘team leader’ to ‘intern’ because she refused to learn what “mandatory overtime” meant. A certain employee who is by far the sexiest woman I’d ever met, but the worst associate Human Resources has ever hired at my company.

“Would you like me to notify the FBI about this, Mr. Reiss?” Walsh asks.

“No.” I shake my head. “I don’t feel the slightest bit threatened.”

“Are you sure, sir?”

“Very sure, Walsh.” I look at my watch. “We don’t need to take this any further.”

“As you wish, but you’re not going back home until this afternoon.” He makes a few calls as the driver speeds through the streets.

Once we reach headquarters, I admire the golden “Reiss Enterprises” sign outside the steps. No matter how often I see

it, I'm reminded of how hard I've worked since turning sixteen to get to where I am today.

Getting out of the car, I swipe my key at the front door and slip inside the building.

I blink a few times as I look around the lobby.

A massive Christmas tree, wrapped in all red ribbon and dressed in bright glass ornaments, is glowing in front of the floor-to-ceiling windows.

Lush green garland is hanging from the staircase railings, and a long line of twinkling holiday lights is creating a trail on the floor.

Although this is the first year I've requested that we decorate this place for the holidays, I'm surprised the staff is handling this so early.

Intrigued, I follow the lights down the hall and into a conference room.

I slip past two life-sized nutcrackers and spot the primary suspect in my future murder.

Georgia Grey.

Dressed in a see-through pink tank top and leggings that hug her small curves, she's tempting me more than usual today. Her ink black hair that typically falls in waves that caress her shoulder is now pulled into a low ponytail that grazes the back of her neck.

For months, I've struggled not to stare too hard at her puffy pink lips, but from this angle I can't help it.

Since I can hear the holiday music blasting through her headphones, I take advantage of the view for a few more seconds.

"Good morning." I clear my throat. "Miss Grey?"

She doesn't answer.

I step closer and pull out one of her earpods. "Can you hear me now?"

“What the...” she turns around. “Oh, um, hey, Mr. Reiss.”

“Miss Grey.” I notice her staring at my chest, so I don’t bother tying my robe shut. “I didn’t know you were capable of coming to work on time, let alone early. What’s the occasion?”

“Uh...” She finally looks up at my face. “I’m just here working on the Winter Wonderland I’m supposed to create for the holidays.”

“Isn’t there supposed to be an entire team doing that?”

“Not when the team has no idea what they’re doing,” she says. “No offense, but most of the people who work here lack creativity.”

“When I said, let’s make this place a bit more festive this season, I was just thinking of a tree in the lobby.”

“Then I guess the CEO is a disappointment in the creativity department, too.”

“For the record, Miss Grey,” I say, staring at her lips, “just because you chose to go above and beyond on this trivial request, that doesn’t absolve you from your daily assignments.”

“I would never think that, Mr. Reiss.” She steps back and picks up a thermos. “But now that you’ve mentioned it, and I’m a lowly intern, I’ve been keeping this coffee fresh and hot for you.”

“Where’d you buy it from?”

“I made this myself.” She smiles. “I’ve decided to go ‘above and beyond’ in *everything* I do now.”

“Why don’t you take a sip of it first before you give it to me?”

“No, that’s okay.” She holds it out for me. “I don’t want to steal any caffeine from my amazing boss who needs it the most.”

“I’d hate to think that you’re trying to poison me, Miss Grey.”

“I’d hate that too...” She continues holding out the thermos, so I take it and vow to pour it out when I get to my office.

“I need to finish twisting the wreaths.” She clears her throat. “My boss has everyone in emergency mode, so I have to be at my cubicle in a few hours.”

“Speaking of emergency mode, my alarm system went off this morning for the first time in ten years. Would you happen to know anything about that?”

“No, but ten years is a very long time to go without running an emergency test.” She shakes her head. “Maybe the alarm company just wanted to try it out when you least expected it.”

I narrow my eyes at her.

“Or, maybe someone is trying to make you as miserable as you make her feel, so you can change your horrible ways.” She shrugs. “Then again, your list of tasks is so long these days, that I’m sure you overlooked it.”

“Georgia Grey...” I step closer. “Between you and me, I know that this is the first *real* job you’ve ever had in your life.”

“Correction, it’s the *worst* job I’ve ever had in my life.”

“Nonetheless, the way to move up the ladder and get promoted isn’t by pissing off your boss.”

“Should I be kissing his ass like everyone else?”

“No, I’m sure there’s something else in his pants that he’d rather you kiss.”

Her jaw drops to the floor.

“Mr. Reiss?” My assistant steps into the room before I make a mistake and pull Georgia closer. “Mr. Reiss, I have your suit and shoes ready.”

“Thank you.” I step back. “Feel free to refresh Miss Grey’s mind about my policy on compliance while I get dressed, please.”

“Will do, sir.”

Georgia glares at me while I walk away, and I rush upstairs for a cold shower.

Fuck. Why the hell haven't I fired her yet?



TWO

PARK CITY, UTAH

GEORGIA

Two Months Before Christmas

Later that Day

Lean down a little bit more...

If I lean my head any lower, this ink pen will slice through my eyeball and splatter blood everywhere. I won't beg my coworkers to call an ambulance when it happens, though. I'll just ask if I can finally leave this boring ass meeting.

I've been stuck in this cold conference room since nine this morning, and my eyes are burning from staring at the oversized screen. For some strange reason, I feel like I'm the only one who wants to escape.

Maybe I should stab both my eyeballs instead of just one...

"What do you think about the final proposal, Georgia?" Mindy Sterling, the company kiss-up, foils my mission within seconds. "*Georgia?*"

"Yeah, um..." I set down the pen. "It sounds super great."

"Were you even listening to my presentation?"

"Sorry." I shake my head. "It's been a *really* long day, Mindy..."

"Days at Reiss Enterprises are never long." She sounds offended. "They take as long as they take because we believe in our beloved CEO's vision."

My brainwashed coworkers murmur in agreement, and I resist the urge to roll my eyes.

Our “beloved CEO” is the epitome of what it means to be a terrible boss. His only saving grace as a human being is how fucking sexy he is.

“Since you’re the best at hospitality, Miss Grey—” Mindy slides a folder toward me. “When December comes, we need you to handle our incoming business guests from the moment they land at the airport, to the second they arrive at headquarters for our holiday marketing presentation.”

“What if I’m still ‘just a demoted intern’ by then?”

“You will work hard to regain your previous position to ensure that won’t happen.” She narrows her eyes. “Your decor budget is limitless, and we’re all looking forward to seeing that “holiday magic” that you brought from your previous employer. Do you have any other questions?”

Can you please let me go home now? “Not at this time.”

“Great! Now, onto the fourth quarter projections, and how we’re measuring up against the competition.”

I tune out her words and return to thoughts of impaling my eyeballs.

Then again, from the sound of things, that probably wouldn’t get anyone’s attention.

I’ve been working at this company for a little under a year, and I’m officially convinced that corporate life is not for me.

I don’t even know what we “do” here.

The impossibly early mornings, paper-pushing afternoons, and “emergency” evening meetings have broken bits and pieces of my soul. Since every employee is cutthroat and desperate to move up the ladder, bonding with a single coworker outside the office has been impossible. Once, when I brought custom cookies to share in the break room, someone reported me to Human Resources for “trying to poison the competition with gluten.”

If that’s not bad enough, the “beloved” CEO thinks that every person on the planet lives to serve his every waking

need. Being the overworked yet empathetic person I am, I've decided to take the high road by saying a daily prayer for him.

Dear God, please murder my boss. Thank you so much in advance. Amen.

As Mindy passes out a new set of folders, the entire room falls silent. Heavy footsteps sound behind me, and the woman beside me gasps, which only means one thing...

“Good evening.” Mr. Reiss’s presence spins my heart into a reckless rhythm. Rumor has it that his deep voice alone is capable of making any woman’s panties wet with ease.

Any woman’s panties except mine, of course.

“I hope you won’t mind if I sit in on this meeting,” he says.

“We’d prefer if you put us out of our misery and finally end it.” I mutter.

“What was that, Georgia?” Mindy asks.

“I said, what’s better than having our beloved boss look over our shoulders and watch our every move?”

“There’s nothing better!” She practically trips over herself as she pours him a cup of coffee.

Taking his precious time to walk around the table, Mr. Reiss takes the seat directly across from me. Then he smiles his perfect “I know I’m sexy as hell” smile that makes his chiseled jawline even more pronounced, and my nipples harden under my blouse.

I can’t help but cross my legs next.

No matter how many times I see this ma—in person or in print—my mind veers down a winding, wet lane of forbidden fantasies.

When I first saw him, I thought he was a walking, breathing dream. That the angels above had sprinkled every bit of their “most attractive man on earth” dust on him to cement him as their best work.

But the first time I heard him speak - a mere, "I'm not paying you to stare at me all day, Miss Grey" - I wanted to stab him in the throat.

"Don't let me derail the meeting," he says. "Carry on with your presentation, Miss Sterling."

She picks up without missing a beat, and I try to look away from the devil dressed in black, but I can't.

At least not right now...

He brings the mug to his lips, taking a slow sip while keeping his deep blue eyes on mine, and my body betrays me with a rush of heat.

"I want to ensure all the hotels have special gift bags to make our guests happy." Mindy drones on, and I finally force myself to look away, but I can still feel Mr. Reiss staring in my direction.

By the time Mindy gets tired of hearing herself talk, it's ten o'clock in the evening, and I've missed the season premiere of my favorite show.

I stuff my folders into a briefcase and head toward the door, hoping to make it home to catch the replay.

Mr. Reiss presses his hand against the doorframe as I approach.

"Can I speak to you for a moment, Miss Grey?" he asks.

"I think you and I have spoken enough for one day, sir."

His lips curve into a smile.

"Do you need to speak with me about anything, Mr. Reiss?" Mindy clears her throat from the hallway.

"No, Miss Sterling. I don't have any issues with you."

"Okay, great!" She smiles and saunters off as if his approval can be put in the bank.

Mr. Reiss waits until the elevator pings before turning his attention to me.

“I’m shocked my car hasn’t experienced a flat tire on any day this week,” he says.

“Me too.”

“There wasn’t a stranger rapping outside my office about how much he hates me either.”

“I guess he’s having issues communicating with his scheduler.”

“Oh, I’m sure *she* is.” He smirks. “Anyway, Human Resources told me that you’ve requested to go home for Christmas. Something about introducing a boyfriend to your family?”

“No, that’s not it.” I can’t believe I told them the truth. “It’s because someone I know passed away. I need to pay my respect.”

“I’m sorry to hear that.” He furrows his brow. “Who was it?”

“You don’t know her.”

“Tell me, please.”

“She’s the person I used to be,” I say.

“*What?*”

“She seems to have lost her mind and her way, so I need to go home and mourn her properly. Hopefully, it’s not too late for her to come back to life.”

“Please send her my deepest condolences.” He smiles. “Unfortunately, I’m not approving your request on such short notice.”

“Two months in advance is *short notice?*”

“It is for something trivial as a boyfriend introduction,” he says. “I’ll consider letting you go home for New Year’s, though.”

“You let Mindy take off for Easter because she wanted to pet some bunnies in the park.”

“That was her first time requesting off in five years.”

“That’s...tragic. But, that’s still unfair and I have every reason to get an approved week off from this place.”

“You haven’t been dating Dante long enough for him to meet your family.”

“*Excuse me?*”

“You met him four months after you started working under me.”

“And?”

“That’s not long enough.”

“Thanks, *Dad.*” I roll my eyes. “Didn’t I update your calendar with a holiday vacation for you and your girlfriend, Amy, yesterday?”

He doesn’t answer.

“Exactly,” I say. “So, what makes you think that some of your miserable peons don’t want to do the same thing?”

“Miss Grey.” He steps closer. “I apologize.”

“You’re forgiven, Mr. Reiss. I accept your apology.”

He stares into my eyes like he always does whenever we’re alone, like on the nights when we’re working late, and he sits next to me and temporarily acts like a human being while we talk until sunrise.

In those moments, I felt a bit delusional, like he had an angelic lining and saw me as more than an employee. Like he was actually my friend.

“I mean that I’m sorry for giving you the illusion that this conversation was a *debate.*” He returns to his Satanic form. “It’s not.”

“Have you ever looked into getting some personal therapy for your mood swings?”

“You’re behind on your work anyway.” He ignores my comment. “The last thing you need is time away from me.”

“You mean, *work?*”

“Same thing.”

“I’m not working on Christmas,” I say.

“We’re past that, Miss Grey. There are two other things we need to discuss now.” He pulls an envelope from his pocket and holds it out for me. “I received this from Webster’s Dictionary this morning.”

“So, they’re finally adding ‘unbearable-ass-boss’ to their vocabulary?”

“*No.*” He doesn’t deserve to be this damn good-looking. “They wanted to let me know that an anonymous employee has been sending them ten requests a day about adding my photo next to the word ‘bastard,’ and they were hoping that she would get tired of being rejected after her ninety-eighth time.”

“The ninety-ninth is the charm. I mean, how awful.” My cheeks heat as I take the envelope from his fingers. “I’ll be sure to mention this in the team email and hopefully that employee will focus on her work.”

“That’d be a first.” He looks amused as he opens the door for me. “Have a good night, Miss Grey.”

“Thank you.” I step into the hallway. “Wait...I thought you said there were two things you needed to discuss. What’s the other one?”

“Your boyfriend.” He pauses. “Are you sleeping with him?”

What? “What type of question is that?”

“It’s a curious one.” He looks me up and down. “You’ve never come into work looking ‘slightly fucked’ or passionately disheveled, so I’m just wondering.”

“Am I allowed to ask the same thing about your girlfriend?”

“No.”

“Okay, then.”

“I mean, no, I’m not sleeping with her.” He pauses. “She’s not technically my girlfriend...”

I swallow. I have no idea what to say to that.

“Are you in love with him?” he asks, stepping closer.

Silence.

“I’ll see you on Monday, Mr. Reiss.”

“It’ll probably be tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow is Saturday.”

“I have a feeling the CEO is sending out an emergency work email in a few hours.” He walks past me without another word, and I remain standing there, confused and aroused as ever.

I’m tempted to go after him, but then I remember he doesn’t want to let me off for Christmas.

Fuck him...



TWO (B)

PARK CITY, UTAH

GEORGIA

A few nights later

“Oh come on, Georgia!” My roommate, Jessica, plops across from me. “You can go out to a bar with me for at least *one* hour.”

“If I had an extra hour, I’d probably use it to pass out.” I sigh. “I have to get this assignment done before tomorrow.”

I’m sitting at the back of a coffee shop, and my fingers are cramping from the pain of pulling back-to-back all-nighters.

“You should ask the employees to install a shower here for you,” she says. “That’s all you use your apartment for these days anyway.”

“Don’t remind me.”

“Are you still planning to host a surprise dinner for Dante’s birthday?”

“Of course.” I open my purse and pull out a small red gift box. “Can you put this on our living room table for him, just in case I have to reschedule that?”

She gives me a stare I know all too well. It’s the same stare I used to give to my older sister whenever she made excuse after excuse for choosing her job over her personal life.

“You owe me, Georgia.” She hugs me. “I’ll call you later.”

“Later.” I watch as she leaves the cafe and stretch my weary fingers.

Out of habit, I open The Office Guest on my phone.

The moment I type in my username, the screen flashes with two ugly words.

BANNED ACCOUNT!

Ugh.

As if something will change, I try another alias.

Same.

I consider the expense of buying a brand-new phone as Mindy rushes into the cafe.

“Georgia?” She spots me and runs to my table. “Why haven’t you responded to any of my text messages tonight?”

Because I blocked your number. “I haven’t gotten anything from you today.”

“Mr. Reiss wants us to meet him at the tree center.”

“For what?”

“Whatever it is, I’m sure it’s highly important.” She motions for me to stand. “We’ll ride together since I don’t trust you to get there alone.”

“I don’t blame you,” I whisper under my breath.

“I’ve got two thermos’ worth of hot coffee for him in my car, but he also wants some bagels.” She looks like this is a life-or-death event. Can you order some fresh ones?”

“He can have these.” I toss her my bag of untouched bread.

“What?” She presses the bag against her cheek and gasps. “You honestly expect me to serve *the* Dominic Reiss cold bagels?”

“We can use the car vents to warm them on the way there.”

She drops my bag to the floor before rushing over to the counter to order new ones.

Annoyed by another Reiss Enterprise intrusion, I shut my laptop, but an idea hits me.

Scrolling through my contacts, I find the first “office guest” I hired—a guy who eventually quit the app and started his own business.

“Tate McGuire Services,” he answers on the first ring. “How may I help you?”

“Hey um, my name is Georgia, and you gave me your phone number a while ago.”

“Oh, hey! I remember you!” There’s a smile in his voice. “Did your boss ever manage to get that spray paint off his windshield?”

“He bought a new car.” I shake my head. “Anyway, I was wondering if you had anyone on your team who could show up and scream during an outdoor meeting for me tonight. Like, just walk around screaming all types of crazy stuff until we’re forced to end it. If so, how much would that cost?”

“Well, if you want the full hit, it’s five thousand. If you want a minor hit, like roughing him up while leaving him thankful it wasn’t worse, it’s five hundred dollars.”

“No, wait. I just want someone to show up and ruin a meeting.”

“I feel you. We’re talking in code, and ‘ruin’ means beat the hell out of him, right?”

“No, I’m being quite literal.”

“So, where do you want to meet me after we beat up the guy?”

“There is no ‘beating up the guy’ at all. I’m hiring you to create a distraction.”

“How about we assault him anyway, and you pay us in installments for the favor?”

I hang up and resign to my fate.



THREE

PARK CITY, UTAH

DOMINIC

Weeks Later

I'm staring out the backseat window as Georgia's boyfriend Dante sets up a "Future Billionaire: Ask Me Anything" sign in front of my headquarters.

What the hell does she see in this guy?

From what I've gleaned about him, he makes a living from making motivational videos on YouTube and selling "How to make six figures in a month" digital courses.

If that's not questionable enough, he's been using the same picture of himself for years. With his slightly faded khaki suit and short red hair that matches his tacky checkered tie, he looks more like a used car salesman than an aspiring entrepreneur.

Since he's loitered in front of my building for the past few weeks, he's stayed late enough to drive Georgia home. He's also interrupted all my one-on-one meetings with her and made it impossible for us to spend much time together.

I have to be missing something.

"Did you find out more about Mr. Dante Harris for me, Walsh?" I ask.

"I'm still looking into that, sir." He looks at me through the rearview mirror. "I did discover that he recently trademarked the phrase, 'Billionaire Boy for Life,' though."

"Wow." I wish I hadn't asked. "How did he meet Georgia?"

“On a dating app, sir,” he says. “I’ve told you this several times before.”

“When’s the last time he took her out on a real date?”

“It’s been a while. Miss Grey’s boss has made a dating life quite impossible, sir.”

“Good.”

He sighs. “Is Mr. Worthy an actual threat to you, sir?”

“Unfortunately, yes.”

“So…” He turns around, shooting me a confused look. “Do I need to remove him from the premises?”

“Let me think about it.” I watch Dante add a second sign, one that reads, “Ask Me How to Land a Bad-Ass Woman,” and shake my head.

I don’t feel like being petty with him, so I’ll let this trespassing offense slide.

For now.

“Drive me to the back entrance, Walsh,” I say.

“Very well, sir.”

Grabbing my briefcase, I walk through the doors, and the scent of fresh balsam smacks me in the face.

The hallways are lined with oversized spruce trees, all aglow with twinkling lights and bright silver ornaments.

Curious, I head toward the conference wing, where I’m hoping to close my biggest deal eventually.

I nearly drop my briefcase to the floor in utter fucking awe.

Faux snow is falling from the ceiling amidst a massive winter wonderland. Shiny red and green trains are racing on tracks, and there’s a sign with directions to every themed spot.

Santa’s Workshop, The North Pole, The Enchanted Forest, The Grace Estate in Winter, The Elf Cafe...

“Wow, son!” My father taps my shoulder from behind. “This is phenomenal. What company did you hire for this?”

“One of my employees did this on her own,” I say. “Georgia Grey.”

The more I look around at her stunning decor work, the more I realize she has no business in a corporate setting with me. She’s too damn creative...

“Well, send her my contact information so she can draft a quote for me and your mother’s Valentine’s party.”

“Why? You hate parties.”

“No, *you* hate parties, son.” He picks up a cookie. “I’m looking forward to your party with Amy, if this decor is any indication. Did this Georgia person do the food, too?”

“Yes, but she’s—Wait a minute.” I cross my arms. “What party with Amy?”

“The invitations were beautiful.” He devours another cookie. “I’ve never seen anything quite like it.”

“I need you to speak words that actually make sense,” I say. “What party?”

“This one.” He pulls a shimmering envelope from his pocket.

I open it, and it unfolds into six sections. The last page features a picture of me and Amy. It’s a photoshopped image of us kissing under the mistletoe amidst falling snowflakes.

Dominic & Amy want to celebrate the holidays with you in a beautiful Winter Wonderland.

Location: Reiss Enterprises, Conference Wing

Prepare to experience the most magical holiday decor you’ve ever seen!

“When the hell did you get this?” I ask.

“This morning,” he says. “That’s why I rushed over here. This holiday party is really an *engagement* party, isn’t it?”

Hell no. “This is probably a prank by my best friend.” I flip over the invitation. “He mentioned working on something insane to loosen me up the other day.”

“I don’t think so, son. Bryan was as shocked as I was when he called earlier. I’m proud of you for finally settling down. Amy is a great catch.”

“She is for *someone else*.”

“Is that Santa’s workshop?” He wanders into the enchanted forest.

“This is even more stunning than it was last week!” Amy steps into the room. “I am beyond impressed.”

“And I’m confused.” I hold out the invitation. “What is this?”

“A surprise.” She kisses my cheek. “Since you’re not big on the holidays, I wanted to do something special for our families and show you how crazy I am about you. We’re meant to be together for life, right?”

I say nothing.

If this were earlier this year, I would’ve quickly agreed, and we would’ve slept together by now instead of simply using each other for public appearances. On paper, she and I are a perfect match. Ruthlessly competitive, determined to outlast our competition, and ambitious to a fault.

Yet, it changed somewhere between this past spring and summer, and I didn’t see much value in our arrangement anymore.

“You should’ve discussed this with me first,” I say.

“Well, forgive me, okay?” She caresses my tie. “Since you’ve been buried in your upcoming deal, I assumed you were far too busy to even think about a party.”

“I’m sure.” I roll my eyes. “We need to cancel it.”

“Two hundred people, including my family, have already RSVP’d.”

“It’s a month away. They have plenty of time to make other plans.”

“What’s the reason?”

“I don’t need one.”

“Is it Georgia Grey?”

“*No.*”

“Sounds like it.” She waves her hand around the room.
“Looks like it, too.”

“I just said she isn’t the reason.”

“How much extra time have you spent with her while she’s worked on this special little project?” She looks into my eyes.
“Don’t lie to me.”

“I’m sure you already know the answer to that since you’ve ‘randomly’ shown up here every day to watch us work.”

“Okay, fine. Let’s make a deal,” she says. “I’ll call everyone personally and tell them not to bother coming, and you’ll fire Georgia by the end of today.”

“What did you just say?”

“I wasn’t born yesterday, Dominic.” She glares at me.
“You like her and she likes you, but she’s just a crush and a distraction. *We* have the history and you shouldn’t throw it away on some skanky little slut.”

“Georgia is far from a slut.”

“How would you know? Are you sleeping with her?”

“I’ve never even touched her.”

“Do you want to?”

“What I want, is for you to cancel this party.”

“Answer my question, Dominic.” She narrows her eyes.
“Do you want to sleep with Georgia?”

Silence.

“Son, you’ve got to see this!” My father shouts from across the room. “These little wooden elves are making me hot cocoa!”

“Look.” Amy softens her tone. “I know how wealthy men are when it comes to commitment, and I know that Georgia is slightly above average in the looks department. She’s...kinda pretty, I guess.”

No, she’s fucking beautiful. I don’t bother saying that aloud.

“Anyway, it’s time for you to shit or get off the pot,” she says. “We’ve been ‘dating’ long enough, and the public expects us to get married soon. You can keep Georgia if you like, but you better do the right thing when it comes to me, or we’ll have a problem.

“Are you threatening me, Amy?”

“Of course not, Dominic...I’m just letting you know that your life will never be the same if we’re not engaged soon.” She steps back, and like a goddamn psycho, she suddenly becomes cheery. “That sounds amazing, Mr. Reiss! Show us those elves and that hot cocoa!”

She wanders into the Enchanted Forest with my father, but I don’t bother joining them.

I’ll check it out later.

I watch one of the golden trains chug its way down Gingerbread Avenue before heading to my office.

As I step off the elevator, a guy dressed in all red jumps in front of me.

“What the hell is up with you man?” he says.

“*Man?*” I raise an eyebrow. “Who are you?”

“The guy you let go of for no reason.” He pouts. “I thought we had something special.”

“You have me confused with someone else.”

“Dude, we’ve shared several memorable mornings. They were the best part of my day.”

“I’m calling security.”

“Okay, maybe you don’t remember because I’m not wearing my full mask today.” He clears his throat and begins rapping.

“I fucking hate working for you. I hate everything about you. Fuck this job, and fuck you, too.” He throws down an invisible mic. “Sound familiar?”

“Unfortunately.”

“I was looking forward to working a few more weeks so I could buy some last-minute Christmas presents, so um...” He runs a hand through his hair. “Any chance I could perform at a holiday party or go back to our normal morning routine?”

“I’d rather pay you five thousand dollars to never show up here again.”

“Can you make it ten? One of my kids really wants a dirt bike...”



THREE (B)

PARK CITY, UTAH

DOMINIC

The Following Morning

“Mr. Reiss, I want you to know that I will always believe in you and your company’s mission.” Mindy is standing in my doorway wearing a “My Boss Rocks!” sweatshirt.

She kisses my ass so much that I’m worried she’ll eventually leave a mark on my cheeks. She also makes me regret demanding that my staff hire a “forever loyal employee.”

“I appreciate that, Mindy,” I say. “What can I do for you?”

“I’d like to know why Georgia Grey is being allowed to have a full week off for Christmas when she spends six hours a week on Pinterest.”

“I’m pretty sure she spends *ten* hours a week on that.”

“Exactly.” She nods. “She also falls asleep during meetings and still hasn’t done anything to become more than an intern, so why would you give her *any* time off?”

“I wouldn’t, and I didn’t.” I take off my reading glasses. “Anything else?”

“Yes, there is a lot else, sir. *A lot* else.”

“I’m listening.”

She steps inside and shuts the door. Then she paces in front of my desk, muttering to herself.

“Should I say it? Is it true? Am I breaking loyalty?”

“Mindy...” I lean back in my chair. “Do I need to get the psychiatrist up here again?”

“No. Well, maybe tomorrow.” She stops walking and pulls out her phone. “By no means am I calling you a liar, but you sent this to me earlier. I know you said not to mention it, but I can’t help but feel betrayed about this.

Confused, I zoom in on the email.

Subject: Can you Keep a Secret?

Dear Mindy,

As my loyal ride-or-die, I know I can trust you with anything *and* everything.

So, between you and me, I’ve decided to give Georgia Grey Christmas Eve through New Year’s Day off since she worked so hard on the holiday display.

Keep this a secret, and never discuss this with anyone else.
Not even me.

Thank you for your undying loyalty.

—Dominic Reiss

P.S. You’re the best employee ever.

I’M NOT sure whether to be amused or angry.

“See?” she says. “I mean, I appreciate you telling me that I’m the best, but Georgia is literally *the worst*, so this doesn’t make sense.”

“I’ll handle it, Mindy.” I return her phone. “Send Miss Grey into my office, please.”

“How can I possibly do that?” She crosses her arms. “You gave her this week off as well.”

“I did *what*?”

“That was the first email you sent me. Don’t you remember?”

“No.” I narrow my eyes. “Show it to me right now.”



FOUR

PARK CITY, UTAH

GEORGIA

If I knew about all the access senior interns gained to the CEO's personal life and password collection, I would've begged to be demoted months ago.

Alas, I'm currently knee-deep in tiny styrofoam trees that lead the way to my living room, and I'm three chrysanthemums away from crafting the perfect gingerbread and stocking mantle.

I'm also slightly drunk and drowning in regrets.

This time last year, I was working my dream job at The Grace Estate.

It's a six-star resort in Colorado that's owned by my grandmother, and I was on the verge of becoming the youngest executive manager in its history.

Well, I was until I made an unforgivable mistake, and she forced me to resign *indefinitely*.

Although I begged her to change her mind, she refused. She said I "wasn't mature enough yet" and "didn't understand true work responsibility."

So, I bailed and came here to Utah, determined to prove I could be a mature workaholic like my older sister, Savannah.

As I'm hanging my family's special ornaments on the tree, I can't help but sigh.

My grandmother might've had a point.

“Can we turn some of the nutcrackers in the bathroom around?” Jessica steps in the doorway. “I feel like they’re watching me pee and it’s starting to creep me out.”

“They’re only in there until I finish rebuilding the faux gingerbread houses that’ll hold the towels,” I say. “Two more days at most.”

“Okay, I can deal with that.” She walks over to the train station near our fireplace. “Does this train need to run all night?”

“Yes.” My chest tightens. “It does...”

“Why, though?” She picks up one of the railroad signs. “I mean, the chugging is kind of soothing and it’s one of the cutest things I’ve ever seen, but—”

“But *what?*”

“But it goes through our entire apartment and it never stops. I don’t think the little passengers will care if their route only runs for a few hours a day instead of all day, right?”

“*I’ll* mind, so drop it.” I nearly hiss. “I’ll adjust any of the decorations except the goddamn train.”

“Okay, okay...” She holds up her hands in a slight surrender before grabbing her coat. “I’ll be back later. Hopefully you’ll be more chill about discussing things then since I live here, too.”

She slams the door shut, and I wince as the walls rattle.

I walk over to the train and make sure the two passengers in the luxury car, my parents, are still sitting upright in their best Sunday clothes. That my mother’s gloves are still on her lap, and she’s smiling about her and my father’s final destination that never came.

I set this train up every year for the holidays without fail, no matter where I am. As if it’ll somehow reverse fate, I never turn it off until the new year.

My phone buzzes as I’m reaching for the superglue.

It’s my grandmother.

I stare at the screen as it vibrates, torn between answering with an “Oh my god, please let me come back home and work at the resort again” or letting it go to voicemail.

My heart refuses to let me do the latter.

“Hey Grandma Hattie,” I answer.

“Hey there, Georgia Bee.” Her voice sounds like a warm hug. “Am I catching you at a bad time?”

“No, I’m just hanging some ornaments.”

“I bet your decor is breathtaking as always. Send me some pictures.”

“I will,” I say. “Did you get my emails about the best way to dress up the top suites and the grand lobby this year?”

“Of course, I did.” There’s a smile in her voice. “The staff has been implementing those suggestions all week. I’m calling you about something far more important, though.”

“I’m listening.”

“I told him yes, and I’m very proud of you.”

“Huh?” I ask. “Yes to what? Better yet, who is *he*?”

“Very funny.” She laughs. “I’m super excited for you two.”

“Can you tell me what you’re talking about so I can be excited, too?”

“Your boyfriend, hun,” she says. “Well, your *fiancé*. Dante called to ask if I would approve of him asking for your hand in marriage.”

WHAT? “Um...” I swallow, resisting the urge to ask if he sounded drunk. “That’s quite shocking.”

“It is! It also means that whenever you’re ready to come back to where you belong, we can discuss you becoming the executive manager of The Grace Estate.” She pauses. “No one handles hospitality quite like you do, and I can’t imagine ever leaving this place in someone else’s hands.”

“What exactly did Dante say to you?”

“Mainly that he knew you were the one after a few dates,” she says. “He said he’s also looking forward to meeting us at Christmas.”

“He told me that he wanted to come home with me to make a sales pitch to the estate.”

“From what you’ve told us about him, he’s quite the accomplished young man.”

“Yeah...” I glance at Dante’s stack of “about to be bestselling” books and “Learn to Be a Boss” business manuals that clutter our couch.

“Your cousin Taryn also tells me that he’s a great kisser?”

“Seriously, Grandma?” I regret ever mentioning that. The truth is, Dante is an average kisser, and our sex life is pretty nonexistent.

“Wait a minute...” I suddenly rewind her words. “Did you say that you’re ready to make me manager of The Grace Estate?”

“Now that you’re finally learning what it means to be ‘well-rounded,’ yes.” There’s a smile in her voice. “I know you hate surprises, so please don’t tell Dante that I told you about the proposal. I’m sure you knew it was coming, though.”

I didn’t.

“Thanks for the heads-up, Grandma. I’ll call you later, okay?”

“Love you.”

“Love you, too.”

I slump onto the floor and shake my head.

Unless I’ve been living in an alternate reality over the past several weeks, I’ve felt like Dante and I have hit a stalemate in our relationship. We haven’t been on a date in what feels like forever, and with him hopping on every podcast on the planet, he’s been “saving” his voice for other people.

He has yet to notice any of my decorations around our apartment. When I asked him if he wanted to stay up last night

and drink twisted eggnog over a “Truth or Dare game,” he said, “Do you honestly think that’s something that an aspiring billionaire would do?”

In desperate need of a distraction, I call the first person who crosses my mind.

No, wait.

Scratch that.

I call the *second* person who crosses my mind.

“Hey Georgia!” Savannah answers on the first ring.

“Hey. You got a second?”

“I always have plenty of time for you. What’s going on?”

“I need some boyfriend advice.”

“Of course!” She gasps. “This is about Dante, isn’t it?”

“Yeah...”

“Well, Grandma Hattie already told me everything, so before you start, let me give you some advice.” She pauses. “You need to make sure you have every work assignment done to perfection before you come home.”

“*What?*”

“There’s a new organizational app I’ve developed that can make sure that you’re at least three weeks ahead. Also, be sure to ask your boss if there’s anything extra that you can—”

I hang up and call the person I should’ve called first, after all.

“Yes, Miss Grey?” Dominic answers on the first ring.

“I think there was a mixup with me being off today.”

“I believe you mean, *fraud*.”

“Most normal people don’t leave their email passwords out on their desk...”

“They also don’t trespass into the boss’s office by stealing the building engineer’s keys.”

“That’s why I used a bobby pin.” I clear my throat. “I mean, oh no. I believe I was breaking up just then. Did you hear me?”

“Every goddamn word.”

“Oh, well, um...” I sigh. “I’m sorry I falsely gave myself off days.”

“Are you really?”

“No, but I’d like to come in and finish all the work I’ve missed, so I need access to one of the overtime suites. Can you please tell security to let me in?”

“I’m spending the night here already,” he says. “I’ll let you inside. Would you like me to send a car for you?”

“Yes, please.”

“Do you need dinner, too?”

“Yes.”

“Are you going to tell me what’s wrong?”

“Please don’t make me.”

“Okay, I won’t,” he says. “I’ll see you soon.”

Not wanting Dante to stay up and wait for me, I send him a message.

Working late and sleeping in at the office. I’ll call you tomorrow.



DOMINIC IS outside waiting for me when the driver pulls in front of headquarters.

He opens the back door for me and reaches for my hand. Then he drapes his coat over my shoulders before leading me inside the building.

I avoid staring at him as we board the elevator, but I can feel him watching my every move until we reach his floor.

“Where do you want to work tonight?” He ushers me into his opulent office suite. “My anteroom or my side conference room?”

“The latter, but I don’t want to jump into any assignments yet.”

“That’s the entire reason you’re here.”

“I accidentally left my laptop and all the spreadsheets at home.”

A smile crosses his lips. “Of course, you did, Miss Grey.”

“I’m also tired from decorating all day.”

“How shocking.”

“So, um, if it’s okay with you, I’ll take a quick nap on one of your couches first. Then I’ll do some work.”

He laughs and walks over to the linen closet. “I can’t believe I put up with this shit...”

Taking off my shoes, I plop onto the large red sofa that overlooks downtown.

“How’s Amy?”

“Alive and well.” He tosses a couple of blankets toward me. “She thinks I’m attracted to you.”

“Tell her that you’re not.”

“Why would I lie?”

“I’m sure you’re attracted to a lot of women here, so she’s probably used to it.” I move my head as a pillow flies my way. “If I see her, I’ll tell her that I’ve recently stopped trying to poison you, and she has nothing to worry about.”

I wait for him to laugh, but he’s staring at me intently.

“Why the hell are you working here, Georgia?”

“I have bills, and I like being one step away from homelessness.”

“I’m serious, Georgia.” He moves closer. “Why are you working an office job?”

“It was between this place or AutoZone,” I say. “Honestly, I tried AutoZone first, but they fired me when they realized I didn’t know shit about cars.”

“Noted.” He laughs. “You’re very good at decor and hospitality, though. You should be doing *that*.”

“I thought so, too.” I lean back on the couch’s luxurious cushions. “I already told you that I was forced to walk away from the highest job I could possibly get in that sector, though. All other places pale in comparison. No offense.”

“None taken.” He looks as if he wants to say more, but he holds back.

He’s often asked me about my previous job but never pressed for me to share more. He can sense it’s a hurtful subject.

“Will you quit working once you reach billionaire status?” I change the subject.

“No, I’ll probably work ten times harder.”

“So you really enjoy this corporate soul-sucking stuff?”

“Yes.” He looks amused. “It’s something I’m the best at doing. Well, one thing, anyway.”

“Don’t let me keep you away from it for another second then.” I roll over, facing the back of the couch. “I’ll redownload the spreadsheets via the cloud after my nap.”

I shut my eyes and hear the familiar sound of him hitting the lights. But his footsteps don’t trail down the hall as usual.

Instead, I feel the couch cushions shift, then him moving next to me.

I can feel his breath against the back of my neck, his cock slowly hardening against my ass as the seconds pass, but his hands aren’t touching me.

I should move, but I like him being this close to me. It’s the most comfortable I’ve felt with anyone in a very long time.

“Can I ask you a quick question?” I whisper.

“Of course.”

“Hypothetically, if I didn’t have a boyfriend and you were single—”

“We wouldn’t be ‘talking’ or ‘napping’ right now.”

“So, you’d want to add me to the long list of women you’ve had sex with in your office?”

“No, I’d make you the first.” He presses a kiss against my neck. “Go to sleep.”



FIVE

PARK CITY, UTAH

DOMINIC

Two Weeks Before Christmas

Subject: My Co-Employee of the Month Nomination

Mr. Reiss,

As you know, I take great pride in selecting a co-employee of the month since you always give me a much-deserved bonus. (Although it would be nice to be publicly awarded again, I understand.)

Anyway, I can't believe I'm saying this, but November was undoubtedly the month of **Georgia Grey**.

She's consistently worked from four in the morning until ten in the evening every day. She's gone above and beyond in a way I never believed possible.

But, by no means does this erase her terrible track record from all the months before, and she's still the worst coworker I've ever had.

Sincerely,

Mindy

P.S. I love the new Armani suits you've been wearing. They look amazing on you, sir.



SIX

PARK CITY, UTAH

GEORGIA

Christmas Eve

My suitcases for Colorado Springs are waiting for me in my kitchen. Perfectly packed and organized, they're devoid of anything that reminds me of corporate life and all remnants from this chapter of life I can't wait to finish reading.

I don't want any reminders while celebrating the holidays, and yet, instead of rushing to the airport with Dante, I'm wasting time in the office.

Perhaps it's because I'm trying to postpone the inevitable conversation with him about not being ready to be married. I just want him to make his sales pitch, and maybe, just maybe, we can start over without my job getting between us.

As I'm reorganizing the assignment folders on the shelf, he sends me a text message.

DANTE

Are you working late again today?

Not as late as usual. I'll be ready to fly to Colorado tonight. I need to talk to you about something.

DANTE

Me too. My last business podcast interview should be over in a couple of hours. Talk then?

Perfect.

“MISS GREY?” Dominic suddenly steps behind me, but I don’t turn around. The scent of his intoxicating cologne is rendering me speechless, and after spending so much time with him over the past six weeks, I need a second to face him.

“*Miss Grey?*” He clears his throat. “Can you hear me?”

“Yes.”

“Can you turn around then?”

“I can hear you just fine this way. What do you want?”

He says nothing for several seconds, and I slowly give in and turn around, hating that he looks so damn good today. The top buttons on his white dress shirt are casually undone, and his mouth is curved into a soft smile.

“May I help you with something, sir?”

“Yes.” He closes the gap between us, leaving his lips a little too close to mine. “There’s a few things.”

“I’m finished with all my assignments.”

“That’s not why I’m here.” He presses his hands against the panels above my head, caging my body with his. “I thought you were gone home for the day.”

“I’m leaving soon.” I glance at his exposed chest and immediately wish I hadn’t. This room now feels like it’s too small for the two of us.

“I need to talk to you about something important,” he says. “Something I’ve been meaning to discuss with you for a very long time.”

“Well, whatever it is, can it wait until after Christmas?”

“You mean, *on* Christmas? As in tomorrow?”

“No.” I shake my head. “I have a flight to catch tonight. I won’t be back until next week.”

He blinks a few times, repeating “next week,” as if he has to taste the words for himself.

“I could’ve sworn I told you I wasn’t granting you any time off for Christmas,” he says. “Did I not?”

“I vaguely recall that unfortunate conversation.”

“Do I need to pull out a dictionary and define what it means for you?”

“I’m two weeks ahead on my work, and I just made employee of the month for November. I don’t see why I need to stay.”

“Because your boss told you to.”

“My boss has the tendency of being an asshole sometimes, and I don’t think he honestly cares about what’s best for me.”

“I guarantee that he does.”

“Name one thing.”

“I’d rather show you.” He slides a hand around my neck and pulls me close for a kiss that leaves me gasping for air.

Fuck...

I shut my eyes as his tongue dances against mine, as he whispers, “I need your mouth to be a bit wider for me.”

I oblige, and he slips his tongue deeper. My nipples harden under my bra, and every synapse in my brain begs me to let him take this as far as he wants it to go.

Feeling entranced, I slide a hand between us, moving it past his belt buckle, right against his zipper.

He groans, and I feel his cock reacting through his pants’s fabric.

“Unbuckle them,” he whispers, and I loop my fingers through the metal buckle.

Struggling to get it loose, I pull my mouth away, but Dominic pulls me back, kissing me even harder.

Mesmerized by how dominant he is, how easily he can control me with nothing more than his mouth, I whisper, “I want to feel you inside me.”

“I want that, too.” He pushes my hand away and unbuckles his pants with ease. “Take it out so I can handle that for you...”

I skim the line of his briefs with my fingers, but reality suddenly smacks me in the face.

What the hell am I doing? I push him away from me as hard as I can, and he glares at me.

“I...I have a boyfriend.” I shake my head. “And you have Amy.”

“That’s what I need to talk to you about.”

“You’re my *boss*.”

“We need to discuss that, too.” He steps forward as if he’s about to kiss me again, but I move left and open the door.

“I’m sorry, I can’t.” I leave the office and stumble down the emergency stairwell, hailing the first cab that comes my way.

As I slip onto the backseat, my lips tingle and beg me to return and get another taste, but I resist.

“Can you take me to Montrose, please?” I say to the driver.

“Right away, Miss.”

I try my best not to think about what just happened at headquarters, but it’s useless.

Why the hell did I pull away from him?

The driver pulls onto my street and my phone sounds with new messages from Mr. Reiss.

MR. REISS

Come back to the office, Georgia.

MR. REISS

I'm not done talking to you.

IGNORING HIS TEXTS, I swipe my credit card against the cab's pay system and step out into the snow.

Rummaging for the keys, I unlock my front door and push it open.

The sound of my infinity train welcomes me, but another string of sounds is in this evening's mix. It sounds like heavy breathing and moans.

Confused, I drop my bags and walk into the living room.

Dante is on top of Jessica, looking into her eyes as he screws her on the couch.

Mid-stroke, he turns to face me and his eyes widen.

"Shit." He jumps up and pulls on his sweats. "I thought you said you were working late."

I look at the two of them, unsure of what to say. I pick up the pair of red lace panties off the floor and toss them at Jessica.

"I guess I should've stayed at work," are the only words I can string together.

Dante runs a hand through his hair and passes Jessica a shirt.

"I can explain," he says. "I promise there's a reason."

"How can you possibly call to ask my grandmother for permission to marry me while you're fucking my roommate?" I snap. "Like, how is that even possible?"

"Because I didn't *mean* to call your grandmother," he says. "I meant to call Jessica's, but I dialed Miss Hattie out of habit and tried to save you from embarrassment."

“Come again?”

“She got my phone number somehow and has been calling me every weekend to check on you.” He shrugs. “It was a butt dial, but trust me, it took everything in me not to tell her that you’ve spent the past month sleeping with your boss instead of me.”

“I’ve *never* slept with my boss, Dante.”

“But you want to, right?”

“No.”

“The sex just started happening one night.” Jessica interrupts. “We were drinking while playing a game and—”

“And then his cock just ended up inside of you?” I ask.

“Don’t lie to her.” Dante kisses Jessica’s cheek. “We’ve been getting closer in the weeks that you’ve been gone, and I’ve realized that she’s more of a girlfriend to me than you’ll ever be.”

“Besides, we haven’t had sex in *months*, Georgia,” Dante continues. “It’s not like I was sleeping with both of you.”

“Honestly, I think I’m in love with him,” Jessica says, avoiding my gaze. “We’re moving in together and we wanted to tell you earlier, but—”

“You’ve been working late every fucking day for two months straight now and we haven’t had the time.” Dante finishes her sentence. “But, now we do. I bet you haven’t even noticed that we moved our stuff out last week, huh?”

I swallow.

I don’t have a comeback for that because I honestly haven’t.

“Exactly.” He rolls his eyes at me and helps Jessica into her coat.

“That doesn’t make what you did okay.” I manage. “I thought you were my friend, Jessica. Of all people, you know how much I hate my job and have been trying to get a better life balance.”

Jessica sighs and picks up her purse. “Do you know how many times you and I spoke to each other in November? You can add in the first few weeks of this month into your calculation if you like.”

“The number doesn’t matter.” I shake my head. “I would never sleep with your boyfriend, and I would never betray a friend while she was simply trying to better herself at work.”

“Cut the shit, Georgia.” Dante scoffs. “The only reason you have a job is because your boss wants to fuck you.”

“That’s not true.”

“Oh, but it is.” He steps closer. “You’re terrible at your job, and everyone in that building, you included, knows it. You’re a sympathy hire, and you probably want to fuck him, too.”

I glare at him, and he laughs coldly.

“Thanks for saving me from an awkward ‘I’m not coming home with you’ conversation,” he says. “I’ll let you call your grandmother and tell her that you’re not worthy of a future billionaire businessman like me.”

I roll my eyes as the two of them walk past me.

They slam the door shut so hard the entire apartment shakes.

Minutes later, a knock sounds at the door.

Assuming they forgot something, I hesitate a long while before opening it.

It’s not either of them.

It’s Dominic.

“Are you going to invite me in?” he asks.

“No.” I shake my head. “Right now is not a good time, and I’m technically off work.”

“No, you’re not.”

“Feel free to argue with my door when I shut it.” My voice cracks. “I can’t take any more bad news today.”

“Then I hate to be the person to deliver another dose.” He pulls an envelope from his coat pocket and holds it out for me.

“What’s this?”

“Your termination letter,” he says. “You’re officially fired.”

“*What?*”

“You didn’t give me a chance to say everything I intended to say at the office, and I wanted to make sure I delivered the news in person.”

My mouth is hanging wide open, and like the clear asshole that he is, he joins me on the top step and gently presses my lips shut.

“I assigned someone to clear out your desk, but you’re more than welcome to stop by anytime and check to make sure they got everything,” he says. “Oh, and before you ask, yes. You will receive a *very* generous severance package.”

“So, you’re firing me because you kissed me in the office and I didn’t kiss you back?”

“First of all, you *definitely* kissed me back. Second of all, no, this really has been a long time coming, and it’s what’s best for you.”

“So, you’re firing me on Christmas Eve?”

“Would you prefer Christmas Day?”

“I would prefer not to get fired at all.”

“You probably should’ve been a better employee, then.” He pauses. “Before November, anyway.”

I wait for him to tell me this is some twisted joke, but he looks dead-ass serious.

“Thank you very much, Mr. Reiss.” I step back. “I appreciate you coming here to personally fire me, minutes after you were trying to fuck me in your office.”

“You’re very welcome, Miss Grey,” he says. “I’d like to finish the rest of our conversation, though.”

“Fuck you.” I step back. “This is the end.”

“Georgia...”

“I’m so glad I never crossed the line with you,” I say. “You would’ve been an even bigger mistake than dating a cheater like Dante.”

He narrows his eyes. “Excuse me?”

“Yeah, that’s exactly it.” I shrug.

I slam the door in his face before he can respond, and I ignore his incessant knocking that comes right after.

I’m not sure why, but his firing me feels far worse than what Dante and Jessica did.



HOURS LATER, I slip into a cab and hold back tears as I add a message to my family’s group chat.

On my way home. Excited to spend Christmas with you all!

GRANDMA HATTIE

We’re excited to see you, too! We’re waiting with bated breath to meet Mr. Dante, too!

COUSIN TARYN

I hope he looks as sexy as his name is!

SAVANNAH

Grandma is in this chat, Taryn!

COUSIN TARYN

So...We're only supposed to speculate about sex stuff in our cousin-only group chat? Is that the rule? (Can we discuss whether Georgia's fiancé is hot or not?)

I DON'T HAVE the heart to tell them I'm coming home alone or have just been fired.

All I know is that I'm done with Utah, the corporate world, and this will be the worst Christmas I ever have in my life.

I fucking promise...



SIX MONTHS LATER



SEVEN

GROUP CHAT

GEORGIA

COUSIN TARYN

OMG! Did you see the enormous bouquet of lilies and roses that Dante sent to Georgia last week? It. Was. MASSIVE!!!!

SAVANNAH

No, but I got your pictures! It was TRULY stunning, Georgia. I couldn't stop staring at them.

Thank you. <3

I think Dante really likes me...

COUSIN TARYN

You mean LOVES you. He sends you a new handwritten card from every business trip and calls you every night. I've overheard you all talking for HOURS whenever I visit.

I think it's sweet that he's holding off on proposing to you in front of your family since he had that emergency meeting last year.

SAVANNAH

It's super sweet. I'll have my fiancé talk to him and get some tips.

GRANDMA HATTIE

You should see what he sent her to the resort last week! .mp4 .video.

SAVANNAH

OMFG!!!! How did he get them to set up that Eiffel Tower cake?

COUSIN TARYN

You told him that he HAS to come this Christmas, right? It's been six months!

GEORGIA

Has it been that long already? Wow, time is flying...

I mark my calendar for the December day when Dante will die tragically in a freak paragliding accident, and then they can forget he ever existed.

And I can stop spending so much money on this ruse...



FIVE & A HALF MONTHS AFTER
THAT



EIGHT

COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO

GEORGIA

Three Weeks Before Christmas This Year

My mother used to say, “Always give your all, no matter what type of job you have.”

While my sister believed that advice and applied it to her life, I was happy to use my father’s amendment instead: “Find a job you love, and you’ll never work a day in your life.”

I have both of their words engraved on a locket, and I’m twisting it through my fingers as I board one of The Grace Estate’s trolleys.

When I make it to the main lodge, I walk inside the lobby and inhale the familiar scent of sweet balsam and crushed pine.

This is going to be the best Christmas ever.

“You have an appointment waiting for you in the lobby, Miss Grey.”

“With who?”

“It’s a different Miss Grey.”

Confused, I follow her to the lobby and spot Savannah.

“You don’t need to schedule time with me,” I say. “You can just call.”

“It’s about my wedding.”

“What about it?”

“I wanted to give you our complete list of requests.” She hands me a box full of binders. “I color coded everything, included tabs for research, and I ranked the businesses based on the number of reviews.”

“I don’t see the point in asking me to plan your wedding if you already did all this.”

“I only did the ‘research’ part,” she says. “You have the eye for the experience part. Plus, I figured since our ceremony is right around the corner, that you could use a little help.”

“Your wedding isn’t for another *two years*, Savannah.”

“So, does that mean you’ve started looking into the best seating arrangement angles for the photographer?”

“I’m looking into getting a DNA test to see if we’re actually related.”

Don’t say ‘no,’ don’t you dare say ‘no...’”

“Is that a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’, Georgia?”

Her fiancé, Garrett, suddenly steps into the lobby and walks toward us.

“What am I missing?” he asks.

“I was just thanking the universe for bringing you into my sister’s life,” I say. “And oh look!”

I point at the green and white bough hanging above them. “Mistletoe! Maybe if you kiss her, it might help her be normal for a change, and she can enjoy the holiday.”

He kisses her lips, but he holds up a briefcase instead of whisking her away.

“I brought an additional system since we plan on doing a lot of work while we’re here,” he says. “Did you bring the Cannon files?”

“Yeah, and I brought the Parish ones, too, since we’re almost halfway done with those.”

“Okay, I give up.” I step back. “You two are officially a lost cause.”

I walk away before their toxic corporate energy can rub off on me.

As I'm walking to the front desk, my cousin Taryn rushes toward me.

"Your fiancé has to be the sweetest guy ever." Taryn sets down flowers and a gift box. "Open it."

"No, I'll wait until later."

"Don't you want to know what it is?"

"I already know what it is."

"How?"

Because I sent it to myself. "I just know him very well."

"Well, I don't, so open it."

"It's another diamond charm for the bracelet he gave me." I fake a smile. "He sends me one every month, remember?"

"Oh, right." She stares at the box. "You know what, I'll unbox it live for all my social media accounts and bring it right back!" She's halfway down the hall before I can stop her.

Sighing, I flip through my newest magazine subscriptions, stopping when I reach *GQ: Business Edition*.

Under the headline, "It's Mr. Reiss's World: We're All Just Living In It," Dominic stares at me with ocean-blue eyes and his signature smile.

Wearing a custom black suit and silk red tie, he makes me remember all the times I was close to him in the office. All the time, he gave me the perfect opportunity to take advantage.

I thumb through the pages and read his interview, learning nothing I don't already know, until I reach the last line anyway.

"Rumors are still swirling about his long-term, on and off again girlfriend, Amy Prescott. Our sources say he'll be engaged to be married any day now!"

A pang of jealousy assaults my chest, and I google his name.

I know he's not mine, that we technically never "dated," but I can't help but feel like he could've told me about this.

His business is clearly thriving without me, especially since my replacement is a Harvard graduate who loves her job. Yet, The Grace Estate was recently awarded its first-ever triple diamond of hospitality award with me at the helm, so I like to believe that I'm doing far better than him since our "breakup."

He's not yours, Georgia. He's never been yours...

I decide to focus on something else for the day, but before I know it I'm calling the VIP customer service line for Reiss Enterprises. It's the private one for top customers, and all the complaints get sent directly to the shareholders when it's time to grade the CEO.

It's petty, but I still owe him for firing me. At least, that's how I try to justify things whenever I make this call at least twice a month.

"Thank you for calling our direct line at Reiss Enterprises," a soft voice answers. "On a scale of one to ten, with ten being the highest, how would you rate your most recent transaction with us?"

"One star for everything."

"*Everything?*" The woman gasps.

"Yes, everything."

"Um, well..." She pauses. "Is there something we can do to make it right?"

"I'd like to leave a few notes about the CEO."

"Tell you what, Miss," she says. "I'll switch you over to the direct line right away so you can leave a message."

"Perfect."

Soft holiday music comes over the line, and I pull up my Pinterest boards while I wait.

“Hello, Georgia.” Dominic’s deep voice cuts through “Jingle Bell Rock,” catching me off guard.

“This isn’t me,” I say. “This is...Someone else.”

“Okay, then.” There’s a smile in his voice. “Hello, *someone else*.”

“Hello, sir.”

“Is there something you’d like to elaborate on regarding your one-star claim?”

“Yes. The CEO of your company sucks and you should quit before the holidays so he won’t have the chance to ruin your life.”

“Thank you for your feedback, Miss. I appreciate it.”

“You’re not welcome.”

“How are you doing this month?” he asks, his voice low.

“I’m not finished giving your CEO my review yet.”

“I’ll assume it’s as glowing as all the others you’ve left.”

“No, I was planning to complain about something different this time.”

He lets out a low laugh, and butterflies take flight in my stomach.

“It’s good to hear from you this week,” he says. “For a moment, I thought you’d finally moved on and forgotten about me. I was about to call you to see if that was the case.”

“Sir, I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“You call me twice a month for small talk, and I call you three times, but you purposely ignore each one and send me a text...”

“That doesn’t sound familiar to me.”

“My day is going quite well by the way.” He changes the subject. “Thank you for asking.”

“You’re welcome.” I tap on my screen. “Well, I have a pretty hectic afternoon ahead, so I’ll let you return to your

life.”

“Wait,” he says. “I’ve been meaning to ask you something since last year.”

“Yes, I stole all the supplies in my office before coming home.”

“I already knew that.”

“Yes, I really do hate you.”

“So, why do you keep calling me?”

“I guess I’m hoping to get a voicemail one of these days that says karma has finally served you with a lightning rod death.”

“Hmmm.” He laughs. “Is that how you really feel about me?”

“I don’t have *any* feelings for you.”

“I think you like hearing the sound of my voice,” he says. “And I think you miss me.”

“I promise that I *don’t*.”

“If it means anything, I’d like to see you in person as well,” he says. “I can send a jet for you since I believe we have some unfinished business.”

“I think you’re confusing me with Amy.”

“No, I know the difference between the two.”

“Yeah, you’re dating one and harassing the other.”

His laugh sends my heart racing again. “Whatever you’ve been reading about me, please stop.”

“Tell her I’ll stop calling your line whenever you make it official.”

“I’m not entertaining that conversation,” he says. “If I sent a jet for you tonight, would you get on it?”

I hang up before I can even consider the idea.



NINE

PARK CITY, UTAH

DOMINIC

When will the decorations at headquarters finally be complete?

MINDY

Today, sir.

You said that yesterday.

MINDY

Yes, well, as your “ride or die” (remember?) I can assure you that today is really the day.

The team you hired is excited to show you the final result this morning.

After Georgia wowed everyone with her headquarters decor last year, I couldn’t risk not having the same experience this season.

I enter the main building and notice a single white tree in the lobby.

It’s a fifteen-foot-tall white spruce with glittering gold “Reiss” ornaments that apparently cost one hundred dollars each.

Before I can ask where the rest of the shit is, a man in a tuxedo appears and hands me a snowman lollipop.

“There you are, sir,” he says. “Thank you for hiring Prescott and Lane to bring in the holidays with your company this year.”

“Thank you for agreeing to it.”

He leads me down the treeless hallways. The only signs of the holidays are the sparse and sparkling snowflakes hanging from the ceiling.

“Okay, in one, two...” He pushes the doors open. “Three!

“What do you think, sir?”

“I think I’m in the wrong room.” I blink a few times. “At least, I better be in the wrong room.”

“What do you mean?”

“I can’t see what you charged me half a million dollars for.” I notice that half the room is empty. “Where is Santa’s secret shop? The elves making hot cocoa?”

The team exchanges confused glances.

“This looks like a group of high schoolers did it.”

“It does not.” He narrows his eyes. “You’ve got drones, a twenty foot snowscape, and a real-life train. If you want more trees and garland, we can add that, but this *is* Christmas, sir. This is the ‘Wow’ factor you asked for.”

I hold back a sigh. “I’ll have my assistant Mindy get back to you with some notes.”

They smile and continue telling me about all the things that are not here, and I feign interest until it’s time for them to leave.

When I reach my office, I push aside the endless interview requests and pull up Georgia’s Pinterest account.

She runs it like a personal blog, and I’ve followed it since she left, even purchasing a few things in the off-chance that she ever accepts the offer to come see me.

I'm scrolling through her "Things I Wish Me and My Mom Would've Done" board when my phone rings.

"There's a manager from Cartier on line one, sir," my receptionist says, "Should I send it through?"

"Go ahead."

"Good afternoon, Mr. Reiss," a woman says, "I was reading the celebrity pages and I noticed you placed a few rings on hold here for you and your fiancée with a "better do right by me" note. Would you like me to have someone come show you these options in person for you to purchase?"

"Excuse me?"

"Amy Prescott, sir," she says. "Don't worry. We're sworn to secrecy at my store."

"Thank you." I stand up from my desk. "I'll be right there to handle that."



NINE (B)

COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO

GEORGIA

The flames in the lodge's fireplace are dancing amidst a snowy winter night, and guests are laughing and drinking at the Hot Cocoa & S'more bar.

This evening is a perfect start to our resort's official Christmas season.

Well, it's *almost* perfect...

"What do you mean you don't 'think' you're coming into work this week, Rita?" I stare at the front desk manager, the woman who I thought loved this place as much as me.

"Exactly how it sounds," she says. "I'm going to be sick."

"How do you know that already?"

"I just do." She coughs. "Something terribly contagious is going around."

I roll my eyes. "Feel better soon when you actually get sick."

"Thank you, Georgia!"

I walk behind the front desk and make the scheduling change. Then, I hear a familiar laugh that I would recognize anywhere.

I look up and see Dante staring right at me.

"Long time, no see, Georgia Grey." His smile is as infuriating as ever. "How have you been?"

"Like you care."

“Of course, I care.” He leans forward. “We have history.”

“It’s nothing worth remembering or writing about.”

“That’s exactly what I mean,” he says. “I was hoping you’d be miserable, homeless, and lonely whenever I saw you again, and that doesn’t seem to be the case.”

“What are you doing here?” I ask. “We don’t accept monopoly money.”

“I have a reservation here.”

“For dinner at one of the restaurants?”

“Funny.” He looks me up and down. “It’s for one of the best lodge suites, for a little over a week.”

Before I can say I refuse to believe that, he pulls a red velvet box from his pocket and flips it open.

“What do you think about this?” he asks.

A heart-shaped diamond glistens under the light, and the words “Dante and Vanessa forever” stare at me in cursive.

“*Vanessa?*” I ask. “What happened to Jessica?”

“I met someone better. Someone who truly appreciates everything that comes with dating a man like me.”

“In other words, you cheated on her, too?”

“You can’t cheat on someone who doesn’t want you. Besides, it takes a certain type of woman to believe in the lifestyle I want to build.”

“That’s a pretty fancy way of saying, you’re still unemployed.”

“I’m an entrepreneur.”

“Are you making any money?”

“That’s none of your fucking business.” He glares at me, and I glare right back.

“That is a *beautiful* ring, sir!” Grandma Hattie steps over to us. “Are you planning to propose during your stay with us?”

“I am.” He smiles.

“Well, we have plenty of romantic spots,” she says. “I’d love to help you find the perfect place.”

“I would love that, too.” He’s still looking at me. “I’ll take you up on that once I finish checking in with the lovely Miss Grey here.”

“She’s soon to be a *Mrs.*” She beams. “Show him the engagement gift Dante sent you this morning, Georgia.”

“No, um...” My cheeks burn. “I don’t like wearing it at work. Besides, I’m sure this man doesn’t care.”

“I’d love to see it,” Dante says.

“See.” She moves behind the counter and opens the drawer, pulling out a charm necklace. “Since they’ve been long distance, he treats her to a new charm every month. How sweet is that?”

“So very sweet.” Dante says. “Sounds like a story I’ve heard about on Pinterest before...”

“I know, right?” Grandma pats my back. “He’s a super sweet guy. He called last year and asked for my permission to marry her.”

“He did?” He raises an eyebrow. “So, how did the actual proposal go?”

“It didn’t.” She shakes her head. “He had a work emergency and couldn’t make it.”

“So, you still haven’t *met* this guy?” He’s practically salivating, and I’m seconds away from knocking him to the floor.

“Well, we hope to this year.” She looks at me. “Otherwise, I might start to believe he doesn’t exist.”

“Me too.” He smiles.

“I believe there’s been a mistake in your reservation, sir.” I can’t take him being in my presence anymore. “I don’t see it for this week’s dates. If you like, I can book you at the Four Seasons down the street.”

“I have the printout in my bag.” He’s still smiling. “Would you like me to take it out for you?”

“Let me see if *I* can find it, Georgia.” Grandma Hattie gently pushes me out of the way. “What’s your name, sir?”

“Dante Harris.”

“It was literally staring right at you, hun. See? His first name is even spelled like your fiancé’s.”

“Wait a minute.” Dante crosses his arms. “Your fiancé’s name is ‘Dante,’ too?”

“It’s a pretty popular name,” I say.

“It’s not that damn popular.”

“He’s a successful businessman from Park City, Utah.” Grandma throws me under the bus again. “I see you’re from there, so you might’ve crossed paths with him before.”

“I’m pretty sure I have.” Dante smirks. “What a random series of coincidences I’m seeing between the two of us.”

“Yeah, whatever,” I say. “Anyway—”

“It’s not often that I hear about a “Dante” from Park City, Utah, who also knows a woman named Georgia who is engaged,” he says. “I’d *love* to grab a beer with him or get our pictures taken together.”

“We will totally arrange that.” Grandma Hattie chats with Dante like he’s a real friend and not a parasite, even offering to escort him to his suite.

When she finally finishes, I head to my office and shut the door.

Taking a few deep breaths, I tell myself that the past twenty minutes never happened and I will wake up from this nightmare in the morning.

It’s still a perfect Christmas, still a perfect Christmas...



TEN

COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO

GEORGIA

My Holiday Wish List

1. *Yesterday was all a dream.*
2. *Dante is not a guest here, and my family is not expecting to meet my nonexistent fiancé.*
3. *I am still on track to have the best Christmas ever.*

I fold the list into a tiny square and slip it into Santa's three-foot tall mailbag.

Then, like I'm the starring actress in a Hallmark movie, I twirl around as the lobby's speakers play "All I Want for Christmas is You." If I'm following the typical script, I just need to wait for the clocks to rewind to yesterday so I can make better decisions and keep my mouth shut about "Dante."

"What the hell are you doing, Georgia?" Taryn bumps into me mid-spin. "I've been looking for you all morning.

"So my wish list didn't work?"

She shoots me a confused stare.

"I'll take that as a no..."

"Anyway," she says, "since I've so generously volunteered to help out at the estate this holiday season, I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad news. I wasn't able to secure the top suite for you and your fiancé, and that's not all."

Okay, it's time to come clean.

"Look, Taryn," I say. "I need to tell you something."

“Me too.” She places her hands on my shoulders. “You’re fucking screwed.”

“So, you already know the truth?”

“Yeah.” She nods. “I just found out why you’re about to have a serious skeleton crew on hand...Taylor Swift just announced a surprise holiday festival here and I’m pretty sure you’re about to experience some ‘suddenly sick’ employees.”

“Taylor Swift is coming here?” I smile. “*Really?* I mean, they wouldn’t do that to me during the business time of the year, right?”

She blinks.

Rushing over to the employee check-in screen, I notice that six people have called in today.

What the hell?

Convinced this is an error or a last-minute holiday prank, I call the first employee on the list. Sarah Folsom.

“Hello?” she answers on the first ring.

“Hey Sarah, it’s Georgia from The Grace Estate.”

“Hey there, Georgia!”

“I noticed that you called in sick for today, with an indefinite return date. Am I reading this right?”

“No, um...” She coughs. “Something serious is coming to town. I mean, ‘going around,’ and I don’t want to miss it, you know?”

“You mean, catch it?” I cross my arms. “If you’re supposedly sick, don’t you already have whatever it is?”

“Um...” She coughs a few times before ending the call.

I call her right back, and it goes straight to voicemail.

“I’ll call everyone who is still scheduled and get back to you.” Taryn takes the phone from me. “Go get some fresh air.”

“Fine.” I head to the courtyard and pace between nutcrackers, mentally calculating how small of a staff I can use to run this estate.

“Georgia Bee?” My grandmother’s voice makes me stop.

“Yes?”

“Happy Seven Star Day!” She approaches me and hands me an emerald green gift box. “You can open this one before Christmas.”

In need of good news, I tug at the ribbon and push off the top. Inside is a huge diamond key with my name etched onto its handle.

“The Grace Estate would still be a regular resort if it weren’t for you,” she says, “and as soon as I meet your fiancé this Christmas and you show me that you can handle running this busy holiday on your own, this resort is yours.”

“Seriously? That soon?”

“It would’ve been a lot sooner, but I wanted you to have a life outside of work, so you won’t make the same mistakes I did.”

“I thought you wanted me to be more like Savannah...”

“Where would you ever get an idea like that?”

“Because she has everything together and she’s super professional.”

“One ‘Savannah’ is more than enough. Trust me.” She hugs me hard. “When exactly is Dante coming in?”

“Um, well, he actually—You see, the thing about him is, it’s complicated.” I stutter.

Now is the perfect time to admit the truth, to come clean about all the random gifts and fake voicemails.

“I’m having an interior designer put some finishing touches on your official manager’s suite so your fiancé can see it while he’s here,” Grandma Hattie says. “Did you already say what day he’s arriving?”

“Yeah, I said he’ll be here on Thursday.”



LATER THAT NIGHT, I lock myself in a suite and set up a table with Mission: Find a Fake Fiancé. I have ninety-six hours to find a guy who can save my life, and I refuse to throw in the towel until the very last second.

I brew coffee and open Craigslist, Home for the Holidays, and Rent-a-mate in separate tabs.

The other sites are far less promising, and I'm convinced that OnlyFans is borderline prostitution.

Not wanting to give up, I log into my social media accounts, checking on all my male friends one by one.

Engaged. Married. Single and looking for anyone down to screw on Christmas. Ugh...

By midnight, I'm close to throwing in the towel and deflating my estate dreams earlier than planned.

As I'm making another pot of coffee, the housekeeping manager texts me "Call me! It's an emergency!"

I forward it to someone else, someone who isn't watching her life go up in flames with every passing second.

I'm not sure how long I flip between tabs and scroll through pages, but when I look up from my laptop, the sun is peaking over the clouds and reality is setting in.

"Telling the truth won't be the end of the world," I say to myself. "Grandma just won't trust me to be manager because I'll still be single...and a liar."

I lean back in my chair, exhaling.

My work cell rings—signaling the start of a new day with VIP guest requests, and I accept that the jig is up. Game over.

"Thank you for calling your Special Guest Services Manager," I answer. "I'm Georgia Grey, and I'm looking forward to fulfilling your every request."

“Good morning, Miss Grey,” a deep voice says. “This is Ryan Painter, a customer specialist with The Office Guest.”

“Okay, seriously? I didn’t have anything to do with that dumpster that caught fire at your headquarters last year. That was totally a coincidence that happened on the same day y’all banned my account.”

“That’s not why I’m calling you, Miss Grey.”

“Oh. Well, what’s going on?”

“I couldn’t help but notice that you have yet to rejoin our app since your suspension was lifted.”

“What?” I sit upright. I’d completely forgotten about The Office Guest.

“I’m sending you a special ten percent code in hopes that you’ll find use for it within the next thirty days, but I do want to warn you that we’ve changed quite a few things since you were last one of our customers.”

“Yeah?” I place him on speaker and re-download the app as he speaks. “Things like what?”

“We just eliminated almost everything you used to abuse our app for.” His voice is deadpan. “And, although you can see what our guests look like, we had to eliminate the men seeing you until it’s time to meet in person due to some abuses by other clients.”

When I enter my old password, I’m not met with an ugly red screen anymore. Instead, the wonderful world I’ve missed so much is suddenly mine again. Gorgeous men in suits, availability, accents, and “skills.”

Maybe I won’t get caught after all...

As he continues droning on about their new terms and conditions, I type in my requirements, the date range and my preferences, and then I set a price that will hopefully get the right guy’s attention.

Eight thousand dollars.

“I hope you enjoy the new look and feel of The Office Guest.” The representative’s voice pulls me out of my thoughts. “I wish you great success with it this holiday season.”

“Thank you very much!”

“One last thing, Miss Grey,” he says. “I have a question.”

“Ask me anything.”

“It’s about last year’s dumpster that caught fire.” He pauses. “We never sent any memos or notes about that to the public or the press. How did you know about it?”

“Um...Merry Christmas!” I hang up in his face.



ELEVEN

PARK CITY, UTAH

DOMINIC

“Ladies and gentlemen, I’d like to lead the first toast.” My father taps a spoon to a glass. “To my son, Dominic Reiss, who, as of today is an officially a billionaire.”

The room fills with applause and I force a smile, waiting for a feeling of elation to finally hit me, but it never comes.

Since the announcement was made this morning via the business wire, all I’ve felt is numbness. I’d thought that I would want Mindy to pull the trigger on a celebratory yacht trip for me, but the only thing I have so far is a “Finally a Billionaire” mug for my desk.

“Congratulations, Mr. Reiss!” “This is so amazing and inspiring!” “I bet you’re on top of the world right now, son!” The party guests surround me with heavy pats on the back and special handshakes.

When I’m certain I’ve spoken to everyone, I pick up a Cuban cigar and step outside on the snow-covered balcony.

“Congratulations on this amazing milestone, sir.” Mindy joins me seconds later, holding out a coat.

“Thank you, Mindy,” I say. “I could’ve sworn that I gave you the day off.”

“You did, but that was so I could celebrate this momentous occasion with you, right?”

No. “Right...”

“I’ll handle a few measures downstairs to mark this occasion, and then I’ll head home if you don’t mind.”

“Thank you.” I pull a red envelope from my pocket. “This is for you to open later. Enjoy your holiday, Mindy.”

Her eyes widen as she takes it and rushes back inside.

I know damn well that she’ll open my one-hundred-percent raise and bonus letter the second she’s alone.

“Okay, when does the *real* celebration start?” My best friend Paul steps outside and shuts the door. “And what time will the strippers arrive?”

“This *is* it, Paul.”

“You better be shitting me.” He crosses his arms. “You finally become a billionaire and you’re marking the moment with a stale ass champagne toast and old people?”

“I also have this Cuban cigar.” I puff an “O” toward him. “It’s pretty damn good.”

“You’ve really changed over the past year, man...” He shakes his head. “If this is the type of guy you’re trying to be, don’t bother showing up to my promotional party next month.”

“That hedge fund is finally making you a manager?”

“Hell no.” He hands me a business card. “I started my own business.”

Mr. Pauly “Big D” Pullman

A Man Who Can Please You In & Out of the Bedroom

No Limitations on Reservations

No ‘Office Guest’ Fees

(But I’m Still on that App if you want me)

“So, you’re a gigolo?”

“No, I’m a man who provides exceptional physical services for his clients.”

“That’s literally the definition of a gigolo.”

“Don’t be so close-minded.” He rolls his eyes. “I’m earning my own money and living the life of my dreams while helping the women who desperately need me.”

“How does your wife feel about this?”

“She filed for divorce six weeks ago.”

“She doesn’t seem like the type who would mind a random side hustle. It’s not sexual, right?”

“Okay, okay.” He holds up his hands in a slight surrender. “I may have kissed a few clients’ pussies here or there, but the money benefitted us both. I even bought her a damn Range Rover, so I don’t see why she was so mad.”

“I’m sorry I asked.”

“Don’t be. Now that you’ve brought it up, I actually need a business favor from you.”

“I’ll pass.”

“You owe me, Dominic.” He steps closer. “I’ve killed countless media stories about Amy’s crazy ass for you this year, and you know those thirsty reporters are just going to keep knocking.”

“Fine,” I say. “How much do you need?”

“I don’t want your money.” He shakes his head. “I need you to set up a quick profile on The Office Guest and agree to take on a job for me.”

“The Office *what?*”

“I’ll explain it later,” he says. “I got greedy and overbooked myself for the holidays, and I can’t afford to be a no-show with the insane rates these women are paying.”

I puff another “O” toward him.

“Both of the ‘dates’ are extended engagements during the same week, but one is here in Park City, and the other one is somewhere in Colorado. I figure you’re the only person who can get to the latter on short notice.”

“Why the hell would you book something like this in another state?”

“Because I didn’t know where it was at first.” He sighs. “I just saw the rate of pay and accepted it. I’d already agreed to all the details when it finally clicked, you know?”

“No,” I say. “What’s the other date option?”

“It’s a simple ‘meet the family’ thing, but first you need to show up at seven o’clock and say, “I know you’re my stepbrother, but I’m still in love with you, Rita” in the middle of some live TV broadcast so she can break up with her on and off again boyfriend.”

“I’ll take the other one.”

“I thought so.”



TWELVE

DENVER, COLORADO

GEORGIA

The baggage claim area at Denver International is standing-room only. I'm standing near the escalator with a sign that reads, "Office Guest Pickup Username: GRB," and silently rehearsing my list of lies.

My short red V-cut dress and matching stilettos aren't the slightest bit comfortable, and I regret not wearing jeans and a simple T-shirt.

As a new horde of passengers comes down the steps, my phone buzzes with a familiar 800 number.

"Hello, may I speak to Miss Georgia Grey?" a woman asks.

"Yes this is she."

"Miss Grey, I'm calling from The Office Guest," she says. "I have some updates regarding your reservation."

"Has his flight been delayed?"

"Not exactly..."

"What does that mean?"

"Nothing to worry about, Miss."

I wait for her to elaborate, to say something—anything, but I only hear other people chatting in her background.

"Um, hello?" I say. "Are you still there?"

"Oh, yeah sorry! Um... Who am I talking to right now?"

YOU called me! "You're speaking to Georgia Grey..."

“Oh, right. The guy you booked had to cancel and he won’t be meeting you anymore.”

“What?” I drop my sign to the floor. “I’m literally standing in the airport waiting to meet him right now.”

“I’m sorry. He actually cancelled yesterday, but our system didn’t catch it until just now.”

Again, I wait for her to elaborate, but she gives me nothing.

“So, is this just a courtesy call to say ‘Sorry we screwed you over, but you’re shit out of luck?’” I ask.

“I’m sorry for the inconvenience, Miss Grey.”

“That’s it?”

“We’re working hard to get you a comparable replacement as soon as we can,” she says. “We’re currently working on a window of seven to ten business days. Since we don’t offer refunds, we will also make sure to send our guest along with a special gift box of holiday cookies and treats for you to enjoy this holiday season.”

I can’t believe this...

“Do you have any questions for me, Miss Grey?”

“Yeah.” I pick up my sign and head toward a waiting town car. “On a scale of one to ten do you have any idea how much you’ve screwed me over for the holidays this year?”

“I’m guessing a ten, but um...Should I take this to mean that I shouldn’t ask you to leave me a good review during the survey at the end of this call?”

“Ughhhh!” I hang up mid-scream.

TARYN

Squee! I’m so effin excited to meet your fiancé today! He better be as HOT as you claim!

GRANDMA HATTIE

Quick question! We want him to join us in our annual flannel pajama photo, so what size shirt and pants does he wear?

SAVANNAH

Do you think he brought an extra charger set that I can use? He's a businessman, right?

I MUTE the group chat as my heart nearly jumps out of my chest. Damn near hyperventilating, I rock back and forth on the seat.

“You alright back there, Miss Georgia?” My driver, Charlie, eyes me from the rearview mirror.

“I’m totally fine.”

“You look like you’re about to vomit,” he says. “Should I take you to grab something while we wait on your fiancé?”

“Yes.” I nod. “Take me to the deepest sinkhole you can find and push me into it.”

“What?”

“You’ll need to give me a few minutes to write out my last will and testament, though,” I say. “I have a lot of valuable things to give away to my family.”

“Okay, Georgia...” He shakes his head and turns on the music. “Let me know when you snap out of your latest delusion.”

Shutting my eyes, I weigh my nonexistent options. I’m too close to the holidays to devise another excuse, and I know they’d never believe me. I also can’t risk the real “Dante” getting any satisfaction from seeing me walk around the resort without another guy at my side.

My phone rings again, and I don’t bother checking the screen before answering.

“Yes?”

“Hello! Is Miss Georgia Grey available to speak?”

“She is until she dies later today.”

“Uh, okay then. This is Hannah, a VIP specialist with The Office Guest.”

“Okay.” I brace myself for more bad news.

“Your cancelled date was generous enough to suggest an even sexier replacement, and I wanted to share the new pickup information with you.”

“You found me a new fiancé?” I open my eyes. “Already?”

“We have, Miss Grey,” she says. “Would you still like your ‘guest’ to know you as ‘GBG’ until pickup or would you like us to release your name and information now?”

“I’d like to wait until pickup.” I don’t want to get my hopes up too high for what “even sexier replacement” means just yet. “I’m already at Denver International waiting. Which airline is he arriving on?”

“It doesn’t look like he’s flying in a commercial aircraft,” she says. “It appears to be a private plane, and he’ll be landing at Colorado Springs airport within the next hour. Will you be able to meet him at that time?”

“Yes, of course,” I say. “Thanks for setting up such a nice flight for him and stuff. That was very sweet of your company.”

“Uh, sure thing!” She clears her throat. “We’ll call you again with verification for pickup.”

“Sounds great!” I end the call.

“My apologies about earlier, Charlie.” I let out a long breath. “Can you take me to the private airport?”

“Absolutely, Miss.”



AN HOUR LATER, I'm waltzing around the private airport in awe. So far, I've watched four Gulfstream jets come and go, and I'm determined to add this place to one of my dream boards when I get home.

Assuming that my fiancé is on one of the waiting planes on the runway, I move closer to the windows and watch as they pull in front of the building individually.

A guy steps off the first plane, and I squint, hoping to get an early glimpse of his face.

With his sun-kissed hair and deep brown eyes, he's definitely a cute replacement and some of my faith is restored in the app.

I smooth my dress as he approaches the door, but a woman in green rushes up to him and kisses his lips.

Sighing, I take a seat and decide to kill time the best way I know how. Calling Dominic.

"Yes?" he answers.

"I hope you're miserable this holiday season," I say.

"I hate to tell you that I'm not."

"How are you spending it?"

"I'm helping my best friend Paul with something."

"Did you get him a gift for whenever he becomes manager at that hedge fund?"

"I did, but he won't need it," he says. "Long story. How are you spending the holiday this year?"

"I'm getting engaged."

"To *who*?"

"Does it matter?"

"Hell yes." He sounds upset. "Does he know that you still call and talk to me?"

"He doesn't care about that," I say. "And it's Dante."

"The guy who fucking *cheated* on you last year?"

“He’s a changed man.”

“I doubt it. You can do way better than him, Georgia.”

“Don’t expect an invitation to our wedding.”

“I wouldn’t dare to come anyway.” He sighs. “What did he say to make you even think about going back?”

“I’m not serious about being engaged to him.” I relinquish part of the ruse. “I’m actually getting married to a different guy, and no, he doesn’t know about my phone calls to you.”

“When do you plan to tell him?”

“Before you do, since it sounds like you’re about to threaten me with that.”

“I’m in the middle of landing something,” he says, his voice terse. “I’ll call you a little later, and you need to pick up.”

He ends the call without another word, and I almost feel bad for lying to him.

Almost.

Another plane pulls up to the departing zone, and another business appears at the top of the steps.

Like the last guy, his suit is tailored to his body, but...He looks way sexier, and he looks familiar.

Dominic?

As he descends the step, I realize it’s him, and his usual staffers and a bodyguard are preparing his luggage.

Of course, he’s flying somewhere for the holiday.

I crane my neck and wait to see Amy emerge in one of her usual Versace or Gucci dresses, but no other woman appears.

Not even a flight attendant.

Confused, I call the reservation desk at the estate.

“Happy holidays from the Grace Estate, how may I direct your call?”

“Hey Dana, it’s me,” I say. “Can you do me a quick favor and run a quick name search on all incoming reservations between now and New Year’s Day?”

“Sure thing. What’s the name?”

“Check for Reiss, Reiss Enterprises, Dominic R LLC, and Dom R.”

“Got it.” She hums as her fingers tap against the keyboard. “None of those names are popping up for me. I even extended my search out by ninety days.”

“I appreciate it. Thank you!” I end the call as Dominic steps into the building.

Wherever he’s staying while he’s here, it’ll be second best, which is what he deserves for firing me.

Before I can turn my head, he spots me.

Stopping mid-stroll, he slowly looks me up and down before coming my way.

“*Georgia?*”

“Get your eyes checked,” I say. “I’m not that person, and that’s not my name.”

He laughs. “What are you doing here?”

“Waiting on my fiancé. We just discussed him on the phone, remember?”

“Right.” He rolls his eyes. “I guess he does pretty well for himself if he can afford to fly into this airport.”

“Yeah, he’s far wealthier than you.”

“I doubt that.” He’s looking me over again, and it suddenly feels like we’re alone in this terminal, like he’s seconds away from picking up where we left off in the office last year.

“Happy Holidays, Dominic. You can run along with your life now.” I motion for him to move, but he doesn’t budge.

“You look sexy as fuck in that dress,” he says. “Does your fiancé know you’re out tempting someone like me with it?”

“Tell you what,” I say, “Let’s call him and see what he thinks. I have to warn you, he’s pretty possessive when it comes to me.”

“I would be, too.” He doesn’t look the slightest bit threatened.

I call The Office Guest’s automated line, giving them the right to release my information to the guest.

“Yes, sweetheart.” I pretend like there’s not a machine on the other end. “I’m standing in the terminal right now, and I can’t wait to fuck you hard multiple times during our amazing hot and sweaty sex, and feel your cock in my mouth. Okay, love you bye.”

Looking surprised, Dominic finally steps away from me, but not far enough.

“Hold that thought,” he says, answering his buzzing phone. “Yes, this is he...Yes, I’ve landed and found my way to the terminal building.”

I glance behind him as another plane lets down its staircase.

“No, I didn’t see anyone with a sign,” Dominic says. “Can you tell me what she’s wearing before you tell me that information?”

The businessman that appears looks like he’s ninety years old, so I know that’s not my fiancé.

“A short red dress with a very low V-cut and sparkling silver stilettos?” Dominic’s description of my outfit catches me off guard. “Yes, I think I see someone who is currently wearing those things...”

I shake my head, certain that I’m hearing things.

“To verify, simply ask the woman in question if her name is Georgia Bee Grey?” He smiles as he looks into my eyes. “I’ll do that. Thank you very much.”

He returns the phone to his pocket and leans closer. “What’s that you were saying about hot and sweaty sex with my cock in your mouth?”

OH. MY. FUCKING—

“Dominic Reiss?” A guy in jeans interrupts what better be a nightmare. “Wow! It’s been forever since I’ve seen you!”

“Feels that way.” He shakes the guy’s hand.

“What brings you to my hometown during the holidays?”

“I’m spending the holidays with my fiancée.” He slips an arm around my waist, and then he gently pats my ass. “Tate Hamilton, this is Georgia. Georgia, this is my former college roommate.”

“*Wow.*” Tate extends his hand. “It’s a pleasure to meet you. Any big wedding plans yet?”

“We’re getting married in Paris.” I stick to my script, even though I still can’t believe this is happening. “At least that’s what he promised when he proposed.”

“I hope to receive an invitation.” He winks at me and gives Dominic a side hug. “Congratulations on getting the best of everything in life, Dominic.”

“Thank you.”

I wait until he disappears before pulling away from Dominic’s grip.

“What the hell?” I say. “Why would you ever need to be on The Office Guest app? Are you secretly going broke?”

“I told you I was doing a favor for Paul. This is it.”

“Is *he* secretly going broke then?”

“Probably.”

“Okay, look,” I say. “We need to set some ground rules before we do anything else, and you need to make sure that you’ve memorized everything I typed in the app regarding our backstory and how we fell for each other.”

“Why would you ever need to hire a fake fiancé, Georgia?”

“I have my reasons.”

“Tell me *one*.”

“That’s none of your concern.” I pinch myself to make sure I’m not dreaming. “You need to tell everyone that your name is Dante while you’re here with me.”

“That’s not happening.”

“That’s what I’ve paid for.” I narrow my eyes. “My family already thinks that’s your name.”

“We’ll have to tell them the truth about that then.”

“That’s...” I sigh. “That’s not going to work.”

“You don’t think anyone in your family has ever seen or heard of me before? That they won’t wonder why ‘Dominic Reiss’ is suddenly calling himself ‘Dante?’”

Yes. “No.”

“They will, and you should get ahead of it.”

“How do you suggest I do that?”

“Just tell them we’ve been using that as a code name for me because I was your boss and you didn’t want them to look me up,” he says. “You wanted their first impression to be genuine because you’ve always hated meeting new people with preconceived notions.”

As much as I want to downplay his suggestion, it’s strong enough to work.

“Okay.” I agree. “You can be Dominic.”

“Another thing, that engagement story that you want me to memorize has so many holes in it, that you should refrain from ever telling it, let alone typing it again.”

“I don’t see anything wrong with it. I think it’s romantic and sexy.”

“There’s nothing sexy about me crying ugly tears because I couldn’t propose to you last Christmas.”

“A man who is in touch with his feelings is hot as hell,” I say. “Just do what I say and we’ll be fine. Any other questions or concerns?”

“Yes. What do *I* get out of this?”

“Excuse me?” I cross my arms.

“You heard me.” A slight smirk crosses his lips. “What exactly do I get out of helping you with this big ass charade?”

“The same thing you’d be getting if you were the original guy I hired,” I say. “After taxes, you’ll receive seven thousand, eight hundred sixty eight dollars and eighty-three cents. Well, minus eighteen additional dollars if you haven’t set up direct deposit.”

“I’m willing to waive that fee in exchange for something else.”

“I’d rather pay so I don’t feel like I owe you anything.” I notice him eyeing my dress again. “Sex is *not* an option.”

“I’ll throw that in for free, whenever you want,” he says, leaning closer. “That’s not what I’m proposing, though. I want four dates with you while I’m here.”

“What do you mean?”

“I would like to *date you*, Georgia,” he says. “There are plenty of cafes and places here to try at the resort, correct?”

“Yes, but...” I nod. “What’s the ulterior motive?”

“There isn’t one.” He extends his hand. “Four dates, no fee via The Office Guest, and I’ll pretend to be an amazing fiancé.”

“Perfect. Can you also promise not to utter any sexual innuendos?”

“I can try.”

“Try hard,” I say. “For what it’s worth, I need you to be an imperfect fiancé toward the end of your stay.”

“What does that mean?”

“Start being a jerk, you know, how you are naturally, so we can break up before you leave and there’s no need to do a real proposal in front of anyone.”

“Fine.”

“So, we have a deal?”

“Deal.”



TWELVE (B)

COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO

GEORGIA

The backseat of this town car isn't big enough for two. The tension between Dominic and me is so damn thick and heavy that I'm seconds away from suffocating.

Since Charlie rolled up the partition miles ago, I wonder if he felt the same.

Focus, Georgia. Focus.

I wait until we're a mile away from the resort before turning to face Dominic.

"Since you're not supposed to do too much talking while you're here, is there anything you want to discuss now?"

"Yes." He clasps my left hand, and warmth jolts through my entire body. "This temporary promise ring won't work if we're trying to convince people that you're mine."

"I just started wearing this today, and it was a last minute addition to my script in the app," I say, admiring it. "It looks like a real diamond."

"It barely passes for cubic zirconia." He shakes his head. "Take it off."

"Fine." I twist it off my finger, and he rolls down the window. Then he tosses it onto the road.

"Is there anything else?" I ask. "Do you want me to change my hairstyle for you, too?"

"I've always loved the way you wear your hair." He smiles. "It's long enough for me to pull it back whenever you

finally let me have you on all fours.”

“You promised no sexual innuendos.”

“*Facts* aren’t innuendos.” He leans over and unbuckles my seatbelt.

I reach for the door handle, but he grabs my hand.

“I would never let my real fiancée open the car door for herself,” he says. “I’ll get it.”

As tempted as I am to resist this, to let him know that I’m the one in control, I let go as he steps out of the car.

He doesn’t walk to my side, though. Instead, he approaches the bellman and exchanges a few words before returning to the car.

Opening the door, he reaches for my hand.

“Remember, don’t say too much when we get inside,” I say. “Just smile and nod like a bobblehead doll.”

He laughs as we walk up the steps.

“Welcome back home, Miss Georgia,” the bellman says.

“Thank you, Benny.”

He ushers us inside, and a scene from my worst nightmare comes to life.

“Merry Christmas!” My family stands under a sparkling “Congratulations Dante & Georgia” banner, and Grandma Hattie walks toward us with a smile.

“We managed to get this all set up while you picked him up from the airport.” She smiles. “What do you think?”

“I think I’m about to reap what I’ve sown.”

“What’s that?”

“It looks beautiful,” Dominic says, extending his hand to her. “Thank you for having me. It’s a pleasure to finally meet you.”

“Likewise. I’m hoping you’ll have some time to join our family for some of the yearly traditions.”

“He probably won’t,” I say. “Dominic has lots of work to do while he’s here, Grandma.”

“*Dominic?*” She looks up at the banner. “I thought your name was Dante.”

“It’s Dominic,” he says. “Dominic Reiss.”

“The *billionaire?*” One of my aunts nearly screams from across the room. “Am I imagining things, or is that him?”

Okay, he was right...

I feed them the “preconceived notions” lie, and before anyone can ask about the specifics, I loop my arm in his and lead him over to the tree. The quicker I introduce him to everyone, the quicker we can mark day one of this deal off the calendar.

“Oh my fucking...” Taryn blinks like a broken doll. “Georgia, your fiance is Dominic Reiss? Like *the* Dominic Reiss.”

“Hello.” He smiles at her, and she blushes. “It’s nice to meet you, Taryn. You’re her cousin, right?”

She stares at him in disbelief, blinking and saying nothing.

“Okay, we’ll come back to you.” I pull his arm and introduce him to Savannah and Garrett, all my aunts and uncles, and when he’s greeted all my cousins, I rush him toward the lobby.

“Why are y’all going that way, Georgia?” Grandma Hattie calls out to me.

“I’m showing him upstairs to the Gingerbread Suite.”

“I reserved that for another guest,” she says. “I placed you two elsewhere since I figured you’ll want to be together.”

What? “We don’t need to do that. Separate rooms will be fine.”

“I’m sure that’d be very inconvenient,” she says. “I placed you in one of the private cottages.”

“With two or four bedrooms?”

“*One.*” She pats my shoulder. “Call me if it’s not up to standard.”

“It’s not,” I say. “We need *two* bedrooms with two separate beds. We’ve never shared anything overnight. Ever.”

“Right.” She snorts. “I’ve scheduled a few couples’ activities for you after Christmas. I figured you may want to show him the best parts of the estate whenever the most hectic time is over.”

“He’ll be gone by then.” I squeeze his hand. “Won’t you?”

“I would *love* to see the rest of the estate after the holidays.”

“Bobbleheads don’t speak.” I mutter under my breath and squeeze his hand again.

“If it’s not too much to ask, Dominic,” Grandma says, “I’d like you to join me for a one-on-one lunch while you’re here.”

“Dominic doesn’t like lunch.” I refuse to let this happen. “At least, he hates eating lunch without me if we’re in the same city, so that’s not possible.”

“Just let me know what day works best for you, Mrs. Hattie.” He defies me with a laugh. “I’m looking forward to it.”

“Me too!” She looks at me. “It’s good to see you with someone who gets your crazy sense of humor, Georgia. I love it!”

“What’s not to love?” I spot the *real* Dante walking through the courtyard and gasp.

“Excuse us, please!” I tug Dominic toward the exit. “We have to go, but we’ll be back!”



THIRTEEN

COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO

DOMINIC

“**O** h godddd, oh godddd....” Georgia is breathing like she just ran a marathon when we step outside.

As her chest heaves up and down, I can't help but wonder if she would breathe the same way while she was riding me all night.

Fuck...

“Why haven't you pressed the trolley button, Dominic?” She looks at me. “You have to do that in order for us to get a ride to where the cottages are.”

“Probably because this is my first time here and I have no idea how anything works.”

“That sounds like an excuse.” She walks over to a red phone booth and hits a button.

Within minutes, a sleek black trolley car pulls onto the tracks ahead of us.

“All aboard!” A uniformed driver steps off to help Georgia inside before motioning for me to follow suit.

A violin version of “Carol of the Bells” plays as we ride through the snow-covered grounds, and Georgia keeps her gaze toward anything and everything except me.

“So, anytime I want to get somewhere, I step into one of the red booths, correct?” I ask.

She doesn't answer.

“That’s correct, sir!” The driver smiles at me through the rearview mirror. “We have twenty private trolley cars ready and waiting to take you wherever you want to go at all times, and there’s also a custom passenger train that runs on a continuous loop through the estate all day and night.”

“Noted.” I spot the golden train chugging in the distance and notice the words “Forever & Ever” etched onto its front car. “Was the train and the trolley system inspired by a book or a movie?”

“Neither, this was all Georgia Grey’s idea.” He beams. “We used to use fancy golf carts and slow-moving carriages to get our guests around this place. But when Miss Grey was a senior in high school, she designed a custom course for us and convinced her grandmother to hire some special people to build this instead.”

“That’s beyond impressive.” I look over at her again, but she’s still ignoring me. “I’ve never seen anything like this at a resort before.”

“Hopefully I’ll catch you during a solo ride during your stay, sir.” He makes a soft turn down Chestnut Lane. “My wife still can’t stop talking about the time you sent Georgia that ten-foot Eiffel Tower cake, and I need to do something like that, too.”

What in the... “I’ll keep that in mind for sure.”

“I appreciate it!” He begins driving up a slope, and my phone rings with a new call.

“Hello?” I answer.

“Please tell me that you made it on time so I can confirm my side of the date for the app,” Paul says.

“I did.”

“Are you with the woman right now?”

“I am.”

“Is she sexy or ugly?”

“Neither,” I say as Georgia slowly faces me. “Fucking beautiful.”

“Well, maybe I should’ve cancelled this other date after all.” He sighs.

“Why is that?”

“Because she’s made it very clear that she wants to be pleased in a way that makes me question my sanity.”

“It can’t be that bad.”

“She has a whipped cream foot fantasy that she wants to try.” He rambles. “I thought it was just toe sucking, which, hey, no judgement, but it’s way worse.”

“I’m not going to ask how.”

“Please don’t.” He sounds desperate. “I may have finally found my limitation on this gigolo thing.”

“I’m proud of you for finally seeing your job for what it is.” I smile. “Would you like me to Fedex some flavored whipped cream to you, to make whatever it is slightly better?”

“Fuck you, Dominic.” He hangs up as the trolley pulls in front of a red brick cottage.

The driver helps us out while slipping me his business card, and Georgia escorts me inside a home that resembles a Hallmark card.

“Okay, so look.” Georgia places her hands on her hips. “You and I need to have a conversation since you’re messing things up already.”

“The only thing I need to do right now is take a shower.”

“No, we need to establish some more boundaries.”

“We can do that,” I say, eyeing the cut of her dress. “After my shower. I need at least half an hour.”

“This conversation will be shorter than that.” She crosses her arms. “So, anyway, allow me to lay down the groundwork...”

Her lips are moving, but I'm not paying attention to any of the words that fall.

When she finally stops, she tilts her head to the side.

“Did you hear any of what I was saying?”

“No, but you can repeat it for me when I finish.”

“You've been standing there thinking about a *shower*?”

“Exactly,” I say. “I need an extremely cold one if I'm going to be able to focus on anything other than fucking you.”

Her jaw practically unhinges.

“You're more than welcome to join me.” I walk past her. “Otherwise, I'll see you in an hour.”

“I thought you said you only needed half?”

“That was before you demonstrated how wide your mouth can open.” I wink at her before heading to the bathroom. “I'll come out when I'm finished.”



THIRTEEN (B)

COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO

GEORGIA

When I return to the suite, Dominic is standing outside on the balcony. Shirtless and in plaid flannel pants, he's sipping coffee while staring at the mountains.

I clear my throat as I approach, and he turns around with a smile.

Okay, Heart. You've seen him a million times at this point. Cut it out.

"Are you ready to talk to me now?" I ask him.

"Yes." He sets down his cup. "I'm listening."

"Okay, great." I cross my arms. "Do not leave this room under any circumstance, unless I give you permission."

"Come again?"

"Do not leave this cottage." I enunciate every syllable. "There is nothing for you outside these four walls."

"I just booked a private tour of the ski slopes."

"Well, I'll gladly cancel that for you," I say. "You can't be trusted without me by your side, and I can't afford for you to give anything about this plan away."

"Is your family actually buying the name mixup thing?"

"That's none of your concern, *Office Guest*." I keep my voice firm. "For the record, that's how I'll refer to you whenever we're alone, so we can keep our boundaries drawn and clear."

“I’m not answering to that, Georgia.”

“You will need to hold my hand whenever we’re in public together, since I previously told them that you’re a gentleman, and you’ll also need to do all the chivalry shit that’s on the list I wrote in the app.”

I wait for him to object, but he doesn’t.

He steps closer and looks deep into my eyes.

“Anything else, Georgia?”

“Yes.” I point to the bedroom. “Since there’s only one bed in this suite, *I’ll* be sleeping on it.”

“No, we’ll share it.”

“In that case, I’ll sleep on one of the couches.”

“Why?” he asks. “The bed is an Alaskan king. It’s more than big enough for two people.”

“I don’t share beds with random strangers.”

“You didn’t feel that way when we were sharing a sofa in my office last year.”

“To be honest, I wouldn’t share an ocean with you right now.”

“I promise I won’t touch you.” He brushes a few curls away from my forehead, and my heart beats stupidly again. “Unless you want me to.”

“You know what? I just remembered something.” I step back. “I’m supposed to be at a private party with my sister right now.”

“Savannah would never party during the daytime.”

“She’s a different person now,” I say. “She’s not an unbearable workaholic anymore.”

“If you say so.” He looks at me like he knows I’m lying. “Where is the room key?”

“You don’t need that since you’re not allowed to leave.”

“I’m leaving this room at some point.”

“Not unless you want to be locked out of it.” I turn away from him and rush out into the hallway.

This was going to be a lot harder than I thought.



FOURTEEN

COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO

DOMINIC

Are you coming back to the cottage tonight?

GEORGIA

Nope.

Where are you sleeping?

GEORGIA

Far away from you.

I'm leaving the cottage in the morning to walk around the estate. Can you bring it back by then? (Why does the front desk have a "Do not copy this key or you're fired" note on this cottage?)

GEORGIA

Tomorrow isn't a good day for you to leave the house. (Why did you call the front desk at all? You don't need to talk to them.)

Bring back the key by then.

GEORGIA

I'll let you out when it's time. You have no leverage here. Goodnight. <3



FIFTEEN

COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO

GEORGIA

A couple of days later

I used to give all my family members the same thing for every Christmas: a handmade “rescue” sweater in a shade of their favorite color. Most of the time, they complained about it, but they never understood my reasoning.

I knew they’d re-gift it to someone who truly appreciated the craft of a handmade sweater, but more importantly I wanted to win our traditional family game of *Dirty Santa*.

Tucking my newest present under my arm, I take a deep breath before stepping into the main lodge.

“About time you showed up!” Taryn waves me over. “I think I’ve guessed about fifteen presents so far, and with any luck I can guess the rest before the game officially starts.”

“That’s cheating, Taryn.”

“I know.” She smiles. “You taught me well.”

I laugh and take off my coat. “Pass me a box.”

“Where’s your fiancé?”

“He’s feeling exhausted from the flight, so he sends his regards.”

“He’s become quite the topic of conversation around here.”

“Less chatting.” I shake a package, sensing a luxury bathrobe. “More subtle unwrapping.”

“He might be the sexiest man I’ve ever seen.” She’s not focusing on the gifts. “And that’s saying something because Savannah’s fiancé is pretty damn hot.”

“I’ll tell him you said that,” I say. “He’ll be back on the market after the holidays.”

“*Huh?*”

“I mean, if the two of us don’t work out, I’ll give him your number.”

“Ha!” She laughs. “The way he looked at you when you got here tells me that he’ll be yours forever.”

Right... “Pass me that maroon box.”

“I’m serious, Georgia.” She leans over and hugs me. “It’s good seeing my little cousin in love, and I’m really happy for you. I can’t believe you’re about to marry a sexy billionaire!”

“You shouldn’t believe it at all.”

“Maybe I need to find a terrible job with a good looking CEO and see if I can make that magic work for me, too.”

“Okay, look,” I say. “Can I trust you to keep a secret?”

“Only if you want me to share it.”

“That’s literally the entire point of—*Wow.*” I shake my head. “Thanks for being honest.”

“You’re welcome! How good is Dominic in bed?”

“*What?*”

“I need to know.” She lowers her voice. “I haven’t gotten laid in forever and he has total big dick energy, so you need to spill the tea.”

“There is no tea, Taryn.” I roll my eyes. “We’ve never had sex, and we will never *ever* have sex.”

“Why not?”

“Because he’s impotent.”

She gasps. “You’re kidding!”

“Nope,” I say. “That’s the big secret. We’re with each other because we get along intellectually, and I understand that no matter how much money he makes, he’ll never be able to perform in bed. He’s super sensitive about it, so keep that fact to yourself.”

“Okay.” She looks distraught. “I’m so sorry, Georgia.”

“It’s okay.” I pat her knee. “We can’t have everything we want in this life. Pass me that pink box.”

She obliges, and I shake it.

“Tea cups?”

“Sounds like it.” She nods. “Pass me the teal one.”

I oblige and notice my phone glowing with a new message.

DOMINIC

I left the cottage to take a tour. I’ll be back within the hour, so you need to meet me there with the key.

No...You need to wait until I FEEL like coming back since you broke the only rule I have you to follow.

ANNOYED, I set my phone on silent as Savannah and my other cousins arrive for the game.

As if she can read my mind, she hands me a bottle of wine and motions for me to drink it alone.

Somewhere between several boxes of cheap playing cards and a design Coach bag, Dominic walks into the room.

His eyes immediately find mine, and I jump off the couch.

“Oh, hey!” I rush over to him, then I lower my voice. “What the hell are you doing here?”

“I came here for the key.”

“You don’t get to hold onto it,” I say. “It’s mine until you leave.”

“I’m not your goddamn prisoner, Georgia.” He glares at me. “Give me the key. *Now.*”

“Hey there, Dominic!” Savannah calls out. “Would you like to join us for a few rounds of Dirty Santa?”

“I can’t,” “He can’t,” we say in unison.

“You can at least play one round then,” she says. “We’ll make it super quick.”

“This is a *family* game.” I shake my head. “Dominic is not a part of it.”

“Um...” She tilts her head to the side. “Isn’t he about to be, though?”

“*No,*” we speak in unison again.

“I mean, you never can be too sure about relationships these days, you know?”

I try to laugh it off, but Dominic doesn’t join me.

“Anyway, he got lost,” I say, “so I guess I need to show him back to our cottage.”

“Wait, Georgia!” Taryn stands up. “Aren’t you forgetting something?”

“How to tell the truth, sadly.”

“You’re under the mistletoe.” She points up at the white and green bough above us.

“*So?*” I scoff. “I’ll be back in a few. Can you hold off on that polka dot gift?”

“After you kiss your fiancé, sure.” Savannah leans forward in anticipation. “You made me and Garrett do it when we checked in. No big deal.”

“I did that because you two are *actually* engaged.”

“Just like you and Dominic, right?”

“I meant to say that he’s not that good of a kisser.” I try to save myself. “I don’t enjoy kissing him and he doesn’t enjoy kissing me.”

“He’s also impotent!” Taryn slurs loudly. “They have an asexual relationship because he can’t get it up, so she doesn’t like to tease him with any type of sexual behavior. Not even kissing because it gives him ‘The Sads.’”

“I’m fucking *what?*” Dominic looks at me like I’ve lost my mind.

“It’s okay, Dominic.” Taryn presses a hand against her heart. “This is a judgment-free zone. No one here cares about the condition of your penis as long as you make Georgia happy.”

“Well, at least they know the truth about you now!” I laugh nervously and step away from the mistletoe. “Ready to go, Dominic?”

“*Not quite.*” He pulls me into his arms, holding me taut against his body.

Without warning, he presses his lips against mine, kissing me so long and hard that I almost lose my balance.

“Why are you fucking with me, Georgia Grey?” he whispers before slapping my ass.

I gasp, but my reaction is short-lived by the overwhelming feel in his next series of touches.

He rubs his palms up and down my back, steadying me, testing me as he positions me to where I can feel just how aroused he is. How he does not give one fuck about the fact that he’s controlling me in front an audience.

I start to panic about what this looks like to them, if I’ll ever live this down, and as if Dominic *knows* that, he cups a hand around my neck and holds me still for a long, lingering kiss that makes every single one of my toes curl.

When he finally lets me go, my cheeks are burning and I can’t bear to look at anyone in this room.

“He looks like a pretty damn good kisser to me...”
“Right?” “I guess that answers my ‘How good is the sex?’ question from earlier.” Their whispers and giggles are loud enough for me to hear.

“I’m *far* from impotent,” he says to Taryn. “Your cousin has a very strange sense of humor.”

“*Clearly.*” Taryn fans herself, and I struggle to catch my breath.

“Now, I’m ready to go,” Dominic says to me.

“Yeah, um...Okay.” I pick up my coat and look over at the game. “I’ll be back.”

“No, you won’t.” Savannah and Taryn laugh, and I’m too stunned by that kiss to say anything else.

I follow Dominic outside and into a waiting trolley, and instead of asking the driver to take us to the cottage, I request that we go to the lodge.

“I think we should get you your own set of keys first,” I say.

“I would appreciate that.”

We ride in silence, and I pretend his hand isn’t caressing my shoulders the entire way.

“Well, well, well.” Dante steps in front of us when we enter the lobby. “Long time no see, Mr. Reiss.”

It honestly hasn’t been long enough.” He looks at me. “I’ll meet you at the front desk.”

He takes his place in line behind another guest, briefly leaving me alone with Dante.

“It’s a really small world huh?” Dante shakes his head. “I mean, it almost feels like last Christmas all over again for you, doesn’t it?”

“I’m not dating a liar and a cheater this year.”

“I didn’t lie about cheating on you. I omitted it until it was absolutely necessary to disclose.”

“Okay, bye.” I start to walk past him, but he blocks me.

“I’m not done talking to you, Georgia.”

“Don’t you have a fiancée to hang out with?” I ask
“Someone who actually wants to be around you?”

“I’m treating her to a spa day. I was hoping to catch you with your fiancé so we could have a nice chat.”

“He’s not your biggest fan.”

“But I’m one of his, since we both know that he’s really me.”

Ugh, God...

“Georgia! My youngest cousin, Ciara, runs over and hands me a picture frame. “Can you ask your fiancé to sign this gift for me? It’s for Cousin Savannah’s wedding.”

“So, you’re going to be Type-A like she is?”

“Never mind!” She snatches it away. “I can ask him myself.”

She runs over to Dominic and tugs on his pants leg.

“Oh you’ve got to be fucking with me...” Dante crosses his arms. “Don’t tell me that your family thinks he’s your fiancé?”

I can practically see the wheels turning in his head as he throws his head back and laughs.

“That’s why he’s here, isn’t it?” He snorts. “Do you really think I’m going to let you get away with this?”

“I don’t see what it has to do with you.”

“Well, we’ll see about that. I believe I’m meeting your grandmother for dinner this week, so I’ll let you know how she takes the news.”

“You wouldn’t dare.”

“I would, and I will.”

I walk away from him as his laughter follows my every step.

If there was any doubt before, now it's official.

This is definitely the worst Christmas ever...



SIXTEEN

COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO

DOMINIC

One more trolley ride later

“Here’s your extra key,” Georgia says, placing it on our suite’s dresser. “I’ll leave an emergency one under the outdoor mat just in case.”

“Thank you.”

“You need to make an appearance at the tree trimming contest in the morning,” she says, avoiding my gaze. “Wear the green flannel pajamas that are in the closet for the official picture. Any questions?”

“We need to talk about what just happened.”

“I’ll be sure to make a reservation for you to enjoy a private skiing session since you mentioned wanting to see the slopes.”

“Georgia, the *kiss*.”

“I texted Charlie and told him to take you on a private tour of the resort.” She looks out the window. “He’s looking forward to showing you some of the spots most guests don’t get to see.”

“Look at me, Georgia.”

“There’s a new spa with outdoor Jacuzzis that’s opening in February, but since you’re here with me, you can try it out early. Speaking of which...”

I walk over to her while she’s discussing her grandmother’s holiday dinner tradition. Tilting her chin up

with my fingertips, I look into her eyes.

“Why would you ever tell your cousin that I’m impotent?”

“Because she thinks I want to have sex with you.”

“That’s not a terrible assumption.”

“Yes, it is.” She blushes. “It’s quite defamatory, and if she weren’t related to me, I’d sue.”

There’s no use in pushing back on that blatant lie, so I change the subject.

“I need to ask you something,” I say.

“I’m not answering anything about that kiss, Dominic.”

“Thank you for admitting it happened.” It takes everything in me not to taste her lips again. “It’s about why your grandmother fired you.”

“She didn’t fire me.” She frowns. “She made me resign and back away for a while.”

“Okay.” I don’t let her get off the hook. “Why?”

“I ruined a destination wedding. That’s like, the ultimate ‘No’ in hospitality.”

“I find it hard to believe you would mess up something like that.” The look on her face is telling me the complete opposite. “Even if you did, I’m sure you would do everything in your power to fix it, right?”

“Not really.” She shrugs. “I was just being a terrible employee. You know that better than anyone.”

“Georgia…”

“He was cheating on her.” Her voice cracks. “I saw him screwing some other woman near the hot tub after the rehearsal dinner, so I… I messed a few things up to give the bride a slight pause, and I may have accidentally played the footage in her bridal suite so she could know who she was about to marry.”

I say nothing.

“We’re supposed to stay out of the guests’ business, but I used to get way too attached sometimes.” She looks at me. “That was the straw that broke the camel’s back.”

“Did your grandmother know?”

“No,” she says. “She just thought I was being unprofessional and late with things since that wasn’t my first mess up with a wedding that year. Same reason, though. Both grooms blamed the resort for making their fiancées walk away and we had to refund over a million dollars in potential profit.”

“You should’ve told her the truth.”

“It wouldn’t have mattered. I wasn’t supposed to be involved in their business in the first place.”

“Does it still hurt?”

“Like hell.” She shakes her head. “But I have a feeling she was looking for reasons to make me get outside job experience anyway. So I could see what it’s like without a dream career, you know?”

“I think you did the right thing.”

“Ruining two weddings?”

“Yeah.”

“Thank you... Since I’m being vulnerable, can I tell you something?”

“Yes.”

“You’re the worst boss I’ve ever had in my life.”

I smile. “You’re the worst employee I’ve ever had as well.”

“I hated the way you ran your business,” she says, still prodding. “You treated everyone like we were beneath you.”

“Technically speaking, you were.” I look her over. “But I apologize if I made you feel bad while working for me.”

“Can you remember to tap into the bastard you used to be when it’s necessary this weekend?”

“I’ll try my best.” I step closer. “You should leave now if you don’t want to have angry sex.”

“What about regular sex?”

“I’m open to that, too.” I glance at the bedroom. “Is that what you want?”

She looks as if she’s considering the idea, but then she slips out the front door.



SEVENTEEN

COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO

GEORGIA

“**D**id you know that your fiancé is on the cover of December’s *GQ: Business Edition*?” Taryn steps into my office the following morning.

“Yes, I’m well aware, Taryn.” I refresh the employee schedule onscreen and put on my reading glasses.

“He looks sexy as hell on it.” She shuts the door. “I still can’t believe you managed to keep his real identity a secret from us for so long.”

“It’s a holiday miracle.” I let out a sigh. “I’m super busy getting the estate ready for the upcoming holiday week, so please hold off on whatever else you want to say, unless it’s ‘I’ll happily help you.’”

“I’ll happily help you!”

“*Really?*”

“Yeah.” She nods, plopping into the chair across from me. “Now that I’ve done that, I really need you to spill some tea on your fiancé’s dick. I want to know how thick it is, how long it is, and where all the veins are. Serve my thirst with every drop.”



EIGHTEEN

COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO

DOMINIC

E *mergency! Emergency! Emergency!*

My second business cell blares in the middle of the night. Only three people have the number, and they all vowed not to call me this week, so it must be a desperate telemarketer.

I roll over in bed, trying to shut it off, but it's a FaceTime call from Mindy.

Worried, I sit up and hit the lamp before answering.

"What's going on?"

"Sir, I know it's the holidays, but I've come across something rather disturbing and I need to know how you want me to handle it."

"Okay." I get out of bed and carry my laptop to the balcony. "Give me the employee's name and tell me what they've done."

"It's not an employee. It's your ex-girlfriend, Amy."

"She's not a relevant part of my life anymore."

"I don't think she got that memo." She holds up a press release. "This is one of thirty that are scheduled to be published, and they've given your company until midnight to comment."

"How is this an 'emergency,' Mindy?"

"Because I didn't receive these from the media," she says. "They came from your shareholders. Some of them are

threatening to invoke the “Indecent Character” clause and remove you as CEO before the new year.”

“What am I missing here?”

“Amy is embarking on a scorched earth and scorned woman tour.” She sighs. “She’s claiming mental, emotional, and psychological abuse.”

“*What?*”

“She says that after all the time you two spent together, she realized you were displaying toxic signs of control over her every move. She has a jewelry store manager backing up a claim of you storming inside and demanding they take everything in her name out of your account.”

“That did happen.”

“Did you also tell her what clothes to wear, how to wear her hair, and control everything she ate?”

“Not at all.”

“I thought so.” She shakes her head. “If you give me an hour of your time, I can draft a statement about these heinous allegations.”

“Don’t bother,” I say. “Tell them I’m engaged to a woman named Georgia Grey, and I’m currently in town visiting her family for the holidays. Tell them we’ve been seeing each other for over a year now.”

“You want me to lie?”

“It’s technically the truth, Mindy.”

“But how?” She sucks in a breath. “I’m your ride or die, so why are you just now telling me? .”

“I forgot to hit send on the email about it weeks ago.” I give up on her ever letting that go. “It’s just been a bit of a whirlwind.”

“I can imagine.” She nods. “Is that why you struggled to fire her for so long? You loved her?”

“I *really* liked her.”

“No, I’m pretty sure it was love.” She taps her chin. “Look back, she got away with a lot of shit you would fire anyone else for.”

“I did eventually fire her.”

“Because you wanted to date her, right?”

“So she could return to what she was good at doing.”

“See?” She beams. “It is love!”

I laugh. “Don’t spend too much time on the statement. Just send it off, okay?”

“Will do, sir.”

“I meant to tell you thanks for this cup.” I hold up the ‘Finally a Billionaire’ mug I brought. “I appreciate it.”

“That wasn’t from me.” She looks confused. I bought you an “I’m richer than you and all your friends combined” T-shirt that’ll be here after the holidays.”

“Do you expect me to wear it?”

“No.” She laughs. “That mug in your hand was sent from some place called The Grace Estate in Colorado. I have a ‘thank you’ card scheduled to go out next week.”

“I’ll deliver it personally.” I smile. “Merry Christmas, Mindy.”

“Merry Christmas, Mr. Reiss.”

I wait for her screen to fade and return to bed.



AROUND THREE IN THE MORNING, Georgia tiptoes into the bedroom.

It’s her first time coming here since we arrived, and instead of joining me in the bed, she slips into an oversized T-shirt and plops onto the couch.

She pulls the blanket up to her neck, and I push off my covers and walk over to her.

Sliding my hands under her body, I lift her off the cushions.

“What are you doing?” Her eyes flutter open.

“Putting you where you belong.” I drop her onto the bed and move beside her. “You’re welcome.”

She rolls over to face me. “We don’t need to sleep this close together.”

“Okay.” I wrap an arm around her waist and pull her even closer. “Anything else you want to say?”

“I keep trying to avoid you, but you’re the only thing everyone wants to talk about.”

“Isn’t that what you wanted?”

“No, I just wanted the keys to running the resort,” she whispers. “I can’t even say ‘Good morning’ without someone responding with, ‘How is Dominic’s morning?’”

I laugh. “I’m having lunch with your grandmother tomorrow. Anything I need to know?”

“Yes. Don’t go.”

“I think she just wants to get a sneak peek of the engagement ring.” I laugh. “It’s not a big deal.”

“Are you going to tell her you threw it out the window?”

“No, I have one to show to her.” I trail a finger against her perfect, puffy lips. “I bought a pretty convincing one the other day.”

“Part of our deal was that you *wouldn’t* have to do that.”

“It’s just in case,” I say. “Thank you for the coffee mug you sent on billionaire day. If I’d known it was from you, I would’ve said something sooner.”

“That’s okay, you’re welcome.” She pauses. “Did you ever notice the tiny sentences in the letters saying, ‘I still hate you for what you did last Christmas?’ and ‘I hope you’re miserable?’”

“No.”

“Okay, I’ll show them to you.” She tries to roll off the bed and get away from me, but I’m done playing that game.

“You can show that to me in the morning.” I kiss her neck, and she sucks in a slow, unsteady breath. “In the meantime...”

I slide a hand against her T-shirt, slowly pushing up the hem until I can see her pussy.

“I have work in a few hours.” Her breathing slows. “I can’t.”

“You can’t let me kiss your sexy ass lips and finger your soaking wet pussy until you come?”

“Yes...” She moans as I slip two fingers inside her. “Fuck...Yes, you can do that.”

“I plan to.” I roll her on top of me. “We’re officially done *talking* for tonight...”



NINETEEN

COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO

GEORGIA

In the morning, my lips are swollen and deliciously sore from hours of Dominic kissing me. I can't help but replay the memory of him demanding that I say his name while I rode his hand, while he made me say, "Yes, I fucking want this..."

"Why are you over here talking to yourself, Georgia?" Taryn waves a hand in front of my face. "You're literally in the middle of a crisis."

"Sorry." I shake my head, snapping out of the trance. "What's going on?"

"Three more people called in sick," she says. "They didn't even *try* to sound convincing. One of them literally laughed in my face."

"There's no way people are bailing on me during the holidays." I glance at the updated spreadsheet, staring at it as if the numbers may change.

"Before I even attempt to get into this..." I pick up a clipboard. "Where are we on Savannah's cupcake order?"

"The same place we were last week when she called at midnight about it." She scoffs. "She and her boss should just elope and put us out of wedding planning misery."

"I suggested that and she turned it down."

"Suggest it *again*."

"Will do." I'm too stressed to laugh. "I'll call the baker for some mockups later to keep her at bay. What department do

you want to help me with today?”

“Housekeeping.”

“Any chance you can handle the front desk, too?”

“Maybe for a couple hours.”

“Okay, so that leaves me with...” I shake my head.
“Everything else.”

The VIP guest service bell rings, and I pick up the phone.

“Guest Services,” I say. “How can I make your evening better?”

“I’d like someone to come upstairs and prepare my hot tub with lavender and candles for me,” a woman says. “I would also like some hot towels.”

“My pleasure, Miss. I’ll fulfill your request right away.”

I start typing an email for the spa department, but I realize they’re down to two employees, which won’t work.

“Taryn, can you do me a favor and—”

The guest service bell rings again, and I fake a smile before answering.

“Guest Services. How can I make your evening better?”

“I’d like to have your best chilled wine, strawberries, and the S’more specialty delivered to my room within the next twenty minutes,” a man says. “I mentioned this at check-in, I believe.”

“You did, Mr. Hanson.” I remember. “Our chef made your order gluten free.”

“You’re the best, Miss Grey. Thank you.”

I wait for him to end the call and page the wine cellar.

The line rings and rings and rings.

Ryan and Liam called off, too?

I slam the phone down. “Turn-down service is in seven hours, and there’s now way we’ll get to everyone in time.”

“It’s okay, Georgia.” Taryn heads to the door. “I’ll handle the lavender bath guest, run to the cellar, and come back, okay?”

“You promise you’ll come back?”

“If you promise to get that crazy look out of your eyes, yes.” She rushes away without another word, and I grab a paper bag.

I breathe into it, ignoring the tears that are pricking my eyes.

Why is this happening now of all seasons?

Dominic suddenly steps into the kitchen, dressed down in jeans and a t-shirt.

“Now isn’t a good time,” I say. “How did you even find me?”

“You told me exactly where you were going.” He smiles. “Plus, I figured you might need some help.”

“What makes you think that?”

“Because no one is answering the front desk line.”

“I’ll go and do that.” I start to walk past him, but he grabs my waist.

“Your cousin is handling it.”

“She doesn’t have the friendliest voice, so I need to make sure she keeps her tone high.” I try to move past him, but he doesn’t let me.

“You need to promise to calm down first.”

“I *am* calm.” My voice cracks. “I’m not the slightest bit worried about things going to shit and everyone leaving me hanging while also trying to keep thoughts of you at bay because they’re all about fucking.”

“Now you know how I feel.”

“I guess so.” I shrug. “I really am fine, though. So, if you could just let me go so I can get through this hellfire of a holiday sooner than later, I’d appreciate it.”

“Georgia...” He bends his head low, planting a kiss against my neck. “Calm down.”

“I am calm.”

“You’re not.” He darts his tongue against my skin, setting a soft warm trail against my exposed shoulders.

My breathing is no longer my own; it’s stalling and anticipating his next touch.

Staring into my eyes, he unfastens the top button on my shirt and pushes down the lace shell of my bra.

Leaning forward, he sucks my right nipple into his mouth, and I grab onto the edge of the counter for support.

He takes his time kissing me there, sucking it between his lips and kneading my breast with his hands before serving the left one the same pleasurable routine.

After pressing a kiss at the center of my chest, he grabs me by the waist and sets me on the counter.

Moving between my legs, he pushes the skirt up to my stomach and my heart races erratically.

“Dominic...” I manage. “What are you doing?”

“Shhhh.” He presses a kiss against my skin, and my entire body tenses as he gently pushes my panties to the side.

Then he places his hands atop my thighs and spreads them wide.

Before I can ask another question, he leans forward and sucks my soaking wet clit between his lips.

“Oh my god...” His mouth is too much for me to take without warning.

I grab a fistful of his hair as he sucks me harder, as he serves me a gentler reminder of last night by slipping two fingers deep inside me.

My moans catch in my throat as he pulls out his fingers and places my legs around his shoulders.

His tongue is even more pleasurable this way, more reckless this way, and I surrender all control.

He devours me again and again, until I beg to come in his mouth, until my legs stop shaking.

It takes me what feels like forever to come to, but when I do, he's staring at me with a smile on his face.

"You taste phenomenal," he says. "Do you feel calm now?"

I nod, unable to speak.

"Good." He re-buttons my shirt. "I'm going to change my clothes, and when I get back, you'll tell me what your delegation plan is. Then we'll go from there."

Why do you want to help me with this?

"Because I *like* you." He reads my mind. "A lot. See you in twenty minutes."

He walks away and I pull myself together as best I can.

When I'm finished smoothing my hair, Taryn steps into my office with a basket full of cookies.

"So, a VIP guest wants someone to warm these up and have them in her suite by the time she finishes walking her dog," she says. "Any chance you want to downgrade this place to a two-star resort for the rest of the week?"

"Never."

"Are you planning to pay me for all this labor?"

"As long as you don't leave." I motion for her to hand over the cookies, and she handles the phone while I draft a list.

Shutting my eyes for a few seconds, I consider what's most important: the things we can get away with slacking on behind the scenes.

"Okay, Taryn," I say. "I need you to send all the front desk calls to voicemail and tell them that the system is temporarily down, but if they text their request, we'll get on it."

"Are you sure about that?"

“Yeah, since no one else is checking in for the week, we don’t need someone just standing there if we’re already short staffed.”

“Okay, on it.” She opens a laptop, and I look at Dominic as he returns.

“You and I will need to handle the list of special requests for the next hour, so Taryn can deliver them on time.”

“Okay.”

“No smart-mouthed comebacks?”

“As much as you deserve that for everything you put me through—” He kisses my forehead. “I wouldn’t take any joy in watching you fail.”

“Thank you.”

“You can pay me back in a different way, though,” he says. “Where’s the list you mentioned?”

For the rest of the weekend, I work alongside Taryn and Dominic, living off power naps, coffee, and bagels.

And somehow, I manage to stay alive...



NINETEEN (B)

GROUP CHAT

GEORGIA

COUSIN TARYN

So, LOOK at all these pics I took while I helped out this week! I need to find a man who looks at me like Dominic looks at Georgia.

SAVANNAH

Oh wow. They're so in love!

COUSIN TARYN

I can't believe she tried to lie to us and act like this man isn't breaking headboards and making her call him Daddy every night. #impotentmyass

SAVANNAH

Wait, what? Georgia's into Daddy play?!

COUSIN TARYN

She **should** be with HIM **crying laughing emoji**

LMFAO, I'm just talking. Prob not.

SAVANNAH

Do you think we'll witness the proposal while he's here?

COUSIN TARYN

IDK. Maybe longggg after the holidays since she's been working her ass off with me and him. I don't think we've slept more than a few hours.

SAVANNAH

Is any of this hard work for my wedding? I sent you both mockups, and you still haven't confirmed receipt.

COUSIN TARYN

OMFG. NO!

O_o, maybe your fiancé needs to break in a few of *your* headboards so YOU can chill the eff out. Your wedding is in TWO. EFFIN. YEARS.

Text you later, tho. Georgia is sending me another list of tasks. Oh, and she's grinning like a Cheshire cat. Dominic probably just finishing eating her out in the office. LOLOL

SAVANNAH

Taryn! You left Grandma in the wrong group chat again.

GEORGIA

You left me in here, too... O_o

GRANDMA HATTIE

What's "Daddy play?"



TWENTY

COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO

GEORGIA

“I’m leaving a fresh batch of beignets in the kitchen for the Polar Express Suite guests!” I yell to the chef. “I’ll be back to help you with the S’more bar in an hour.”

“Thanks, Georgia!”

Too exhausted to think straight, I lean against the counter and consider taking my next nap here instead of wasting any time walking across the estate.

“Well, hello there, Georgia.” Grandma Hattie steps into the kitchen, and I use what’s left of my energy to perk up and smile. “I’ve been looking all over for you.”

“Yeah, well, I’ve been relaxing since this place practically runs itself, you know?”

“Right... You handled this week beautifully.”

“I think you mean, ‘barely survived.’”

“This resort will be in great hands with you at the helm, and the staff is already planning one hell of a transition party.”

“Tell them to hold off on that.” I untie my apron. “I’m thinking of a way to punish them for leaving me hanging.”

“Why would you want to do that?”

“They ditched work for a Taylor Swift festival and left me struggling at the worst time of the year.”

She shoots me a confused look.

“I mean, I could see going to the concert of course, but they took off the entire week!”

“They didn’t do that, Georgia.”

“Yeah, they did.” I wave my hand around. “See how empty this kitchen is?”

“I told them to take the time off,” she says. “Granted, I should’ve had them come up with more believable excuses, but I did that on purpose.”

“Why?”

“Because any manager can work well when everything is going their way.” She steps closer. “I wanted to see if you could handle this place when everything was going wrong.”

I stare at her.

“I would’ve stepped in to help you if it got out of hand. But you stepped up big time, and I’m so proud of you.”

I say nothing.

“The staff is scheduled to work their regular hours starting this evening. She steps closer. “So feel free to enjoy your evenings for the rest of the week. I only need you for the VIP suites and you know those guests don’t tend to call unless it’s an emergency.”

“Are you planning to say something, Georgia?”

“I don’t know yet.” I narrow my eyes. “I’m not sure exactly how to feel about you right now.”

She hugs me close. “You should feel accomplished and happy.”

“No, that’s not my current feeling at all...”

She laughs and pulls a golden name tag from her pocket. “Well, wear this around and eventually you will feel that way.”

I run my fingers across the engraved letters and my heart skips a beat.

Miss Georgia Grey

Executive Manager of The Grace Estate

“We’ll discuss logistics and the transition later.” She kisses my forehead. “I’m sure your fiancé would like to spend some quality time with you.”

She walks away without another word, and I turn off the ovens before taking the trolley to the cottage.



DOMINIC IS LEANING against the mantle, sipping a drink when I return.

“I’ll be ready to help you at the lodge in just a minute,” he says.

“No need for that,” I say. “I’ve got the remaining evenings off, so you can pack up all your stuff and go home.”

“What?”

“The deal is done, I’m officially the manager, and therefore I don’t need you anymore. Thank you for all your help.”

“Just like that?” He arches a brow.

“Yes. Just like that.”

“Okay, Georgia.” He sets down his glass. “Congratulations.”

“Thank you. Would you like me to get a bellman here for you?”

“Not yet.” He walks over to me. “I’ve been doing some thinking, and I realized that I called you every day for a month straight when you first left me.”

“I vividly remember hitting ignore.”

“Why?”

“For one, you fired me, Dominic.”

“For two?”

“I figured you’d eventually forget me and move on to someone else.”

“How’s that prediction going?”

“Pretty good.”

Laughing, he wraps an arm around my waist and pulls me flush against his chest.

“I missed you.” He bites my bottom lip, sucking it between his teeth. “And I don’t think I’m over you choosing to date Dante while you worked for me.”

“Were you jealous?”

“Very.” He tears my shirt open, sending the buttons scattering all over the floor. “Were you dating him to fuck with me?”

“Not at first,” I say. “No comment on my mindset a few weeks after that, though.”

He bites my lip again. “You could’ve told me.”

“You could’ve been a better boss.”

“If you weren’t so awful at your job, I might’ve been.”

“Was I really that terrible?”

“You were *the worst*.” He tightens his grip on my waist. “But I’ll forgive you if you finally admit that you want me as much as I’ve always wanted you.”

He kisses me deeply before I can say those words, rendering me so breathless that I can’t speak.

“I’ve wanted you since the day I first saw you, Georgia,” he says, “And I hope you won’t keep making this any more difficult than it needs to be.”

“Ahhh.” I moan as he squeezes my ass. “I won’t...”

“I’m listening.”

“I wanted you, too,” I say. “I still do...”

“Good.” He smiles. “*How* do you want me?”

My cheeks heat as he trails a finger against my lips, as he gently pries them open to slide the pad of his thumb against my tongue.

“Tell me,” he says. “It’s your turn.”

“I want you in my mouth first.”

He looks stunned, but he unbuckles his belt. “Take it out.”

I slowly slide a hand into his briefs, and my breath hitches as his cock hardens under my touch. I take my time pulling it out, admitting how huge and thick it is.

I lean down and open wide, covering his tip with my lips, earning a low growl of approval.

“Fuck...” He threads his fingers through my hair as I take him down my throat inch by inch.

I gag when he hits the back of my throat and move my head back. Then I swallow him again and again.

Feeling in control for a change, I rub my hands up and down his length, moaning between mouthfuls, and he tenses in pleasure each time.

“I’m going to come in your mouth if you keep doing that,” he whispers. “Is that what you want?”

I can’t focus when he looks at me like this.

“Do you want my cock in my throat or do you want it deep inside you right now?” He stares into my eyes. “Say it.”

“I want both.”

He grins and positions me against the back of a sofa chair to face one another.

Opening a condom, he rolls it over his cock and slowly slides into me.

“Ohhh...” I moan as he buries himself inside me, as he gives me a few seconds to adjust to how fulfilling his cock is.

Kissing my neck, he whispers, “You feel so fucking good... Wrap your arms around my neck.”

The moment I oblige, he begins thrusting in and out of me.

“Dominiccccc...”

“Yes?” He swallows my words with another deep kiss. “Is this what you want?”

I’m too lost to answer.

All I can do is stare into his eyes while he fucks and controls every aspect of my pleasure.

He slides a hand between us and teases my swollen clit with his thumb, all while fucking and kissing me senselessly at the same time.

With every deep stroke, he pushes me closer to the edge of an orgasm, but he doesn’t let me take it.

“Tell me you’re mine,” he commands.

“Yes...” I rasp.

“No.” He bites my bottom lip. “*Say it.*”

“I...” I’m about to come apart. “I’m...”

“Don’t make me ask you again.” He thrusts into me harder and deeper, demanding that I say the words he needs to hear.

They sit on the tip of my tongue, stubbornly holding on while the screams and the moans jump out first.

As he grabs a fistful of my hair and buries his cock entirely inside me, I relinquish all my sanity.

“Yesss! Fuckkkk yessss!” I moan. “I’m fucking yours.”

He punishes me with more reckless strokes, pushing me to my absolute limit, forcing me to hold on until I can’t anymore. My legs begin losing strength, and my hands fall from his neck.

He holds me steady; then he stiffens against me while I scream louder than I ever have tonight.

He’s the best sex I’ve had in my entire life...

Panting in sync, we stare into each other’s eyes, still entwined.

“Are you okay?” he asks.

“Yeah, I just...” My cheeks are on fire. “I know we just had sex, but I think I want to um...”

“Fuck me again?”

“Yes, please.”

He laughs before kissing me, and within seconds, I’m lost in “us” again.



IN THE MORNING, I roll over in an empty bed, convinced last night was all a dream.

Letting out a breath, I adjust the pillow behind my head.

The sudden soreness in my muscles confirms that the best sex of my life was a reality after all. As I try to sit up, the bathroom door opens and Dominic steps into the room. Completely naked.

Smiling, he walks over and slips under the sheets.

“Do you want to leave the cottage today?” I ask.

“No.” He pulls me against his chest. “We’re not leaving here for a long time...”



TWENTY-ONE

COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO

GEORGIA

LIAM (WINE CELLAR)

We have three hundred bottles of champagne perfectly chilled for this week's events. Be sure to sign them out, please!

AMY (FRONT DESK)

It's Christmas Eve, people! Let's make it count for all our wonderful guests!

CHEF ALWYN

Georgia, can you help us with a VIP request? It's URGENT!

L iam (Wine Cellar)

We have three hundred bottles of champagne perfectly chilled for this week's events. Be sure to sign them out, please!

Amy (Front Desk)

It's Christmas Eve, people! Let's make it count for all our wonderful guests!

Chef Alwyn

Georgia, can you help us with a VIP request? It's URGENT!

SLIPPING out of Dominic's arms, I pull on my employee blazer and make my way to the kitchen.

"Where do you need my help?" I ask the chef.

"Some guest is requesting a champagne toast near the atrium," he says.

"Really?" I check the sheet. "I thought my grandma booked that for my family's pictures throughout the day."

"As if she would ever turn down a guest's request." He places a cherry garnish on top of a tray. "See you when you get back."

I grab a champagne kit and place it onto a rolling cart. I smile at the couples taking advantage of all the holiday setups around the lodge and stop when I see a tuxedoed man by the atrium.

Dante?

I'm surprised that he's still here.

Behind him, my family is taking pictures with a photographer.

"Ah, there you are!" He smooths his tie. "How do I look?"

"Like you could've asked someone else to do this."

"What would be the fun in that?" He motions for me to give him a glass. "Besides, I wanted to see you."

"Okay, seriously. Where is this mystery woman you're supposed to marry?"

"She'll be down soon," he says. "I'm looking forward to introducing her to the woman who sabotaged all my YouTube comment sections with hashtag cheater, and ruined my live business chats as well."

My eyes widen. I'd honestly forgotten I did those things.

“You thought I didn’t know about you being behind all that last year, didn’t you?”

I sigh. “I’m sorry.”

“Not as sorry as you’re about to be.”

“What does that mean?”

He clinks a spoon against his glass. “Excuse me, everyone. Excuse me.”

The conversations in the room slowly soften to a soft lull.

“I know some of you may not know me, but my name is Dante Harris and I’m a businessman from Park City, Utah. The same place where a certain Dominic Reiss is from.”

I swallow as he continues speaking.

“I’d like to make a toast to celebrate one of the best resort stays I’ve ever had in my life.”

“Awwww!” “It is amazing here, isn’t it?” “It’s my best resort stay, too.” Other guests and a few of my family members smile at him in agreement.

“But I’d also like to share this toast with an old girlfriend of mine, Georgia Grey.”

“Huh?” Taryn is suddenly at my side, whispering. “You know him, Georgia?”

“Is he drunk?” Savannah mouths at me.

“We were kind of engaged last year, weren’t we, Georgia?” He smiles, and I glare at him.

“But sadly, things didn’t work out because well, she’s a cunt who was fucking her boss.”

The room falls completely silent.

“It’s a funny story, actually.” He sips from his glass. “She was spending so many nights in his office and so many hours away from home, that she got mad at me for finding someone else.”

“Georgia, what the hell is he talking about?” Taryn whispers again.

“I called her by accident to ask her the lovely Mrs. Hattie for her hand in marriage, and Georgia was supposed to tell you that it was a misunderstanding and that proposal was never meant to be.”

“So, imagine my surprise when I check in here and see Georgia claiming that she’s still engaged to a ‘Dante’ but then she’s concocted it somehow into Dominic Reiss.” He snorts. “Not only that, but she’s convinced you that they’ve been together all this time!”

He’s the only one laughing.

“I mean, how dense are you people?” He looks around. “You don’t think it’s suspicious that you’re just now meeting him? He’s a goddamn multimillionaire and he could’ve flown here on his jet anytime, but it’s not until Georgia is set to take over this estate?”

Silence.

“Is any of this true, Georgia?” Grandma Hattie steps in front of him, looking right at me.

“I...” I can feel the weight of the resort keys in my pocket, the feel of the manager badge pinned on my jacket, and yet...I can’t bring myself to justify how I “earned” them anymore.

“Yes,” I say. “It’s true.”

“Which parts?”

“All of it.” Tears prick my eyes, and murmurs sound behind my back.

Savannah shoots me a sympathetic look, and I can sense Taryn moving to get a better angle of us.

I’m hoping that Grandma will suggest that we take the rest of this meeting someplace private, but that’s never been her style. She doesn’t hold her tongue (or her disappointment) for anyone.

“So, let me get this straight.” She looks at Dante, then at me. “I kindly ask you to resign from this estate, so you can get some life experience and I can learn to trust you again. But

instead of doing that, you make up a ton of lies, which means you've learned nothing?"

Dante nods in agreement behind her, grabbing a fresh champagne glass.

"Georgia Bee Grey," she says, her voice as broken as I feel, "What do you have to say for yourself?"

"You were wrong for letting me go in the first place."

A collective gasp fills the room, and two of my aunts glare at me from the tea table.

No one in this family, and I do mean no one, ever dares to tell her that she's wrong when it comes to anything about this estate. If she were to say that the sky above it shines in purple, we would all agree.

"You cost me two and a half million dollars in wedding revenue." She grits her teeth. "If anything, I should've let you go when it was only half that amount."

"You never even asked me why I ruined those weddings." My voice cracks. "You never thought there was a reason?"

"What does this have to do with you lying about a fiancé and wrongfully gaining ownership of everything I've worked for, Georgia?"

"Both grooms were as shitty as Dante is." I hiss. "I caught them both cheating on their brides in different ways. And the Grandma Hattie I know wouldn't want any woman to make a lifetime commitment in her estate to someone she couldn't trust, 'Stay out of the guest business' policy or not."

She stares at me, her expression stoic.

The aunts who were glaring at me before are shooting me sympathetic looks.

"I'm sorry I lied about Dante being 'Dominic,' but there's nothing more I've ever wanted to do than run this place, and Dominic and I do have a real history. It's just—"

"A lie." Dante interrupts me. "You're a liar who knows that homemade crafts and people-pleasing is all you'll ever be

good at in you life. You have no idea what it means to be loyal to anyone outside of herself. As a matter of fact, when I was dating you—”

“You fucking cheated on her,” Dominic’s deep voice is suddenly behind me, and I feel him wrapping an arm around my waist. “But you’re right about most of the stuff you said earlier, minus a few bullshit points.”

“No one asks for your opinion on this, *Mr. Reiss.*”

“What makes you think anyone wanted yours?”

The room is so silent that the pelting snowdrops echo against the windows.

“Mrs. Hattie, Georgia *was* my former employee, we did spend hours and plenty of nights together, and I’ve wanted her since the moment I met her,” he says. “If I could go back in time, I would’ve asked her to be nine months before Dante came along and messed everything up.”

“See?” Dante points at Dominic. “*See?*”

“We’ve been talking to each other ever since she came back home, and the only reason I didn’t fly to see her sooner was because she mentioned wanting to show her family how serious she was about becoming the manager.”

“That’s the only reason?” Dante can’t shut the hell up. “Are you sure about that.”

“My apologies to the Grey family,” Dominic says. “This really isn’t how I wanted to do this, but...” He kisses my cheek before getting down on one knee.

Pulling a black velvet box from his pocket, he flips it open to reveal a massive princess-cut diamond ring.

“I will forever regret hiring you at my company.” He smiles. “But not because of your record of employment. It’s because we wasted too much damn time not being together when there’s no one else who I can spend endless hours with quite like you.”

Dante crosses his arms, but a few people push past him to get a better look at the sparkling jewel.

“I wish you had called to ask me for a favor instead of going through *The Office Guest*, but you wouldn’t be who you are if that was the case, so, I can live with that.” He caresses my hand. “There’s a lot more I want to say, but I don’t want to go into another year without you being mine, and I want you to know that I love you...”

“Georgia Grey,” he says, “Will you marry me?”

I stare at him in disbelief, unable to decipher which part of his speech is real and which part is fiction. “Yes. Yes, I’ll marry you.”

“*Seriously?*” Dante fumes. “You two are still trying to convince everyone to buy into this charade? If anyone in this room is dumb enough to—”

“If you say one more word, I promise every single Grey will fuck you up.” Taryn cuts him off. “It’s you versus her entire family, so you must not understand how math works, and you can’t be as good of a ‘businessman’ as you claim.”

He looks around at my glaring family members and takes several steps back.

I overhear someone saying, “Cancel his reservation and get him the fuck out of here,” and I’m pretty sure Taryn says, “Let’s go beat his ass anyway.”

Dominic places the ring on my finger and pulls me up for a quick kiss. Then he leads me outside.

“Wait a minute!” My grandmother calls from behind. “Get back here, young lady.”

I let out a breath and turn around. “Yes, Grandma?”

“You and I have a lot to talk about this weekend, so don’t go too far.” She steps closer and sighs. “I would’ve never let you go if I knew what really happened, hun. I’m so sorry.”

“Don’t be.” I look at Dominic. “It wasn’t that bad of an experience.”

She hugs me close and then she hugs Dominic.

“I have a lot to discuss with you, too, Mr. Reiss,” she says.
“Same rules of not going too far apply.”

“Understood.”

I wait until she walks away before looking up at him again.

“Thank you, Dominic,” I say. “Thank you so fucking much.”

“For what?”

“Saving me from having to tell the complete truth about us in there.”

“That was the real truth, Georgia.”

“Even the part about you loving me?”

“That’s quite obvious.” He leans over and kisses me, saving me from wasting time on a conversation, kissing me until I can’t breathe.



TWENTY-TWO

COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO

DOMINIC

“**W**hat do you mean you’re staying for *another* week?” Paul yells at me via FaceTime. “Have you lost your mind?”

“I’m doing what you said,” I say. “Going above and beyond for the client.”

“Unless the client is Georgia Grey from last year, you need to tell the client her time is up and she’s full of shit. Her friends and family will just have to deal with whatever lie she concocted.”

I raise an eyebrow. “What do you mean unless she’s Georgia Grey?”

“We can discuss that when you’re on your way back to Utah,” he says. “Do I have to fly to Colorado personally and drag you back?”

“I want to hear why you think Georgia is the exception to me leaving.”

“Jesus Christ.” He rolls his eyes and tosses back a drink. “Let’s count the many ways, shall we? Actually, let’s just keep it simple with the obvious: you should’ve fired her after her first day, and then you should’ve asked her on a damn date.”

“I had my reasons.”

“Being attracted to her while being unable to seriously date anyone else aren’t good reasons.” He shakes his head. “Spare me the bullshit about her being a bad employee with the potential to turn it around.”

“She was.”

“Yeah okay,” he says. “And if she was so terrible, you would’ve been happy when she was gone. You moped for months like a fucking puppy.”

“I did not.”

“You haven’t dated anyone since she left.”

“Goodbye, Paul.”

“If it’s not Georgia, and the woman hasn’t sent me an additional seven thousand dollars by the end of the day, I’m reporting her to the app.”

I hang up in his face and send him a text.

It is Georgia...Talk when we get back.

PAUL

In that case, don’t come back. Ever.

BEFORE I CAN TELL him to go fuck himself, the bathroom door creaks open. Georgia steps out, her cheeks flushed red.

“You moped when I was gone?” she asked. “Is that what your friend just said on the phone?”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” I say. “You’re hearing things.”

“Am I?”

“Yes.” I smile and pull her closer to me. “I wasn’t even on the phone.”

“Why didn’t you ask me out?”

“Because you would’ve said no.” I tilt her chin up with my fingertips. “And you were taken.”

“I would’ve said yes,” she says. “As long as you offered me a raise.”

“Of course.” I laugh, kissing her lips. “What time do you have to start your final holiday shift?”

“I’m still off. Why?”

“Because last time I checked, you still owe me a few dates.” I look into her eyes. “We have a standing reservation at the ski slope, and then I want to see if we can break yesterday’s orgasm record.”

“Do we have to do those things in order?”

“Not unless you want to.”

“I’d like to break the orgasm record first.”

“Good decision.” I push her onto the bed.



TWENTY-THREE

COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO

GEORGIA

I *don't want you to leave...*

Those six words are trapped under my tongue the morning that Dominic is due to return to Utah. They nearly tumble out when he gives me one last orgasm in the shower, but all I can do is scream his name against the glass.

He kisses me while we dress, and he insists that we make sure we're no longer needed in the kitchen before we leave.

"I would never ask you to help on your last day." Grandma Hattie walks over to hug him the moment we enter the room. "But I will ask you to come back next season, if you're available."

"I'm sure I'll be back before then."

"I would hope so." She smiles. "Maybe I'll get to witness *two* weddings here."

I let out a nervous laugh. "I'm riding with him to the airport. I'll be back."

"Don't rush to come back," she says. "Take advantage of your off days."

"Will do." I grab a box of cookies before leading Dominic to the private pickup lane.

Charlie opens the door once we approach, and Dominic motions for me to slide onto the backseat first.

He pulls me against his chest, and I try to tell him how I feel, but he kisses me, and I can't think of anything else.



“SIR? MISS?” Charlie clears his throat while we’re in the middle of a kiss, and Dominic slowly pulls away from me.

As I’m catching my breath, I realize that we’re at the airport, and Charlie looks as if he’s been holding the back door open for far longer than he’d like.

Dominic laughs and steps out first, handing him a hundred-dollar bill. Then he helps me step out.

“I’ll circle around a few times, Miss Grey,” Charlie says. “Call me whenever you’re ready to go back.”

In that case, never. “Noted, Charlie. Thank you.”

Dominic presses his palm against the small of my back as we walk into the terminal.

“How are you planning to tell your family that we broke up?” he asks.

“I’ll think of something.” I take off the ring. “Maybe I’ll make it easy and say that you cheated.”

“I would *never* cheat on you.” He slides the ring back onto my finger. “Ever.”

“I’ll just say that we grew apart then.”

“Or, you could finally tell them the truth.” He smiles, pressing a kiss against my lips.

“I’m never telling them that you were a rental.”

“That’s not what I mean.” He laughs. “I cancelled my flight home this morning.”

“Wait, what? Why are we here then?”

“I was hoping we could go somewhere else for the weekend.” He pulls an envelope from his breast pocket, and I squint at the small font.

Paris?

“That’s still on your Pinterest board of places to stay for a full week, right?”

I nod, stunned that he knows that.

“Then we don’t need to say goodbye,” he says. “Not for a long time.”

“What are you saying, Dominic?”

“That I don’t want to leave, and I would like to date you exclusively,” he says. “I would also prefer it if we *didn’t* call off the engagement. At least, not unless things don’t work out for the long-term.”

“Anything else?”

“Yes,” he says. “When we fly back here, I think we should extend my reservation.”

“For how long?”

“As long as you want.”

“That might be awhile.”

“Good.” He kisses me. “I would hope so.”

The End



EPILOGUE

ONE YEAR LATER

GEORGIA

Next Christmas

Park City, Utah

“Do you think they’ll like me?” I smooth my dress as I stand outside Dominic’s parents’ home. “Be honest.”

“Yes.” He rings the doorbell. “You’re acting like they haven’t met you before.”

“They met me as your intern, not as your girlfriend.”

“Fiancée.” He corrects. “But again, they know exactly who you are, Georgia.”

I nod, keeping my gaze straight ahead.

The door swings open and his mother stands before us. Then she glances at my hand and calls over her shoulder.

“You owe me one hundred dollars!” She yells. “He brought Georgia home!”

Pulling me into her arms, she gives me a long hug and then gives one to Dominic before motioning for us to follow her inside.

“Aren’t you going to get our suitcases and stuff from your car?” I whisper.

“We’re not staying here after dinner,” he says softly. “We’re flying back to Colorado.”

I look up at him, confused.

“You’d wake everyone up if we stayed here.” He cups my face in his hands. “And you still owe me two dates from last year at the resort.”

“I thought you were kidding about that.”

“I wasn’t at all...”

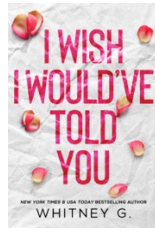
THE END, again

THANK you so much for reading this holiday novella!

If you LOVED it, flip the page to get a sneak peek of the first book in the series (Savannah’s story), [The Office Party!](#) Or, check out the next book in this series, [The Office Games!](#) (The next one is Taryn’s story!)



In the meantime, flip the page for a sneak peek of my latest release, [I Wish I Would've Told You!](#)



PROLOGUE

I WISH I WOULD'VE TOLD YOU

ME

I swear I didn't mean to send him that letter.

Yes, I revised it fifty-seven times, spent eighteen days fretting over which envelope to buy, and paid for first-class postage, but I didn't *really* intend to drop it into a postal box.

It was supposed to be a simple "cathartic exercise" to heal old wounds. Yet, after penning letters to every person I'd ever hurt, I set aside several blank pages for him.

I wrote down all the ways I missed him and asked if he missed me, too. I told him that whenever I'm lying in bed at night—despite whatever guy may be sharing my sheets—I can't help but remember all the times he handled me better.

So much better.

He bent me over our high school bleachers after the home games. Made love to me in the backseat of an old-school Mustang. Devoured me in his father's office while the mistress cooked in the kitchen downstairs.

I penned rambling paragraphs of things I never wanted to forget and others that were better left unsaid. On page seven, my teardrops marred the lines so terribly that the sentence "I was so lonely," read like "I was so horny."

Then again, page eight featured nothing more than a drunken drawing of the time we were thousands of miles apart during one summer, so he'll probably interpret it the proper way.

None of those things concern me, though.

The problem is on page eleven.

Sixteen lines down, in the second to last paragraph, is a sentence that unravels every lie I've ever told him. It's the one thing that will obliterate 'us' the moment he reads it.

The post office sent me a delivery confirmation minutes ago, so I'm standing outside our old meetup spot with gasoline and matches.

It's almost time.

I'm prepared to set our world on fire before my words can beat me to it...

PART 1

THE LIES BEGIN...

BACK THEN

Question:

Assuming you're a good person, if someone close to you is dating a guy you desperately want, but she isn't willing to give him up, which of these would be your next move?

- **A)** Let it go. Spend your time trying to find someone else.
- **B)** Fight. Because you truly believe this guy belongs to you.
- **C)** Explain how this guy is your soulmate and hope your friend will let go of him and understand.

Answer:

None of these.

A "good person" would never be in a situation like this.



ME

Dear Carly Hills,

I was the one who stole your Prada purse during our junior-year class trip. I didn't take anything out of it, though. I just tossed it into the Blackwater River because I was tired of you calling me a "Wednesday Addams looking bitch."

Sorry.

Well, not really.

Wish I Would've Told You,

—Scarlett

My date's breath smells like Doritos. Not the good Cool Ranch flavor, the stale Nacho Cheese kind that should've been banned from production decades ago.

We're sitting in his car as it rains, and I'm wondering why he chose to wear a "Bros before Hos" t-shirt tonight. I'm also confused as to why he's staring at me with desire in his eyes when the only thing we have in common is our eye color.

"You're really mature for a high school girl," he says, running his fingers through my hair. "I wasn't expecting you to know anything about classical music."

I smile. "I've been playing violin and clarinet since I was four."

"That's very impressive." He pulls my head a bit closer. "So, that means you have some amazing *strumming* and *fingering* skills?"

“Um...I guess so.”

“I’ve never played any instruments, but I bet you’d be impressed with my strumming skills on your body.”

Why did he just stretch out the word ‘body’ like ‘bahhh-deee’?

“I hope you had a good time with me tonight.” He saves me from asking. “I’m looking forward to getting to know you a lot better.”

“Me too.” I nod, even though I have no intention of answering his calls after tonight.

I really need to give up on the idea of college guys being “intellectual and deep” once and for all. He’s the fifth guy I’ve dated, and although he didn’t try to slip his tongue down my throat or try to impress me with a never-ending game of beer pong, his conversation was as shallow and mundane as the others.

All he did was talk about himself.

“I really need to get home.” I lean back. “I have school in the morning.”

“Are you sure you don’t want me to walk you inside?” He unbuckles his seatbelt. “I’d hate for you to slip in all this rain.”

“I’m sure. I have to go through the back door so I won’t wake up my parents before my curfew.”

“That’s the good thing about dorm rooms.” He presses a stale kiss on my forehead. “There are no parents and no one cares about curfew.”

“Sounds amazing.”

“It is amazing.” He wiggles his fingers. “I’ll call you on Friday so I can show you what I can do with these, okay?”

“Okay.” I vow to block his number once I get inside. “Looking forward to it.”

Stepping out into the drizzle, I wave at him before walking up my neighbor’s driveway. Then I watch until his headlights

disappear around the corner before jumping the fence and running into my *real* backyard.

As thunder roars in the distance, I run to the oversized treehouse and unzip the duffel bag I left there hours ago.

Panicking, I pull a pair of sweatpants over my fishnet tights. Then I cover my black halter top with a hoodie.

I've got exactly fifteen minutes before my parents realize that the human-shaped mound on my bed is nothing more than sweaters and hoodies.

The lights in the kitchen suddenly turn on, so I slide behind the tree trunk.

Seconds later, I see my dad heading toward the fridge.

Walking like a zombie, he takes out a beer and sits at the breakfast bar. He opens a laptop and stretches his fingers, making it clear that he'll be sitting there for a while.

Shit.

There's no way I can get through the back entrance without him spotting me, and I can't risk getting caught sneaking out without permission again.

I've been grounded more than enough this year.

Thinking fast, I pick up a rock and hurl it at the parlor room window.

It misses, so I pick up another.

Then another.

It takes five tries before a rock hits the glass and ricochets off a drainage pipe.

My father immediately stands and looks around.

Come on. Come on...

He doesn't make a move, so I pick up the biggest rock I can find and launch it.

This time, I break the glass.

My father grabs a baseball bat and runs toward the sound.

Finally!

I run to the house as fast as I can, getting soaked with each step.

My sandal strap snags on a lawn tool, and I fall face forward on the ground.

I yelp in pain as I struggle to free it from the blade, but it's stuck, so I'm forced to leave it behind.

When I make it to the steel ivy brackets that cling to the side of the house, I hold them for dear life.

Climbing up, I make it to the second story and push up my window.

Using my bare foot for balance, I force my body over the sill and fall onto the floor.

"I made it." I let out a sigh of relief. "I effin' made it."

The lights come on.

"I could've sworn your curfew was *ten o'clock*, Scarlett." My mom is glaring at me from the bed. "Didn't we discuss this the last time I grounded you?"

I glance at the clock, tempted to tell her that it's nine fifty-eight, but I bite my tongue.

"I also recall saying that you needed to *ask* to leave this house." She crosses her arms. "You're only seventeen years old, last time I checked. But since I clearly can't trust you, don't make plans for the next three weekends. You're coming with me and your sister to shop for prom dresses in Nashville."

"Can't you drown me in our pool instead?" I roll over onto my back. "I think that would be slightly less painful for me."

"Very funny, Scarlett."

I groan and stand up. The mere thought of tagging along with my mom and sister for more than an hour is punishment enough.

She tosses me a dry towel and gets off my bed. “Where were you anyway?”

“Out on a date,” I confess.

“Really?” She smiles. “Who is he? Or were you with a she?”

“It was with a college guy, Mom.”

“I’m sure, hon.” She snorts. “So, you were with your weird little friend Kaizen?”

“His name is *Kevin*.”

“That’s what I said.” She smiles. “I like him a lot, and I love that he adores me.”

He hates you.

“Yeah, I was with Kevin,” I say, stunned that she still doesn’t know me in the slightest. I could literally tell her what I’ve been up to for the past several months and she wouldn’t believe a word.

In her eyes, I’m still the shy and awkward girl who prefers to lock herself in a room and practice music instead of making new friends.

“I was going through your closet a while ago, and it makes me wonder if you’re preparing for a slew of funerals that I don’t know about.”

“No, Mom,” I say. “I just love wearing black and grey.”

“It’s no wonder why no guys at school ever ask you out, then,” she says. “They probably think you’re the Queen of Death or something...Then again, at least you keep your makeup light and pretty.”

“Thanks, Mom.”

Please walk away and don’t give me the ‘beautiful’ speech...

“You’re such a beautiful girl, Scarlett,” she says, stepping closer. “You have brains and talent, and I’m just worried that

you'll end up old, crusty, and reading romance novels to get yourself off instead of experiencing the real thing.”

“That’s not why people read romance novels...”

“Of course it is.” She places her hands on my shoulders. “They can’t find men in real life, so they have to resort to dating the ones on the page. I don’t want you to be like that. I want you to find a great guy who treats you well, takes care of you financially, and keeps your panties wet without you having to flip a page, don’t you?”

“I don’t want to talk about sex with you...*Ever.*”

“I just know that you could land any guy you wanted if you were more like—”

“My sister,” I say, “I know.”

She nods, shooting me a sympathetic look. “I meant what I said about the next three weekends. Goodnight, Scarlett.”

“Goodnight.” I watch as she steps into the hallway and shuts the door.

I move closer and wait in the silence, thinking that maybe, just maybe, she’s changed her old, troubling ways, but the telltale sound of her clicking through music samples begins. Then she begins speaking in a high-pitched sing-song voice.

“Soooo, I just caught one of my daughters sneaking in past her curfew, so I sat her down to have a heart-to-heart conversation. It was important that we discussed her behavior, and although I had to punish her, she’ll respect me so much more as her mom for not giving her a free pass. Speaking of ‘free pass,’ when it comes to parenting teenagers...”

I put on my headphones and change clothes.

As a former mommy vlogger, my mother still has a habit of making every moment, no matter how mundane *content*. Her life revolves around what will net her the most comments and likes, and even though the world knows her as “Sweet Southern Caroline” a woman who loves baking and has a Marry Poppins approach to life, she curses like a sailor and is

more of a “Cool Mom.” (Oh, and the only thing I’ve ever seen her bake is a pre-package cookies.)

Thanks to all the money she made off her former “Caroline and the Twins” YouTube channel, we changed our last names and moved from our trailer park in Ohio to an estate in The South. We live in a fancy suburb where everyone owns at least four acres, and attend a school system that ranks in the top five of the nation.

It’s supposed to feel like a “prize,” but the past few years have felt more like a punishment...



BY THE TIME I open the door, my mom is long gone, so I head downstairs to the kitchen. I’m hoping I can persuade my dad to make her cancel the cruel and unusual shopping punishment, but he’s not sitting at the bar anymore.

I pour myself a glass of milk and chug it down. As I’m opening a bag of Oreos, I hear a high-pitched laugh coming from outside.

Ugh, Tully...

Even though we were born six minutes apart, me and my sister couldn’t possibly be any more different. I analyze our birth certificates and call the hospital for verification on our birthday every year.

We tolerate each other’s presence like strangers who share a long transatlantic flight. Cordial when we cross paths, a light conversation here and there, but never anything beyond the surface.

Her dreams of being a top influencer have come true, and she has ten million followers who buy into the sugarcoated version of her life, numerous sponsors who’ve already paid her way to college, and most importantly, a mother who knows exactly how to help her build her “brand.”

Peering through the blinds, I see that she’s not alone. She’s sitting next to her boyfriend, Easton Rush.

I suck in a breath at the sight of him in a white T-shirt that clings to his muscles, at his perfect pearly white smile that makes my heart race.

He's the star player of the football team, the sexiest guy to ever exist in this small town. With his sinewed muscles, stunning ocean blue eyes, and a face courtesy of a maker who said, "Give me fucking perfection," he makes grown women give him a second glance.

Leaning against his shoulder, Tully holds up her cell phone.

"So, we just got back from Gayle's Diner and I bought a ton of stuff that I'm making him try tonight," she says. "Since everyone swears by the waffle bites and custom creams, I can't wait to see what he thinks!"

She runs a hand through his ink-black hair before turning off the video. Then she looks at him. Do you want to eat chocolate or vanilla first?"

"Chocolate."

"Vanilla it is, then."

He smiles and picks up a tiny silver tin, while Tully places a spoonful of cream onto his tongue.

I watch as she films him trying flavor after flavor, forcing my blood to boil with every dollop.

Every time she playfully runs her fingers through his hair, I think about my fingers touching him there better.

Each time he laughs, I can hear the strain and the fakeness. Not the authentic full-throated one he has with me.

And in the rare moments that he places his fingers under her chin to adjust the angle of the camera, I think about where those fingers have tried to go with me, where they've trailed against my skin and made me lose all consciousness.

I *hate* this feeling, and I know that I should stop watching and walk away, but I can't.

I hate dating other guys, searching for someone who can make me feel even a tenth of what Easton does.

Stepping back, I return to my room and lock the window. I draw the blinds shut and close the curtains. Then I curl into a ball on my bed, put in my earbuds, and ignore the wetness that stains my pillowcase.

I'm not sure how long I lay there, but later I hear a familiar sound outside my window.

Tap! Tap! Tappp!

It's *him*, but I don't move.

Tap! Tap! Tap!

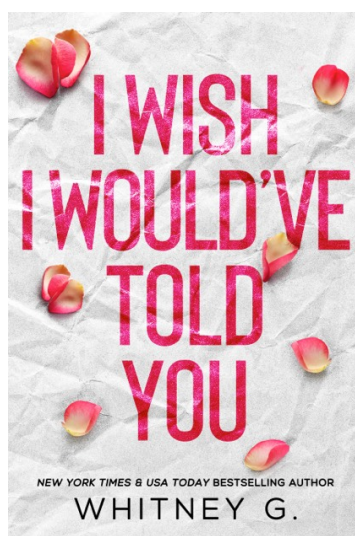
I remain still.

I feel my phone vibrating next to my head, and then he taps again, but I can't face looking at him tonight.

I just can't.

In addition to accepting that the college boys aren't worth my time, I need to accept that none of them will ever be able to wean my heart away from the boy who's owned it for over a year.

[I Wish I Would've Told You](#) is now available on amazon & Kindle Unlimited!



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A FREE HOLIDAY AUDIOBOOK

If you want a little more holiday cheer, [sign up for my newsletter \(The F.L.Y. List\)](#), and I'll send you a free audiobook of another holiday novella of mine, *Late Night Kisses*!

Warning: The heroine is a baker, so listening to this book might make you hungry.

