

# CALLUM

CAN THEY COME TO A COMPROMISE OR IS THIS THE END?

KATTIE DOWE

# Callum

## Can they come to a compromise or is this the end?

A sexy BBW, marriage romance by Katie Dowe of BWWM Club.

In the spotlight of the theater world, plus size African American beauty Lynn Peterson captivates audiences night after night.

But when her path crosses with Callum Hammond, a multi-billionaire investor with an eye for talent, her life veers into uncharted waters!

Their passionate whirlwind romance quickly becomes the talk of the town.

Yet the shadows of Callum's past looms large, sparking doubt in Lynn's heart about their future.

And when a turn of events thrusts her into danger, a surprising discovery in the hospital changes everything...

As they step into the unknown, can Lynn and Callum find a way to blend their worlds and build a family against all odds?

Or will the glare of the spotlight cast a shadow too dark to overcome?

Find out in this emotional yet sexy romance by Katie Dowe of BWWM Club.

Suitable for over 18s only due to sizzling hot sex scenes!

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## Chapter 1

“You brought the house down as usual.”

Lynn eyed the man through the curved mirror as she painstakingly removed her stage makeup. She had been working with playwright Jack Donaldson for over six years and was familiar with his expressions. Right now, the almost femininely pretty face with the superbly cut ash blonde hair and light blue eyes spoke volumes.

“What is it?”

“I have a bucket of champagne- “

“I have to meet Jason in exactly ten minutes, and you know how he is with time.”

“He is a stick in the mud and was not here for your stellar performance.” He pointed out.

“That’s because he was at the courthouse.”

“Ah, that big trial.”

“Pour me a glass, and let’s hear what’s up with you.” Cutting her eyes back to the reflection in the mirror, she rubbed the cream into her skin. Plucking several napkins out of the box, she used them to wipe the cream off her fingers. She was exhausted. The play had been running for the past two weeks, and she had been going nonstop.

“Here you go.” Pulling up a chair, he sat in front of her, holding his glass delicately between his fingers as he stared at her. “You are beautiful.”

Lynn lifted a tapered brow as she sipped her bubbly.

“This must be huge.”

“I am just paying you a well-deserved compliment.” He protested. “When I started six years ago, you stuck with me.”

“That’s because I believed in you. Still do.”

He nodded. “Everyone, including my parents, thought this was just something – a fling, a phase I was going through.” He shrugged his elegant shoulders. “Having their only son turned out to be gay was something of a letdown.”

“They love you.”

“In their way.” His dazzling smile flashed as he continued to stare at the star of his play. Lynn Peterson was a size twenty-two black woman with curves in all the right places. Right now, the curly salt and pepper wig she was still wearing concealed thick dark brown hair streaked liberally with blonde highlights.

Her smile was white with dimples on her cheek, deep enough to bury dimes in, and her complexion a flawless caramel brown. Her personality was vivacious and engaging, and people could not help but fall in love with her, on and off the stage.

“Miriam’s role was made for you. When I wrote the play, I did not dream that people would grow to love it so much. But it was you who brought the personality to the character.”

“You are flattering me, which means this is something huge.”

“I am just stating facts.” He told her mildly. “We are running out of money.”

“Ah, there it is.” She pointed her glass at him. “You want me to forgo my measly salary for how long?”

He shook his head. “Nothing of the sort. I would rather do without than ask you to sacrifice your salary.”

“Yeah, right.” She snorted.

“Oh, maybe I would not go that far.” He grinned at her. “We are running out of money, like I said before, and will have to close if we do not get an investor.”

She frowned at that. “I thought we would have a packed house every night.”

“As you know, the props, the overhead, the ads, the billboards all add up, and I will not approach my parents for another dime. I told them I would make this happen, and I meant it. There is someone.”

“Who?”

“Callum Hammond.”

Her eyebrows lifted. “Multi-billionaire investor. I have heard of him, of course.”

“He was here the past two nights.”

“You should have invited him backstage.”

“He had to run – a trip to New York, but will be back tomorrow,” Jack told her as he fussed with his sports jacket. “He is interested in the play and you as well.”

Her eyes widened before she burst out laughing. “You are kidding.”

“He loved you on the stage and wants to take you to dinner.”

She shook her head. “I am not interested in a relationship.”

“It’s just dinner.”

“Is it?”

“The man is a hottie, a self-made billionaire with investments worldwide. I wished he was gay; then all of my worries would be over. But he is straight and wants to have dinner. He has his own private jet, a sleek, streamlined yacht custom-built. He is a powerful force, courted by presidential hopefuls. And he is interested in our little play.”

“Don’t undersell yourself or the play.” She told him dryly. “And as much as I would like to soften some money out of him, I am not willing to prostitute myself for it.”

“He just wants to have dinner.” Jack insisted.

“Men don’t just want to do anything. He is suggesting buying into the play based on me having dinner or going to bed with him.” Her dark brown eyes flashed. “If that’s the case, you are both in for a big disappointment.”

“Just have dinner with the guy.” Jack pleaded, blue eyes earnest. “We need the investment.”

“Okay, fine.” Finishing the champagne, she dragged off the wig and placed it carefully inside the box. She lifted her hands and took out the pins, shaking the heavy curls until they tumbled down her back.

“Incredibly sexy,” Jack said with a grin as he rose. “Let me get out of your hair and tell that delicious brother of yours that I send my love.”

“He is straight.”

“All the good ones are.” He said with a sigh. “I will call and tell Callum you are looking forward to having dinner with him.”

“Reluctantly.”

Jack shook his head. “It might just turn into something else.”

“Not a chance. Now get out and let me finish getting ready.”

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She would like to think she had gotten used to the stares, the finger-pointing, and the request for autographs whenever she stepped into a building, but it always gave her a jolt to realize that she was recognized.

Jason had chosen a restaurant near the courthouse, and at this time of the day, well into the late afternoon and the season, the eatery was pretty crowded.

A smile wreathing her face, the manager bustled forward to greet her personally.



“Your brother just got here, honey.” Carmen’s eyes sparkled in excitement. “I managed to take in the show on Saturday and was bowled over. You have quite the talent.”

“Thank you.” Lynn squeezed her hand slightly.

“Now, today’s dinner is on the house.”

“You don’t have to. “

“I insist. Anything you want, honey. Because of the awful weather, we have freshly baked soda bread and chicken soup with chunks of vegetables.”

“Bring it on.” She had left her jacket at the front.

“Here you are.”

Putting away his phone, Jason rose to embrace her before pulling out her chair.

“I am sorry I was not able to attend the performance.” His dark brown eyes searched her face as he picked up his wine glass. “We should have been finished with the trial by now, but the prosecutor keeps coming up with discoveries.”

He sounded very frustrated, the frown touching his brow. “But enough about me.” His smile came as he leaned forward to kiss her cheek. “You killed it as usual.”

“You were not there.” She pointed out.

“I was there last week for two nights. And two of the partners were there tonight. They called while I was coming here and gave you rave reviews. You are very good for my reputation.”

“Glad to be of help.”

He grinned at her and waited until the steaming bowls of delicious-smelling soups were placed in front of her.

“Thank you.” Lynn dipped her spoon into the thick liquid and tasted, her eyes widening in appreciation. “Just the thing for the weather. December is proving to be living up to its reputation. It’s brutal out there.” She glanced at him

as she broke the warm and savory bread in half. “How are you?” she asked carefully.

“The same way since you last asked me. That was this morning at precisely nine A.M.,” he pointed out. “Stop worrying, you are not my mother or my-” he bit off and took a sip of water.

“I am your sister, and you are going through a very rough divorce. I intend to ask you that question until I know you are okay. She put you through the wringer.”

“And I am getting over it. Work helps.” He dipped into his soup. “You did not have to meet me-”

“Yes, I did. I thought it will be Christmas Day in three days, and Jack is wrapping up the show on Christmas Eve, giving me time to sleep and cook for us. Just the two of us. Eggnog – homemade, of course, in the morning.

A pot of coffee, a full black people’s breakfast, us watching some Christmas movies, and a big dinner. Then you spend the night.”

He eyed her and shook his head. “You don’t have to feel sorry for me.” He told her dryly.

“Maybe I am feeling sorry for myself.”

He snorted. “Yeah, right. You love spending time by yourself.”

“Not when it comes to Christmas. Say you will come.”

“I will agree because if I don’t, you are going to be a pain in the ass.”

“You know me so well.”

“But I insist on cooking dinner. The last time you did the chicken, it was raw.”

“It was not!”

“Honey, I love you, but cooking is not your thing.”

“That’s what I get for trying to be a good sister.”

“And I appreciate you for it.” He grinned at her. “Now, let’s talk about the play.”

She told him about the invitation and offer from Callum Hammond.

“He wants to have dinner with you?”

“Yes.”

“Will you accept the invitation?”

“We need the backing, and the play is doing better than we expected.”

“The man is extremely powerful and ruthless with that power.”

“It’s just dinner.”

“He might want more.”

“And I am more than capable of saying no.”

“Just watch yourself.”

“I will.”

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“When I agreed to have dinner, I had this thing inside my head that it would be a trendy restaurant in the heart of uptown. Not this.”

She turned in a tight circle to take in the scene. He had called her right after she had left the restaurant with her brother and issued the invitation, which she had accepted. And he had quickly followed up by asking if she was free the next day.

From then on, things progressed rapidly, with him telling her he would pick her up from the theater. Callum told her to use her imagination when she asked what she should wear. “Something lovely.”

She had debated for almost half an hour and decided on the slinky black and white romper with the diagonal cut of the shoulder. She had paired it with ankle-length boots

and had left her thick dark brown hair loose in curls tumbling down her back.

She had seen him at parties before but never to talk to, and had to admit that Callum Hammond was dreamy. His coffee brown hair was immaculately styled and framed a handsome, if hard, face.

His nose was prominent, his chin decidedly determined. But it was his eyes that caught the attention. A cross between green and gold, they had a piercing quality that made one feel as if you were being stripped down to the soul.

And he was tall, indeed, he was topping six feet. She was five -six and wearing heels, and she only came to his shoulders.

“I had the idea that our first time should be somewhere private. And I figured you would love the view.”

“It’s stunning.” They were on top of his building; the balcony or patio, for want of a better term, was large and had been enclosed because of the weather. The view from the transparent glass was breathtaking, and as she stood there taking it in, she felt the appreciation in every pore.

He could not have chosen a better spot. A table with a snowy white tablecloth stood in the center, and a uniformed waiter with a white napkin over his arm stood discreetly waiting for the order to be served them.

“Shall we?” Shaking his head as the waiter rushed forward, he pulled out the chair and waited for her to sit before taking his seat.

He seduced her with the food. They had quail eggs with basil oil, followed by butternut squash. The main course, the Kobe beef steak, was smothered in some sort of butter and garlic, and she had her eyes closed in delight.

“You know how to feed a lady.” She told him.

“I wanted to make an impression.” His voice was deep and cultured, his movements precise as he cut into his

steak. "Happy that you are."

"What is this, Callum?"

Leaning back in the chair, he subtly asked the waiter to leave. "We are having dinner."

"And?"

Lifting his glass to his lips, he took a sip, his amazing eyes boring into hers and sending awareness through her body. She had felt it the first time he approached her right after her show, and it was increasing.

"Tell me about the play." He said instead.

She thought about pursuing the topic but decided to let it go.

"You know what it's about. You have been to several performances."

"And I am impressed by the talent." His eyes wandered over her face with a boldness that had her heart racing. "The portrayal of a woman who has lost her two children is very poignant and believable. You are very talented."

"Thank you." Reaching for the wine glass, she realized that her hand was trembling.

"The part was tailor-made for you?"

"Yes."

"You played a few minor roles over the years."

"I see you have been following my career."

"I am interested enough to do so. I like the theater. Have you ever considered the big screen?"

"Considered and dismissed it almost immediately. My life and talent lie with the theater."

"Some might say that conquering the theater means you have every chance of making it on the big screen."

Shaking back her hair, she leaned her elbows on the table and cupped her fingers around the glass. "I love performing in front of a live audience," her eyes shone

with purpose and pleasure and sent desire straight to his core.

“Seeing their reactions firsthand and hearing the gasps, the applause, the sighs is something that spurs me on. I could never exchange that for anything.”

“You are very passionate about your work.”

“Which makes it easy to do.”

“I agree.” He pressed a button under the table, and the waiter materialized almost out of nowhere with a tray.

“Pumpkin cheesecake. I hope you like it.”

“I am sure I will.”

“That’s it for the night, Gerald.”

“Personal chef?”

“Something like that. What do you think?”

She closed her eyes as the pie melted on her tongue. His hand balled on his thigh as he felt the desire increasing. He had intended to take it slow, perhaps take her out a few times, but it would have to be tonight.

“It tastes like heaven.”

“Happy you like it.” He picked up his glass and asked Gerald to bring him something stronger. “I have done my research, and investing in the production is something I would like to do.”

Her eyes sparkled at that. “Jack would be over the moon.”

“And you?”

“Happy, of course. As I said, the theater, particularly this play, is my life.”

“No significant other?” He asked casually.

“No. I have been so wrapped up in my work that it leaves little or no time for anything else.”

“I see.” He finished the wine and leaned back against the chair, his eyes following her movements as she polished

off the pie. "Would you like another slice?"

"No." She shook her head and laughed, pressing one hand against her stomach. "I am quite full."

"More wine?"

Her tapered brows lifted. "Trying to get me drunk, Mr. Hammond?"

"Never entered my mind, and the name is Callum. Let me show you around." Pushing back his chair, he came around to pull hers out. Instead of moving out of the way, he crowded her in, forcing her to be pressed against him.

His cologne was heady and expensive, and so was he. Before she could move away, he cupped her cheek, eyes roving over her lips and sending heat to her core.

"I just want to get this out of the way."

"Callum- "

"I love the way you say my name. You asked me what this is; I will just show you." His lips cruised over hers; it was the only word she could find to identify what he was doing. The kiss was light, his lips brushing over hers, his breath lingering.

Her hands grabbed the lapel of his navy blue sports jacket, and she felt her nipples harden painfully. She had not come here for this, or had she? She wondered dazedly.

He was barely touching her, and yet here she was, dissolving. It occurred to her that a man like Callum Hammond was experienced and knew how to push a woman's buttons. And she wanted more. She was about to offer him her tongue when he stepped back, eyes glowing greener than gold.

"I want to show you around." His hand gripped her upper arm and steered her from the table to where a double dark brown door was swept open to reveal stairs leading down.

"Watch your step."

He guided her down the steps into a sweeping foyer with an arched ceiling and a dazzling chandelier. He had taken the elevator straight up to the rooftop when they came. So, it was the first time she saw the inside of his home.

“It’s lovely.”

“I would like to think so.” He led the way into a vast space, the fire blazing in a hearth the entire width of the wall in front of them. Leather sofas were placed strategically on the shiny board floor, giving the room an elegant and coziness that was immediately welcoming.

“To our left is the library, my home office, and the gym.” He led the way up the stairs and branched off to the left. “The living area as well as this-“ Sweeping the door open, he ushered her into a room with a high arched ceiling with recessed lights, the floor scattered with plush chairs and a wide screen.

“Movie theater.”

“Yes.” He led her to the front. “I thought we could watch a movie if you like. What would you like to see?”

“Action.” She told him immediately, dazzled by the sumptuous wealth.

“A woman after my own heart.” His smile came as he reached for a button to activate the screen. “Popcorn?” He cocked a brow at her.

“Why the hell not?” She said with a laugh, and to his approval, she kicked off her shoes and tucked her legs beneath her.

Going over to the machine that had been set up before, he filled a bucket and brought several glasses of wine. Setting the bucket between them, he removed his jacket and draped it over one of the chairs before sitting down and stretching his legs out.

“I love Clint Eastwood.”



“So do I.” The surround sound filled the room as the credits rolled. Callum watched as she sat there glued to the screen, hand dipping into the bucket to scoop up popcorn. He was acutely aware of her; his senses heightened as her intoxicating perfume enveloped him. His hands were itching to touch her, to explore her voluptuous curves.

He had gone to the theater on a whim, something he did not have the luxury of indulging, but he had given into a friend’s persuasion and had found the performance fascinating. The main character is exceptionally talented and soulful.

He had gone back another night and sought out the playwright/producer. The man had been impressed and had launched into the potential of the play and the need for investors.

Callum had not minded the pitch as he had needed something himself. He had not been looking for a relationship but had been drawn to the actress and was intrigued. And he had every intention of taking her into his bed tonight.

## Chapter 2

She enjoyed the date so much that she forgot about the kiss. The movie was a classic, and she relaxed in his presence. But as soon as the credits started rolling, she was brought back to the present.

Rising with cat-like grace, Callum switched off the set and turned to take the almost empty bucket and wine glass from her before pulling her to her feet.

“Where are we going?”

He kept her hand in his, loving her skin against his, and realized he could not wait to feel more of her.

“You will see.” He led the way out of the room and turned left along the wide passageway where several distinctive and well-known paintings hung.

“Oh, I love this!” She exclaimed, stopping before a violently colorful splash of red, green, blue, and a touch of primrose yellow painted on canvas. “It’s a Jackson Colby, isn’t it?”

“Yes.” Curbing his impatience to get her into his bedroom and out of her clothes, he stood next to her and studied the painting. “A new acquisition.”

“I saw the showing at his art gallery in New York and was fascinated that he just keeps going.”

“He has quite the talent. Do you like art?”

“Is that so surprising?” Tearing her eyes from the mesmerizing splash of colors, she looked at him and felt her heart jolting at the look of him. He was ruggedly handsome and had a presence about him that was unmistakable. “I am an artist, after all.”

“That you are. I was at that show in New York as well.”

“I know. It was a packed room, and you would not have noticed me.”

“I would have. I am noticing you now.” Tugging at her hand, he turned her towards the glossy ruby-red double

doors to reveal a large, cozy sitting room with leather sofas and a large flat-screen television mounted on the wall.

She waited until he led her into the vast bedroom with the blue-green décor, lush carpeting, and wide fireplace before she turned to him.

“Look, Callum- “She turned to look at him and stared at the bed on the raised dais that could comfortably accommodate a dozen people without them being crowded against each other. “Good Lord.” She whispered. “You sleep there?”

“Not tonight.” He turned her to face him, determined to get her to see that there was something tangible between them.

“I am not- this is our first date, and I am not that type of girl.”

“You feel something.”

“Yes. But- “

“So do I.” His hands cupped her face, eyes smoldering. “I am going to make love to you. And no, I have never done this before.”

“We should wait- “

“That would be a mistake.” Taking the decision from her, he bent to touch her lips with his. Her breath escaped in a soft whoosh to mingle with his, and her hands came up to clamp around his wrists as if to push him away. But she moved closer, melting against the solid frame of his long and muscled body.

His lips roved over hers slowly, sending flames licking at her core. And that was before he parted her lips with his tongue. As soon as that happened, the kiss took on an explosive quality that swept over them with the force of a tornado.

Her hands slid up his chest and around his shoulders as his arms came around her waist to draw her into him. His

hands roamed restlessly up and down her back, transferring the heat from his body to hers. But it was not enough. He wanted more of her and could not wait.

Ending the kiss, he eased back, reluctant to break the contact with her. "I need you." He rasped. "Don't deny us."

She opened her mouth to respond, but the words were stuck inside her throat. She wanted him, and that was something she had to acknowledge. She had told him she had never done anything like this before, and it was true. But somehow, for some unknown reason, it just felt right.

"I won't. I am not." She was feverish with need, and it could not be denied.

Without another word, he removed her clothes and waited while she stepped out of her boots.

Stepping back, his eyes still on her face, he undressed, the feeling of passion swamping him as he stared at the parted lips and tumble of hair around her shoulders. Her gasp brought his attention back, and he realized she was looking at that part of him that was raging out of control.

"I won't hurt you." He whispered raggedly, fearing that she was about to change her mind. "I promise."

"I will take your word for it." She whispered back.

Taking her hand, he led her up the steps and waited for her to climb in before climbing in with her. He had yet to take off her underwear, wanting to savor the moment when he did. Her skin was flawless, not just on her face but all over.

The caramel complexion was smooth and felt like satin. Unhooking the front clasp of the flimsy black lace, he eased it over her shoulders and had his fill of her generous breasts with the large nipples.

She shifted restlessly, forcing his eyes away from the swell of flesh.

“You are staring.”

“I cannot help it.” One hand cupped the breast nearest to him, and he felt when the nipple turned rigid. “You respond to my slightest touch.”

She moved restlessly and went rigid when her thigh brushed against the hardness of him.

“So beautiful.” His voice was ragged, and he knew he could not wait to taste it. Bending his head, he brushed lips over the flesh, almost reverently. Lynn felt her body heating up even more and had to close her fists over the thick blanket beneath her to anchor herself.

When his mouth opened to take in the nipple, she could not stop the moans deep inside her throat. Her fingers dug into the blanket as he tugged the hard bud into his mouth and used his teeth to perform an almost unbearable torture.

Lord, the man had a mouth on him! she thought hazily. Callum was thorough. Had to be, wanted to be. The taste and texture of her nipple were bringing out the fire inside his gut.

He switched to the other one when he had paid enough attention to it. By that time, she was a mass of nerves and raging emotion, writhing beneath him, her body heaving and demanding more.

Heeding to her silent cry, he let go of the nipple and made his way down to the flat stomach, quivering with passion. He kissed her there, his lips trailing further down until he was at the apex of her thighs.

He felt when she stiffened, her hands grasping his shoulders as if to pull him away. But there was no way she was going to accomplish that.

The musky scent of her was pulling him in, swamping him. He wanted to taste, to drive himself deep into her, to experience this incredible intimacy with her. With that in mind, he kissed the swollen flesh and filed away the startled cry that came from her.

He nibbled at the flesh, finding pleasure in that simple task. Inserting a finger inside her gave him a jolt. It was like being electrocuted! His finger encountered a tightness and moistness that made his body shudder. Introducing another finger, he lifted his head, eager to see the expression on her face.

His heart jolted and pounded inside his chest as he stared at her. Her lips were parted, her body heaving as he thrust into her with slow, rhythmic movements. Her eyes met hers, the dark brown glowing with passion. No words were spoken between them, just the sounds of their accelerated breathing inside the vast room.

“Callum,” she whispered, her voice husky from the emotions tumbling inside her.

“Yes. Tell me.” he continued driving into her, his body shattering.

“I need you.”

“Have me.” Removing his fingers, he used the moisture from her to coat his cock, eyes never leaving hers. Lynn bit her lip, her fingers curling into the blanket, her gaze fastened on his action. Rising above her, he lowered himself between her thighs and guided himself into her slowly, the tip of him just hovering at her opening.

Sinking in, he drove into her, his mouth swallowing her gasp. Her body went still for a few seconds before her arms wrapped around his neck, drawing him in and wrapping around him like a cloak. The sensation was unbelievable! And she was not the only one to think that.

Callum was having a difficult time controlling his reaction. Her tightness closed around him like a fist, making it very difficult to slow down. He tried desperately, but it was not happening.

His mouth crushed hers, hands wandering down her sides to her hips as he struggled for control. It did not help that she lifted one foot to settle over the back of his leg, her body heaving in desperation.

Lifting his mouth from hers, he eased away, fighting for breath, his eyes closed as he willed the madness to slow down.

“Please.” She whispered, reaching for him and pulling him on top of her. With a muffled groan, he complied, driving into her with enough force to shove her up against the padded headboard. Her back arched, her fingers digging into his shoulders as the climax claimed her and destroyed her senses.

Gripping her hair, he dragged her up and took her mouth in a brutal kiss that had the climax, which should have depleted, gaining more strength. He came then, his long, lean body shuddering as he shot his load.

It took him a few minutes to roll off her, and even then, his limbs were shaking, and his heart was pounding inside his chest. He could still feel her wrapped around him, and it occurred to him then that he had not even thought about using anything.

Even if the thought had entered his mind, it would have been dismissed immediately. He had wanted to feel her, the bareness of her against him. Crossing his hands at the back of his head, he stared at the ceiling, his mind spinning.

“Well.”

Turning his head, he stared at her and felt his heart picking up speed again. She looked well screwed, the hairs tumbling around her face and shoulders, lips plumped and still moist from his avid attention. And he wanted her again.

“I feel the same way.” Shifting onto his side, he shoved at the hairs on her cheek. “What do you say about spending the night?”

“I would say that’s us moving way too fast.”

“Hmm.” He was fascinated by the fullness of her breasts, the nipples still moist from his sucking. “I want to move faster.”

“How much faster can it be?”

“You would be surprised.” He trailed a finger down one soft, full cheek and her neck. “I would like to see you again.”

“You are seeing me now.” She pointed out, ignoring the sparks where his finger was touching.

He slid her an amused look. “You know what I mean.”

“I do. Callum-” She sucked in a breath when he touched the soreness of her nipple. “I don’t know you.”

“What would you like to know?”

“This is crazy-”

“I have a sister.”

Her eyes flew to his face. “There is nothing about that in the papers.”

“My kid sister, ten years my junior.” He continued to toy with the nipple as if fascinated by the way it peaked.

“Different fathers.

Mine was an asshole who left me and my mother when I was just eight.” his face was expressionless as his eyes met hers. John - my stepfather, came into our lives when I was going on nine, and he played the father role even though I was resistant.

He never gave up, and then they had Julie.” His hand lifted to cup her face. “Julie is -” A smile touched his lips, softening it. “She is sweet, and I was fiercely protective from the minute I looked at her. “She is fresh out of college and interning at Hope & Grace.”

“She is a doctor.”

He nodded. “We have different last names, and I prefer to keep her out of the limelight. Having me as a brother is not an easy task.”

“I am sure she is very proud of you.”



“She adores me.” He grinned at that. “As I do her.” His smile faded. “She is determined to make her way. I sent her to college and med school and set her up in an apartment. But she does not want to be harassed by the press.”

“Your parents died-”

“In a car wreck five years ago. I want you, Lynn, more than I have ever wanted another woman.”

“It’s too soon.” She tried pushing him away, but he would not budge. “I am not interested in a relationship. My career-”

“Will not keep you warm at night.” He moved in so that he was crowding her. “I can.”

“You are a complication; I cannot afford it now.” Her defenses were taking a beating. The man was lethal. He had a toughness that thrilled her and made her feel as if she was being lit from the inside by flaming arrows.

“What does that mean?”

“It means you are high profile-”

“So are you.” He had thrown one powerful leg over hers, effectively trapping her.

“Not as much as you are.”

“Hawaii.”

“Pardon?”

“Or the next date should be there. I have an interest in a few hotels and restaurants. A gift shop or two. I am thinking of diamonds.” His fingers circled her throat, and she felt as if she was being entirely swept off her feet and definitely out of her league.

“Diamonds?” She murmured, swallowing the lump inside her throat.

“Square cut and sapphires.” His kiss was raw and hungry and had her melting into a puddle.

“Callum-” She whispered when he ended the kiss. Her breath hissed out as he parted her thighs and palmed her sex.

“Yes?” His voice had thickened.

“I cannot think.”

“So, don’t.” Before she could say anything else, he was on top of her and inside her. “Feel me.” He whispered against her mouth.

“I do.” She told him achingly, arms wrapped around his neck.

They barely slept. He found himself unable to keep his hands off her. The night was sliding into dawn when he finally allowed them both to get some sleep and even then, he held her close, arms wrapped around her body.

Lynn stirred around noon, her eyes opening slowly, her body feeling bruised and sore. Wonderfully sore. And her environment was not familiar. The room was three times hers, and the ceiling was soaring. The bed- Sitting up, the memories came flooding back and brought heat flooding her body.

Dragging her fingers through her tangled hair, she looked around for him but was alone in the room. She had spent the night, and the only thing she had to wear was what she had worn the previous night.

She was about to leave the mile-wide bed when he entered the room with a tray and a package tucked under his arm.

“You are up.” His smile was charming and sent flutters inside her tummy. He had showered, wearing loose sweat pants and a black cashmere sweater, and looked lethally handsome.

“It’s almost noon.”

“We slept the day away. I had to make some calls and handle some business.” He placed the tray table over her lap and lifted the silver dome to reveal the plate of

toast and scrambled eggs. There was also coffee and orange juice.

“I have to go.”

“Not before you eat.” Setting the package on the bed, he opened it. “I think I managed to get the right size.”

Her eyebrows winged up when he lifted an emerald green sweater and black leggings. There were also underwear, a brush, a comb, and essentials to use on her face and body. Knee-high boots and a matching tan cashmere jacket completed the outfit.

“Where-”

“I called Monique and asked her to send them over.”

Pushing the stuff away, he sat at her hip and picked up the steaming coffee. “I take mine black, but I’m not certain about you.”

“Really?” She asked him dryly as she took the cup from him. “You mean you missed that part of it in your research?”

“I am afraid so. Cream?”

“I like it black.”

“My type of girl.”

“I am not your girl.”

“Aren’t you?” His fingers skimmed over her cheek and lingered. “I was thinking we could spend the day, perhaps go for a ride, and you help me do some shopping.”

“Don’t you have people to do that for you?”

He laughed. “I do. But there are some things I like to do myself. I waited until the last minute to pick up gifts for Julie and a few friends. I need a woman’s opinion.”

“And I am certain you have plenty of that.”

“I want yours.”

“I have to leave sometime.”

“You do not have a performance until after Christmas.”

“I still have things to do. My brother is coming over for the Christmas-”

“You have plenty of time to go back to your place.” He cupped her cheek and bent his head to kiss her slowly, firing her blood. “I need this.”

“Callum-” She was already sinking into the kiss and being swept away again. “You are moving too fast.”

“I am afraid if I slow down, you will leave. I cannot afford that.” He kissed her again, and this time, he introduced his tongue. Ending the kiss, he removed the food tray and set it on the table next to the bed before climbing in and gathering her against him. With a longing moan, she turned into him, arms wrapping around his neck.

“What you do to me.” He breathed against her mouth, hands drifting down to cup her breast. “Let me love you.”

“Yes.” She let herself be pushed back against the pillows, body already vibrating as he leaned in to take a nipple into his mouth.

“Oh.” He whispered, fingers digging into his thick coffee-brown hair as he suckled earnestly. One hand drifted down her quivering stomach to her pussy where he drove his fingers into her and felt the moistness there.

“You are ready.”

“Yes.” Her hands were drifting over his shoulders and along the corded muscles of his back.

“I should have enough.” He muttered, referring to last night and this morning. “But I don’t. I want you again.”

“I want you too.”

“Good.” Dragging himself away from her, he made short work of taking off his clothes before climbing on top of her. He entered her swiftly, back bowed, his breath hissing through his teeth as her tightness closed around him. “Christ!” he whispered roughly, head bending to hers, breath mingling. “You are so damn tight.”

“Are you complaining?” She asked him sultrily.

He laughed shakily. “Not at all. Quite the opposite.”

“Good.” She moved then, restlessly, her hands going over his shoulders and down his back, blunt nails raking the skin as he drove into her slowly. His hands cupped her face as his head descended.

His lips brushed hers softly, sending tremors through her body. He wanted it to last, but perhaps that was just wishful thinking. The blood was already rushing through his body, and his heart was pumping.

It would be over very soon, and he did not want that. Her tongue was tangled with his, their bodies slicked against each other. He could feel her large nipples branding his chest and quickening the heat, intensifying it until he was being engulfed.

When her body stiffened, his hands drifted to her hips, turning her slightly as he increased the pace. He swallowed her cries, his body jerking in response. Someone let out a groan, and he knew it was him as his own body shuddered and convulsed.

The climax was soul-destroying and intense. His body went rigid and then just exploded as he poured himself into her. He could not move, could not find the strength to do anything, but just stayed there on top of her as he tried to recover his strength.

## Chapter 3

“When you said shopping, I thought we would go uptown to one of those exclusive shops. But Paris?” Lynn had to admit that she was dazed and pulled along so rapidly that her head spun.

They had spent another two hours in bed making love (the man had the stamina and staying power that was utterly amazing!) Afterwards, they ate and then showered.

The clothes fit perfectly, and the boots made her feel like she was wearing air. Now, they were in his jet and landing at the private hangar.

It was almost midnight in the city of lights, and the dazzle of billboards announcing the various sales, the Christmas lights, people whisking along with shopping bags, and the jumble of stores in the Triangle D’or was fascinating to see.

He was well-known in all the stores. Dior, Chanel, Louis Vuitton, Ferragamo, and Romano’s were some places they strolled into and were given the best services. The stores were officially closed, but he had called ahead, and who would say no to a man of Callum Hammond’s ilk and his vast resources?

They had champagne on ice and were allowed to browse at their leisure. She wanted to ask him how much he was paying for the privilege but was unsure she wanted to know. His type of power was already making her nervous. And she was beginning to be enchanted.

Even though she protested at the gifts he was heaping on her, she had to admit that she had never had anyone pamper her the way he was doing now.

The exquisite lovemaking followed by the attention was going to her head like fine wine. By the time they were through, she was exhausted. The numerous packages were being shipped to his pied a terre a few miles away.

“How about some champagne?” He asked as soon as they stepped into the elegant living room with its cozy furnishings.

“My head is already spinning.” Shrugging out of the jacket, she draped it over a stunningly carved velvet draped chair by the fire. “You alerted someone that we were coming.” She nodded to the electronic fire blazing.

“There is a couple who tends to the place. Tea?”

“Nothing. I am full.” She patted her flat stomach as she stared at him. “You bought me tons of stuff.”

“My pleasure.”

“I don’t need you doing that.”

“Too late.” Pouring himself a finger of bourbon from the well-stocked cabinet, he braced his hip on the marble counter and stared at her. “I like spoiling you.”

“See, that’s just it.” She moved restlessly around the room, her fingers trailing over the furniture. She was tired, the time difference buzzing around inside her, but she was not ready to settle, could not settle. “I am not your latest toy-”

“I resent you thinking that you would be.”

“I know of your reputation.”

“All right.”

She stopped and stared at him. “All right? That’s all you have to say?”

“I like women, and I will not insult you by denying it.”

“Good.” She sat on one of the padded chairs and got back up, to his amusement. “I can never be a kept woman.”

“I don’t expect you to be.” He inclined his head regally, thinking he would have her again in another few minutes. It amazed him that he was being swept away like this. It had never happened to him before.

“Good.” She repeated. “What is this?” She pointed between them.

“It seems as if we are entering into a relationship.”

She shook her head. “That cannot be. I am practical and independent, and you are-” She sat back down and pressed her hand against her breasts. “I already told you that I am not open to having a relationship.”

“And yet, here we are.” He finished the drink and came towards her. She braced as he hunkered down before her. “I have never done anything like this before.”

Ignoring her snort of disbelief, he took her hands in his and studied the elegant fingers. When she was distracted in the jewelry store, he had picked out a stunning ruby and diamond bracelet. Turning her hand over, he lifted it to his lips and kissed the soft skin, feeling her jolt. “We are in a relationship.”

“We just met!” She reared back as if denying it was happening.

“And one meeting was all it took.” He exerted pressure and pulled her down on top of him; shifting, he turned so that she was half lying on top of him. Brushing her hair back from her face, he bent to kiss her lips.

“I am bowled over, darling,” he admitted with a shaky laugh. “For the first time in my life, I am vulnerable and in a position I have never been in. I am not going to ask you to move in with me-”

“Good.” She interrupted huskily, completely shaken by his admission. “Because that’s not happening.”

“Yet.” He plowed on as if she had not spoken. “I will wait until you get used to us being together.” He stroked her cheek gently.

“Until you find someone else.”

“I have a feeling there isn’t going to be anyone else,” he said wryly.



Her eyes latched onto his, and she drowned in the green-gold depths. And he was damned persuasive, and she was being drawn in. "I love my career." She realized how defensive that sounded to her ears.

"And I would never interfere." Amusement lurked in his eyes as he watched her. "I love what you do and admire your talent."

"I mean it, Callum."

"I believe you do. I only want to advance your career and celebrate you."

"I cannot be bought." She warned, feeling her defenses crumbling. The man had made love to her for an entire night and morning and on the flight here. He had brought her to Paris and taken her shopping, and now they were in his elegant apartment where the fire was making dancing shadows on the walls.

"That much I know. Investing in the play is a solid business interest, and even though I am intrigued and fascinated by you, my board would not let me get away with throwing money away. Rest assured, I am thinking about business, mostly.

Half," He qualified, dotting his words with kisses trailing from the corner of her eye to her cheek and the sides of her lips until she moved restlessly against him. "Right now, I am not. I am thinking about you and what I want to do to you. How I want to use my mouth all over your voluptuous curves."

"You are going to tire of me."

"Unlikely." He was nibbling at her lush bottom lip and getting so much delight from it that he wanted to swallow her whole. Couldn't she feel how much he wanted her? he wondered dazedly.

"You have been with a princess-" She turned her head to avoid being destroyed by his lips. "There were several well-known actresses-"

“Hmm. None of that matters now.” He turned her head to him firmly.

“What makes me different?” She demanded.

“Damn if I know.” He admitted hoarsely.

“It’s just sex.” She wanted desperately to inject some sense into the madness happening.

“Is it?” He kissed her hungrily.

“And - and-” her hands shook as she tried to push at him. “You will discover that this is a novelty- Dammit! Stop.”

“Why?” Pushing her hands away, he crowded her, lips exploring the rounded lines of her cheek before nipping at her chin and then going for her throat.

“I want to think. Let me think.”

“I am here, and I am here to stay.” He ravaged her throat and left her as weak as a kitten. Her limbs felt weighted, as if she was dropping deep into the ocean.

“I cannot- Oh Lord.” She gave up and wrapped her hands around his neck as his mouth took hers with a savage hunger that had her heart racing!

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It had been magical, and now it was over. It did not matter what he said or how many times he had made her come; she had finally stopped counting. The man had destroyed her senses and her nerves. But now they were back home, and it was time to return to reality.

She had a staggering number of packages to cart home, and since he had picked her up from the theater, Lord, was it only two days ago? It felt like two months ago, and so much had happened since then. He sent her home in his mile-long town car and promised to see her right after Christmas Day.

“You will spend the day with your brother, and I will be with Julie.” He fussed with the expensive cape he had

bought her.

“It’s a family tradition.” She found herself explaining as she delayed the parting. She felt a pang that she was leaving and was afraid it would be over as soon as she walked out the door.

“So it is with Julie and me. Or I would invite you to come with me.”

She shook her head. “Christmas is for family.”

“And lovers.” He whispered against her lips as he kissed her hungrily. “I will be thinking about you and missing you like hell.”

“You don’t have to say that.”

His eyes flared. “You don’t trust me.”

“I don’t trust what we are feeling.” She clarified. “This is too sudden, too intense, and I am afraid it will die out.”

“Is that so?” He hauled her against him and kissed her again with enough fire to burn her through and through. “Does that feel as if it will die any day soon?”

“Callum-”

“No.” he silenced her with one word, the authority in his deep voice getting through to her. “No. We are parting and going our separate ways, and I will not have you spoiling it. Have the day and spend it with your brother, Lynn, but the rest of the time is mine. I need that. I will spend the day with Julie at her place-”

A smile touched his sensuous lips. “She is off and has this thing where she insists on cooking an entire meal even though I offered to have the entire thing catered.”

“It’s more personal if we spend time slaving away at the stove.” She smiled whimsically. “I will be doing the same, or rather, my brother, a far more decent cook than I am, will be doing the cooking. I’m making eggnog; it’s my specialty. And he is going through a painful divorce, so I want to be there for him.”

“I understand.” he was loath to let her go, but the time he had taken away from his many business ventures was catching up to him. He had calls to make, contracts to pore over, and calls to return, not to mention the many emails he had seen when he signed in.

The corporate office was closed at this time of the year, but he paid his assistant a ton to have him on call twenty-four seven. “Will you come to me afterward? I want to spend Christmas night making love to you.”

She opened her mouth to say no and decided against it. Because the truth was, she wanted to be with him, too. “Yes.” She whispered against his mouth.

“Just let me know when your brother has left. I will send the car for you.”

They lingered over goodbyes, and finally, she could tear herself away from him.

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She was drawn into the conversation and the preparation while still mooning about the two days she had spent with a man who had swept her completely off her feet. The numerous packages were stowed inside her large walk-through closet, just waiting for her to rip through them.

But she had come home last night and fell into a deep sleep, waking up just in time to start making the eggnog and wait for her brother to come by. Her house, and as soon as she had started making some decent money, she had invested in a ranch-type place on a large parcel of land where she had hired a landscaper to take care of the ground.

The living room was spacious, and she had spent hours at flea markets and antique stores all over the country decorating it with the eclectic style that suited her.

“Hey.”

“Hey.” She forced herself to concentrate on the conversation. The tree was twinkling prettily in the corner

of the room, and they had decided to eat here instead of in the dining room. Outside, it was gray, and darkness was already falling.

“Have you heard a word I just said?”

“You said something about the witness you were interviewing.” She said calmly, reaching for some mac and cheese. “And I thought we decided not to talk about work.”

He blew out a breath and reached for his glass of wine. “How was your date?”

“What?” Her hand jerked as she stared at him.

His eyebrows lifted. “That good?”

“It was not a date. It was-” She took a sip, more like a gulp of the Cabernet, and almost choked. “He took me to Paris.”

Jason simply stared at her, the glass arrested halfway to his mouth. “As in France?”

She nodded and passed a hand over her hair. “He wanted to shop for his sister. He has a younger sister, a doctor, and she has a different surname. And God, I am babbling. I spent two nights with him and -” She breathed. “He wants a relationship.”

“I see.” Jason put his glass down carefully. “he said that specifically.”

“Yes. I tried to talk him out of the madness - which it is.” She picked up the glass again and sipped slowly this time. “He is like a damn tornado and -” She closed her eyes. “I am sucked in, Jace. And I have no idea what to do.”

“In two days, you have been with this guy; no wonder I could not get you. Where is he now?”

“Spending Christmas with his sister, or so he says.”

“You have reason to disbelieve him?”

She uttered a laugh. “You sound like a damn lawyer.”

“That’s because I am.” He eyed her and felt a tug of something inside his chest. She was his sister, and he was accustomed to looking out for her, even though she did not need it.

But men like Callum Hammond, and there were not too damn many of them with that kind of resources! Men like him had women crawling all over him. He could have his pick. He knew his sister was beautiful, classy, and incredibly talented; he had seen her on the stage too many times to argue that.

“What’s his endgame?”

“What?”

“What does he want?”

“Me, apparently. I don’t want a relationship or did not want one. I am concentrating on my career and finally going places and getting somewhere. He is overpowering and accustomed to getting whatever the hell he wants.”

“And now he wants you.”

“Yes. I don’t know what to do.”

“I want to advise you to run, but that would be my brotherly instinct warring with common sense. You have to be the one to decide.”

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Julie Bentley was a petite woman with a flawless complexion she had inherited from their mother, and added to that, she had red-gold hair that was a striking contrast to her alabaster skin. Their mother had also passed on her amazing eyes to both siblings. She adored her big brother, which showed as she opened the door and flew into his arms.

“You are crushing the gifts.” He chided her as he dropped them to wrap his arms around her before lifting her clear off the floor. “How is my favorite doctor?”

“Tired and looking forward to spending two days in my apartment.” She looked at the packages and shook her head. “Really, darling?”

“It’s Christmas.” He told her simply as he helped her pick up the packages and put them under the six-foot-tall tree. “The star is missing.”

“Waiting for you.” It was a tradition for them as well, and he humored her.

Smiling, he placed the star on top of the tree easily before turning to take in the red sweater, black leggings, and the antlers perched on top of her head.

“I have one for you as well.” She told him cheekily.

“I love you to death, but the answer is hell no.”

Laughing, she tucked her hand through his and felt her heart swelling with pride and love for this man who had made a fortune through sheer determination and grit.

He had given her so much even when she protested—and had respected her reasons for not wanting the limelight. She preferred to enjoy him in privacy and could not bear it if someone was into her because of the connection.

Right now, she was concentrating on work, which did not allow for much personal life. “I made cookies shaped like Santa and elves.”

“I am sure you did.”

“And I bought you something.”

“I told you not to.”

Rolling her eyes, she went to the kitchen cabinet next to the fridge and took out a gaily wrapped gift. “Open it.”

“Why is it not under the tree?”

“I wrapped it last night when I came in and just stuck it there. Open it.”

“Very impatient.” He untied the bow and tipped through her careful packaging. Opening the box, he took out a framed photo of them. It had been a selfie taken by her the last time he had visited. She looked so tiny and delicate against him that he had to smile.

“I love it.”

“I debated what to get for a man who has everything, and I decided on that.”

“It’s perfect.”

“Wine?”

“Yes, thanks. How have you been?”

“Work is wonderful. I enjoy being in the OR.”

“Still doing grunt work?”

“Yes, and I don’t mind.”

“It would help if they knew that your brother contributes heavily to that hospital.”

“No. I want to make my way.” She handed him the wine and went to get the plates. Her apartment was cozy and not too flashy; she had been firm.

She had friends over sometimes and colleagues. She did not want them to know that her brother was the multi-billionaire Callum Hammond and that she was a millionaire with several million tucked away in her account.

“I understand.” He waited until she had dished out the meal and sat across from him around the counter.

“I met someone.” He spoke casually as he dipped into his soup.

“Someone?”

“Yes.” His eyes met hers. “I want you to meet her as soon as I can persuade her to do so.”

“Who is she?”

“Her name is Lynn Peterson, and she is -”



“An actress. I have seen her performance. She is incredibly talented, and she is not your usual type.”

He smiled at that as he eyed her. “I don’t have a type.”

“You have never wanted me to meet any of your - er - women friends before.”

He chuckled. “Lovers, darling, and you will not be struck by lightning by saying it. How can you be my sister and be such a prude?” He wondered.

“I am not a prude-” She muttered. “She is special?”

“Very.”

“How long have you been seeing her? There is nothing in the papers.”

“We met officially two days ago.” He shook his head at that. “Hard to imagine that it was such a short time.”

“Two days?” A frown touched her smooth brow. “You are not usually so-” she shook her head. “You are never this impulsive.”

“It’s not an impulse. I asked her to enter into a relationship with me. She is contemplating it.” A smile played around his lips, and the expression on his handsome face made her take a breath and realize it was jealousy.

She had seen the photos of him escorting different women around to various functions and him being paired with several of them but had smiled and shaken her head. He had never introduced them to her, and she knew it was because none of it was serious.

“It’s rumored that the play is struggling for lack of funding.” She busied herself digging into the veal. She had done away with turkey and made his favorite. He was so busy that she hardly ever saw him, even though he called several times a week.

“You think I am being used.”

## Chapter 4

She busied herself by turning away to get the chocolate mousse she had splurged on, also one of his favorites, and brought it over.

“Are you?”

“I am going to invest in the play for practical reasons.” He admitted, digging into the dessert. He had to admit that as much as he enjoyed his sister’s presence, he was eagerly anticipating leaving so that he could be with Lynn. He was thirty-five years old and was like an eager schoolboy with his first crush. It amazed and confounded him.

“We have an excellent R&D department, and they have done their due diligence.” He eyed her thoughtfully. “You are my sister, and as expected, you have concerns.

But rest assured, as much as I am -” He paused and took a sip of the wine, amusement in his eyes. “I don’t know what the hell I am. I just know that I have never felt this way before. I ache for her when I am not with her.”

Julie felt the twinge and had to tamp it down. “Perhaps you should use that to stay away for a little bit. It might just be lust.”

He smiled at her, a white smile creasing his face and transforming it drastically. “I know what lust feels like.” Reaching across the counter, he took her hand in his. “I am your brother, and I love you endlessly. No matter how I feel about them, no one will ever come between us.”

“I am just concerned.” She muttered.

“And a little territorial.” He added wisely.

“I am not jealous.”

His thick brows lifted. “That never entered my mind, and for the record, I would be just as territorial if the shoe was on the other foot.” Removing his hand from hers, he picked up his wine. “And I happen to know a lot about her.

Whenever I invest or think of doing so, I do my research. Lynn was a choir girl. She lost her parents when she was in her teens and has a brother who is a lawyer.

He is currently going through a rather painful divorce. She has been involved with two men and has not been with anyone for a long time.” He took a sip of the wine and realized that, perversely, that bit of information pleased him greatly.

He had sensed her inexperience when he made love to her. “She is about her career, something I aim to change.”

Julie simply stared at him. “You are-” She shook her head. “You are - surely you are not talking about marriage?”

“Eventually.” His smile widened at her expression. “I knew the minute I laid eyes on her that she would be the one to change my life, and I was right.”

“You are an extremely wealthy and handsome man.” Julie was agitated, but she did not care. “Callum, you are not making any sense. If I came to you and told you that I met a guy two days ago and am thinking of marrying him, what would you say?”

“I would not allow it.’ He told her immediately. “This is different.”

She bristled, her eyes flashing. “Because what? You are a guy?”

“Because you are inexperienced. I am not. And because I am your senior by ten years. I know what I feel.”

“You are not thinking with your brain.”

He laughed out loud, eyes twinkling. “Why darling, I believe you are telling me that I am thinking with what you would call my appendage. I am being polite, considering my audience. But no-” He shook his head. “My brain is involved.”

“She might be into you for your money.” Julie pointed out. “The play needs the funding-”

“And I already established that they will be getting the backing.’

“You said that she was all about her career.”

“Yes, I did say that. But the last two days I spent with her, we were not thinking about hers or mine. I took her to Paris.”

Julie’s eyes widened. “You took her to Paris.”

“She helped me pick out your gifts.”

“And you bought her some as well.”

“Naturally.” He inclined his head as he watched her.

“You dazzled her. A trip to Paris and numerous gifts. I bet some of those include jewelry.”

“Yes.”

“Callum-”

“No.” He shook his head firmly. “I love you, darling, and I respect your opinion, but I will not allow you to rain on my parade. I trust her, and I will get to know her over time. I assure you that I will not jump into marriage just yet, even though that is precisely what I want to do.

Lynn and I will get to know each other, and there will be lots of press, but that cannot be avoided, considering who we are. Whenever it is prudent and the time is right, I will arrange for you to meet her and hope that, as my only relative, you will show her some courtesy.”

She stared at him in silence before turning away to put away the dishes. His tone had been firm and authoritative, different from what he was used to with her.

“Julie?”

“I am processing.” She muttered. “More wine?”

“I am afraid not.” He glanced at his watch, and she saw when he jumped slightly and turned his phone over. A smile touched his lips as he looked at the screen.

“Excuse me, will you? I have to take this.”

She watched as he moved away to stand at the window.

“Hey.” Julie did not feel bad about listening to the one-sided conversation because she knew who it was.

He chuckled, the warmth flooding his handsome face. “I am just having supper.” He listened again. “You are not getting out of it. just let me know when you are through, and I will leave.” He listened again. “You are not taking me away from her; I just-”

He brushed a hand at the back of his neck. “I need to be with you, Lynn. I want to spend the night making love to you.” As if he realized he had an audience, he headed out so that she could not hear the rest. But what she heard had her shaken to the core.

Taking her wine glass, she took a sip. She knew her brother. He was her hero, and she was proud of him and his accomplishments. He had built a staggering fortune, and she knew what was written about him in the papers.

Only a few key people at work knew her connection to him; she preferred it that way. Being connected to a man like him meant all sorts of complications. She knew him very well and knew he had never been this way about a woman. There was a naked vulnerability on his face that had never been there before.

She had seen him with females, photos of him with a princess, and several high-powered women, and the expression on his face had been one of cool detachment. And they never lasted more than a month.

She often teased him about it, and he told her it was just physical. This time, it was not, and she was afraid he was heading into dangerous territory. He had wealth and power, enough of it that could open doors for anyone in his life.

He was already talking about investing in the woman's play and had just met her. He had taken her to Paris, and she knew he had splurged. He did that with people he cared about deeply.

He could get his very efficient assistant to pick out gifts for her, but he never did. "You mean the world to me, and I want what I give you to have the personal touch." He had told her.

"Hi." She forced a smile to her lips as he wandered back into the room.

"I am leaving shortly," He announced. "Lynn is about finished, and she wants to get into it about the bracelet she found among her packages." A smile played around his lips as he picked up his wine glass.

"A very expensive one, no doubt."

Something in her tone had him staring at her quizzically. "Is there any other kind? You disapprove."

"You are an adult and have been doing your thing for a long time. Who am I-"

"My sister." His deep voice had a ring that warned her she was treading on boggy ground. "I love you very much, but I must tell you I know what I am doing. You don't have to approve-"

"I don't!" She cried softly before she could stop herself. "I am afraid that she is using you-"

"And that's my problem." He told her coolly. "Now I have to go."

"Callum, please don't be mad at me; I could not bear it."

His expression softened as he looked at her. Moving around the counter, he plucked her off the stool and hugged her. "You are not losing me, darling."

"It feels like I am."

"And that's ridiculous." He kissed the top of her head. "I will call you later." He flicked a finger over her cheek. "I

am fine.”

She hugged him again and clung until he put her away, and she walked with him to the door. “Merry Christmas again.”

“I enjoyed it.” Turning her around, he kissed her forehead. “Get some rest.”

She watched him leave and then closed the door with a heartfelt sigh as she continued to worry about him.

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She was waiting for him when he arrived, and the sight of her sitting inside her car sent a gut punch to his solar plexus. He had to take a breath as he parked and exited the vehicle.

“I should have given you the code.” Opening the door, he took her hand, his heart racing as she reached for an overnight case. “I will remedy that immediately.”

“It’s freezing.”

“We might be in for a white Christmas after all.” He could not keep his hands or eyes off her. She was wearing a bulky cable knit sweater, the color of ripe pumpkins, over thick black leggings and had on the boots he had bought her. He made a mental note to order some more.

“Shall we?” Taking her hand, he led them to the entrance, where he keyed in the code and let them into the warmth of the foyer. He took the elevator instead of the stairs and headed straight to the bedroom. “How was dinner?” Drawing her over to the tan leather sofa, he hunkered down to take off her boots.

Her heart took a quick dive as she gazed at his bowed head. She had almost talked herself out of coming but had not quite managed it. Now, she was pleased she had not done that.

“It was delicious as usual.” He had taken off the boots and was pulling off her socks. A purr slipped out when he started to rub her feet. “A girl could get used to this.”

“You should.” Going on his knees, he came between her thighs to tug the sweater over her head. “Should we talk about your reluctance to accept my gift or go straight to bed?”

Her tapered brows winged up. “Talk about the bracelet. It’s too much.”

“That’s not even a quarter of what you should expect from me.”

“I can buy my own things, and I do not want you to think that is what I am after.”

“What are you after?” He was fascinated by the thickness and lushness of her hair and the flawless caramel complexion.

“Sex, of course.” She told him loftily.

“Why don’t we give you what you came for?” He asked smoothly, unhooking her white lace bra.

“We should really talk.” She protested as he slid the straps off her shoulders.

“We will. Later.” Rising, he pulled her up and across the room and up the steps.

“Tell me about your sister.”

“No. Not now.” He was still a little sore about Julie’s comments. “I don’t want to talk.”

“You just want to have sex.” She complained.

“What gave it away?” He was down to his underwear, and it was apparent he was more than ready. It gave her a quick kick in the stomach.

Pushing her back, he finished taking off her clothes before joining her. The fire was crackling inside the huge hearth, flames making shadows on the creamy walls.

He had not bothered with the lamp as enough light from the fire and the glass ceiling allowed them to see the sliver of moon peering through the ominous-looking clouds. “I think they might be right.” She whispered.



“About?” He was busy trailing his fingers down her flat stomach.

“About it snowing.” Her body was vibrating. “Callum-”

“Hmm?” Bending, he kissed her ear, his breath sending shivers all over.

“We should- Oh Lord.” Her hands touched his chest, tangled into his powerful chest’s dark hair. “This is - It feels so good.” She moved into him, against him, and felt a jolt at the hardness of his thighs.

“I can make it feel better.”

“Pretty cocky, aren’t you?” She followed up by nudging a knee against his crotch. This time, he felt the jolt, and he felt it straight to his heart.

“I have reason to be.” Turning her face towards him, his eyes wandered over her face and touched her lips. Bending, he brushed his lips against hers. “I am hooked, darling. Completely hooked. Merry Christmas.”

Before she could respond, his mouth crushed hers and stole her breath. For the next hour, the only sounds inside the room were the crackling of the logs in the fireplace and the sounds of the sighs and ragged breathing.

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He allowed her to sleep, intending to wake her up in the early hours of the morning and start all over again. He had told her he was hooked, and that was the truth. The honest-to-goodness truth. Nudging his chin down, he stared at her tangled hair and curled against him, her hand on his chest.

He loved the feel of her warmth against him. His skin was still flushed with heat. He had made love to her without using anything, and it did not worry him, but he should consider asking her if she was on anything.

He would want a child eventually, but he was getting to know her right now. He laughed softly at how like a

young child he felt, how invigorating it was to feel this way. It made him feel whole and complete.

Brushing the hairs off her forehead, he kissed it gently, tempted to kiss her mouth. He wanted her again, he thought in amazement.

A frown touched his brow as he realized the consequences of that. He had shown her how vulnerable he was where she was concerned, meaning she could get away with anything more or less. He was not used to that.

He had a reputation to think about, but damn if that did not matter to him at all.

Settling back, he pulled her closer and settled into sleep.

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He woke up with the side of the bed next to him empty. Feeling bereft, he sat up and dragged his fingers through his hair before looking at the time. Almost ten, he mused, shaking his head. He was always an early riser, no matter what. But having a somewhat active sex life could change that.

It also occurred to him that she could not leave without the code. That settled him somewhat and had him leaping off the bed to shower and put some clothes on. A look outside the expansive windows confirmed that it was snowing.

He found her in the kitchen and enjoyed bracing against the doorframe and watching as she scrambled eggs. She had showered and was wearing purple leggings and a thin lavender sweater. Her hair was piled on top of her head in an untidy style, with tendrils framing her face and the back of her neck. And she was barefoot.

“Oh. Hi.” She stared at him as she turned around. “I invaded your kitchen and made breakfast.”

“Consider it yours.” He strolled into the room and caught her around the waist.

“I am cooking here.”

“And it smells wonderful, or perhaps it’s you.” He bent to sniff the side of her neck and nibbled at the skin.

“Definitely you.”

“The eggs.” She pushed him away reluctantly to rescue it.

“Sit.”

“Yes, ma’am.” He did so and smiled as she poured coffee and handed it to him.

“I could get used to this.”

“Don’t.” She told him mildly. “I am not one for the kitchen. And you have enough money to hire millions of maids.”

“Maybe not millions.” He sipped the coffee. “And I would never want you slaving behind a stove. I am a modern man and would rather have you in my bed.”

“Very funny.” She looked darkly at him as she popped bread into the fancy toaster.

“It was not meant to be.” He grinned at her. “You are not wearing makeup.”

She looked at him in surprise as she scooped the eggs out. “Why should I?”

“Most women would not dare step out of the bedroom without putting their ‘faces on.’”

“I am not like most women, and I hardly wear makeup.” She took the bread out. “Butter or jam?”

“Butter.” He did not bother to tell her that he rarely ate breakfast. But this was cozy, the snow at their backs and her making him breakfast. It felt like they were a couple. And they were. “Why don’t you?”

“Why don’t I do what?”

“Not wearing makeup?”

“I hate sitting still and applying it when I have to turn around and take it off before bed.” She slid him a plate

and climbed onto a stool. "I hate to waste time."

"You do not need it." Reaching across the mile-wide malachite counter, he tugged at a lock of hair and slid his fingers over her cheek. "You have gorgeous skin."

"Thanks. Now, shall we talk about the bracelet?"

"What about it?" He dug into his eggs.

"Callum, you cannot be buying me things like that. We only just met."

"Hmm."

"Are you listening to me?"

"Of course. You said I cannot buy you things."

"And?"

"I am disagreeing with you inside my head." He grinned at her. "And I just spoke it aloud."

"This is not funny."

"No, it's not. As you eloquently put it, I will buy you stuff, so deal with it."

Shaking her head, she sipped the excellent coffee. "It's your money."

"Precisely."

"If you want to throw it away, it's on you."

"Yes. And I do not consider buying my woman things, throwing money away."

"Your woman?" She lifted her brows at him.

"I thought 'girlfriend' sounds too immature, considering how mature we are."

"That's another thing we need to talk about." She dug into her eggs. "It's too soon."

"We have been together for all of seventy-two hours." He said teasingly.

"We do not know each other."

“We do. Intimately.’ Leaning forward, he tucked a hand beneath her chin. “I know every crevice and corner of your delectable and voluptuous curve.

There is a mole right next to your sex. My tongue has been inside you, deep enough to touch your womb. I know the taste and texture of you. Your nipples are imprinted on my tongue, and I have explored every inch of your mouth.”

“Stop.” Her voice was strangled, and breakfast was just a memory, a very faint one. “That’s not what I meant, and you know it.”

“Ask me anything.” He offered hoarsely. “What would you like to know?”

“I-” Her eyes strayed to his lips, and the fire licking at her belly became a volcano. The words she had been about to express were strangled inside her throat. She was hot and wet, and the need for him was so intense that she could not breathe. She had no idea how he could do this to her.

“Ask me, darling.” He invited. Shoving aside his breakfast, he came around and settled between her thighs. “Or don’t.” His hands plucked the pins from her hair and grabbed fistfuls of it as he lifted her head for his kiss. “I don’t care much.” Taking her lips, he ravished her until she was but a puddle in his arms.

## Chapter 5

“Tell me about your childhood.” He murmured, scooping back the hair from the side of her neck so that he could plant a kiss there. They were in bed after making love for the second time. His head was propped up on his hand as he enjoyed staring at her.

“You mean you do not already know?” She asked dryly, tugging the blanket up some more. He simply tugged it back down so that he could take in his fill of her. Her breasts were still wet from the lavish attention of his lips. “Stop looking at me like that.”

“Like what?” His head lifted, his eyes meeting hers in amusement.

“Like, I don’t know. Like I am a meal you want to devour.”

“That’s an accurate description. I am giving you time to rest up.” His hand cupped her cheek. “Tell me about growing up.”

“Is this the getting to know me stage?”

“Something like that.”

“I had a fairly normal childhood. If you consider the fact that Dad died when we were little. I think I was around eight, and Jason was two years older. But our mother just went on working-” She shook her head.

“Now that I think about it, I wonder how she did it. Two children to take care of and the loss of her husband. She was a teacher in high school and supplemented her income by working weekends at the local diner. She was hardly there, so Jason and I had to fend for ourselves, and he learned to cook.”

She smiled at that. “I hated the kitchen, and housework was something I had to do, something I also hated. I loved reading and making up stories and acting them out.” She shrugged. “I guess it was a way of retreating from everyday living.”

“And it made you into the star you are now.”

She looked at him in surprise. "I guess it did. I always knew I wanted the theater."

"And you went into that immediately."

"I was into all of the plays when I attended high school. God. It seems like a lifetime ago." She uttered a quick laugh that had the heat rising inside him. "I pushed myself into all of them. When it came to drama, I was always up for it." Unconsciously, her hand came up to rest on his chest and had his muscles flexing. "Now you." She said quietly.

Placing his hand over hers, he lifted it and turned it around to kiss the palm. "I was a model child." He grinned as she rolled her eyes.

"The man who sired me left when I was five and never turned back. My stepfather came along three years later, and I did my best to make things extremely difficult for him. By then, I had considered myself the man of the house and decided that we did not need anyone else. I never thought about how difficult it had been for my mother.

She juggled three jobs to keep the roof over our heads and food in our bellies. George came along and started coming around, picking up the slack and trying to be there for us.

Eventually, he moved us out of the tiny apartment and into his place. I had a big bedroom and bathroom, something of a novelty for me." He still had her hand in his and had linked their fingers.

"He was a decent enough guy, but I was unwilling to have a replacement dad. I was churlish and rude every chance I got. Then they had Julie." A smile touched his sensuous lips. "I fell in love with that beautiful baby and wanted to be the best big brother in the world."

"I bet you are."

"I am. Sometimes too protective and domineering."

“Sometimes?” She lifted a brow and had him bending to kiss her.

“All the time.” He flicked a finger over her chin, his expression thoughtful. “Lovers?”

Her eyebrows winged up. “Pardon?”

“You think that’s an inappropriate question.”

“Don’t think, know.”

“You were with a guy for almost a year.”

She bristled at that and started to push him away.

“I did my research; I told you that.” He would not budge.

“But you failed to tell me that it was an intrusive one. It’s none of your business.”

His fingers gripped her chin to keep her still. “I am considering it mine,” He told her firmly. “Why were you with him for so long, and what happened?”

“You mean you do not know?”

“Hence the question.”

She blinked at him and realized that he was dead serious. “I am not going into details.”

“Why? Because you were in love with him?”

“Just go to hell-”

“Lynn, tell me.” The determined look on his handsome face told her he would not let it go. “I want to know what exactly I am up against.”

“You are-” Huffing out a breath, she inhaled deeply. “I was young and just out of college. We did theater together and would read lines with each other.” Her eyes flashed at him, but she continued. “His name is Paul, as I am certain you already knew. I thought I had everything I ever dreamed of.

We both got a part in a bit of play, a badly written one, but it got us on stage in front of an audience, and it was in New York. We decided to move in together to save on



rent, and it was perfect for the first six months until I started getting noticed. The producer noticed me and started giving me more lines.

He resented my rise and started to belittle me, subtle digs about my figure and how I should consider losing weight or that I sounded flat and monotonous, things like that. I kicked him out of the apartment, and that was that." her eyes were fierce as she stared at him. "I don't tolerate being put down by men."

"I will bear that in mind." Letting go of her chin, he put a hand where her heart beat unsteadily. "Is he still here?"

"No."

"Completely gone?" He quirked a brow at her.

"Completely. You had no right-

"Darling, I have every right." He cupped the breast and watched the nipple burgeoning. "I am the man in your life, will be the last man in your life, and I want to know if you are emotionally free to deal with that."

Her heart fluttered at that, but she bristled at his arrogance. "I do not have a say in any of it?"

"You do, yes." His lips quirked in amusement. "You get to decide where we go next."

"Very funny." She grumbled. "You have been involved with hundreds of women."

"Slight exaggeration." He trailed a finger over one smooth, round cheek. "I have a past."

"And I will not bore myself by asking you about all those women." She told him loftily.

"Bore yourself?" His grin widened.

"Yes." She pushed at him again, but he blocked her by pulling her against him, arms coming around her waist and settling on her butt.

"I don't want to hear about your tawdry affairs."

“There is no need to be jealous.” He wisely removed his lips from hers as she snarled.

“You flatter yourself.”

“I am about to do it again.” His expression turned sensuous, his amazing eyes heavy-lidded as he parted her thighs with his knee. “I need you.”

“I don’t particularly like you right now.” Her breathless tone belied the words.

“As long as you need me too.”

“I don’t-” She broke off with a moan as he brushed his lips against hers. “Callum.”

“Shh. Let me love you, darling.” Covering her body with his, he did just that.

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“I have to go back to my place. I have rehearsals this afternoon, and you have work.” She had opened her eyes to see him reclining on the sofa with several papers strewn around him.

“Unfortunately.” He had insisted on them showering together, which had led to him making love to her against the tiles and had made them both coffee. “I will have to go in for meetings.” He was standing at the door with her and was loathed to let her go. “What time will you be through?”

“I don’t know. Callum, I need rest. I am going to be performing over the weekend.”

“I want to see you later. How about I drop by later?”

“At the theater?”

“Hmm.” He had his arms around her, his fingers splayed over her waist. “I have some business with your producer anyway.”

“About that.”

“Yes?”

“It’s going to look like you are paying me for sexual favors.”

His thick, dark brows lifted in genuine amusement. “I assure you that the paperwork will not say anything in that context.”

“I am serious.”

“So am I. This is a genuine business deal that my lawyers will insist on thoroughly reviewing, as will I. Your producer will also have his lawyers peruse the document to ensure all i’s are dotted, and all t’s crossed. I am a businessman, after all.”

“And it has nothing to do with what we have been doing over the past three days?”

“Four,” He corrected automatically. “And no. I do not have to pay for sex, and it’s insulting that you would even hint at it.”

“I am not-” She breathed as he lifted a brow. “We just started seeing each other, and you are investing in the play. If the press gets hold of this information, they are going to think that-”

“I believe in my woman’s talent and see this as a solid business deal.” Tilting her chin up, he kissed her thoroughly and had her clinging to him. “It’s that simple.”

“Or that complicated.” She whispered. “And I do not want us to use titles. I also would prefer that we keep this - us quiet for now.”

“No.” His expression was implacable.

“What?”

“I have no intention of doing any such thing.”

Her eyes blazed. “I am an actress who is trying to make my name. Having your name attached to mine is going to defeat the purpose.”

“How so?”

“You are Callum Hammond-”

“I am aware of that.”

“A damn multi-billionaire investor whose reputation is well-known. You have also been paired with several women from your society. I do not want to become known as your latest conquest.”

“You are not.”

“How do I know that?” She fumed. “And how is the public going to class us? It will be more about the fact that we are involved than about my career.”

“We will just have to live with it.”

“Callum-”

“I intend to make the world know I am involved with you. Deal with it.”

“Oh! ” She pushed at him. “Let go of me.”

“I don’t want you to leave mad.”

“Too damn late.”

“Why don’t I fix that?” Before she could move her head, he clamped his hands on her face and crushed his lips to hers. She fought on principle but was soon buried under a sea of emotions that swept through her body like a flood. She melted, her hands coming up around his neck as she sank into the kiss.

“I hate you.” She whispered without heat as she leaned against him weakly.

“Christ!” His voice was unsteady, his heart hammering inside his chest. “What you do to me. No hiding our relationship, darling, and in case you are wondering, we are definitely in one. See you later. Think of me.” He kissed her again before letting go.

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Jack had been doing theater since he could remember and had latched onto it naturally. His family disapproved, but he had managed to break the mold and stuck to his course, much to their disappointment and disapproval.

They had expected him to fail and return to the family business, but that had not happened and never will. Now teamed up with a very talented cast, especially the leading lady whose talent was unquestionably brilliant, he knew he was on the way to becoming a legend.

He was meeting with Callum Hammond, a self-made multi-billionaire who had taken a sudden interest in the play and the leading lady. He had asked Lynn about the date, and she had been distressingly evasive, telling him that it was none of his business and that she had rehearsals.

The man had taken time out of his hectic schedule to meet with him at the restaurant a few blocks from the theater and was minus his contingent of lawyers. Jack had the contract before him, but the amount on the check had him stupefied.

“This cannot be real.’ He murmured hoarsely.

“I assure you it is.” Callum had ordered coffee and a slice of the pie and was impatient to be on his way. He had decided to zip across town on the way from his appointment to deal with this.

“And it’s all mine?”

A smile quirked his lips. “It’s not a personal gift.”

“I know,” Jack said hastily. “I meant that it was - of course, going to the play.” He shook his head in a daze.

“Is it enough?”

Jack tore his eyes from the many zeros and looked at the man across from him. Jack had been brought up with money and knew the power of it, but the man seated in front of him exuded the raw and indefinable vitality and heady power that he could only dream of. “More than.” He managed to croak.

“Good.” Finishing the coffee, he rose. “Have your lawyer look at the contract before signing it.”

“I am sure it is all above board.”

“Never assume anything when doing business.”

“Of course. There is just one thing.”

“That is?”

“Is it because of Lynn?” Jack squirmed at the chilled look on the man’s face.

“Partially. I expect returns on my investment.”

“Of course. Thank you.”

With a curt nod, he turned and left. Heaving a breath, Jack watched him leave, that long sloping strides that bespoke power, and allowed himself to dream a little.

The man was hot and very much besotted by Jack’s leading lady; if he was not mistaken, he was one hundred percent he was not. Callum Hammond had forked over millions to sink into a small play, and no matter what he had just said, it was personal.

He was smitten by Lynn and had decided to sweeten the pot, which made Jack curious as to what had transpired between the two over the few days. It must be something huge for him to spend so much money on something uncertain.

Not that the play was not going to be successful, but it was going to take some time for Hammond to see returns. He bit back a smile as he glanced at the numbers again. He would not have to worry about funding - if ever again!

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Lynn tamped the impatience away and told herself that it was the humane thing to do. Her understudy, a girl of a mere twenty-five, was eager, hungry, and intent on following her footsteps. Jack had stepped out for a meeting, and it was left up to her to see that rehearsal went on without a wrinkle.

Not to mention the fact that she was feeling the effects of having sex for the past four days with a man who was as potent as outstanding wine; he had kept her mostly

naked and under his hypnotic spell, so much so that she was a little offended that he had not called her since she had been here for the past several hours.

She had to put it behind her. She was not some wide-eyed innocent girl caught up in the snares of a beautiful and wealthy man.

She was strong and independent and had her career to think about. But damn him, in four days; he had managed to weave himself into her until she could not stop thinking about his hands, his mouth, and him buried deep inside her. And he had said some things that were embedded deep inside her head.

He wanted a relationship and thought they were already in one. He was arrogant and cocky- She closed her eyes at that. The man had a gift and had been handily bestowed with a penis - one that filled her to bursting, and she knew how to use it.

“Lynn?”

She shook her head to get rid of the erotic images of being sprawled under Callum Hammond to concentrate on the woman with tears spiking her lashes.

“I am sorry. You were saying?”

“I am the one who should be sorry.” Linda sniffed and plucked another handful of tissues from the box to dab at her cheeks. “I am supposed to be a professional-”

“You are also a woman. One who had been dumped by her boyfriend of six months. You are entitled to the waterworks.”

“It’s just that I thought we were fine. Only to find out that he was diddling with my best friend. How could he?”

“They both betrayed your trust, which is incredibly hard to deal with. Especially when it comes to your best friend. Women are supposed to have an unwritten code, and she stepped over that line.”

“Yes.” Linda scrubbed at her cheeks, her dark brown eyes fierce. “She did something nasty, and I will never forgive her.”

“What goes around comes around. And I want you to picture the day when your ex is going to dump her ass for someone else.”

Linda’s eyes brightened at that. “You think that will happen?”

“Honey, I am sure of it. Why don’t you wash your face, and let’s get back to work? Jack will be back in a few minutes, and we would not want him to think we are slacking off.”

“Thank you. I feel so much better.” Linda told her gratefully.

She was about to go to her vanity when her phone rang. She could try and convince herself that the zing inside her heart was nothing, but she knew better.

“I am busy.”

“Are you?” The deep voice had lust clutching at the base of her stomach and her knees going weak enough for her to sink on the stool. “Is that any way to greet your man?”

The clutch widened. “Using labels, are we?”

“Precisely. How are you?”

“Exhausted. You used me up good and proper and now I am unable to do my job. I will have to stay away from you for a few days.”

“Try it.” He offered pleasantly. “There is a thing at the Renaissance later at eight, and I would like you to be there. It’s black tie, some associates from out of town. I can order an ensemble and send it to your place if you prefer. But I would love it if we could leave from mine.”

“I can’t.”



There was a pause, and she waited for the explosion.  
“You do not have a show until the weekend.”

“I have rehearsal, and I have to go grocery shopping-”

“You do not need groceries as I have a very efficient housekeeper at my disposal, and you will not be spending a great deal of time at your place. I am trying to be patient and careful here, Lynn, but I need you tonight. That’s not too much to ask.”

“And if I am not there? What? You are going to leave me?”

“I will send a car to pick you up at eight. The outfit will be delivered in an hour. I will see you later.”

She listened to the dial tone and cursed him fluently under her breath. The man was so accustomed to getting his way that he did not tolerate hearing the word no. Well, he was going to have to get used to it. With a sigh, she sat there staring at her image in the mirror.

The discreet knock on the doorjamb had her jolting. Turning her head, she did not disguise the frown as Jack waltzed in, a smile wreathing his face.

“We need to talk.”

“I don’t have time for a conversation.”

“I insist that you make time. This calls for champagne. Dom Perignon, at least.”

## Chapter 6

“I don’t have time-”

“I am making time, and so should you.”

To her surprise, she saw when he plucked a bottle and two glasses from behind his back and strode into the room. She watched him pop the cork, ignoring the froth running over the lip. Pouring the bubbly, he moved to hand her a glass before settling on one of the small sofas in the room.

His eyes sparkled. “We are seriously rich, Lynn. You should be dancing around the room. I did some dancing myself when I came here with a big fat check from your admirer.”

She was careful to keep her expression blank. Jason was a notorious gossip and had friends in various magazines. “Which one?”

He cast her a look and took a long swallow of his champagne. “Like you don’t know. Callum Hammond asked to meet me at Cassie’s earlier today. I did not want to say anything in case it was to turn me down. I have a contract and a check with enough zeros to carry us until-” he flung a hand wide. “Let’s just say it is more than enough.”

“I see.” She wondered why he was so high-handed and expecting her to jump through his hoops.

“You don’t sound too enthusiastic.” He accused his brow pleating.

“I am dancing on the inside. What does he expect from us?”

“You sound very suspicious.”

“And you are way too trusting.” Putting down the glass, she returned to start with her makeup to get into character. “The man is a multi-billionaire who will expect swift returns on his considerable investment.”

“He has a personal interest.”

“Oh?” She was careful to keep her voice neutral.

“He said so himself. He is very interested in you, Lynn.”

“You are leading me to believe that a man of Mr. Hammond’s ilk invested money into the play because what? Like me?”

“I would think there is more to it than that.” He eyed her curiously. “I have asked you what transpired between you, and you are not telling.”

“That’s because it’s none of your business.”

“Your name is on the contract.”

Her reaction, this time, could not be hidden. “What?”

“Thought that would get a rise out of you. I read the basics when he handed it to me, but I took the time to peruse further after he left. It clearly states that you are to be given creative freedom.”

“What the hell does that mean?” She demanded.

“It means darling that the man more than likes you. He invested mostly because of you. What did you do to earn such ... ardency?”

“I have no idea what you are talking about.” She went back to putting on her makeup.

“Have it your way.” With fluid grace, he rose and left the champagne within reach. “But thanks for whatever you did. It worked.”

Damn him! Damn him! Damn him! she fumed as she put away the rouge and eyeliner. She was going to have words with him.

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Callum sat in the board meeting and listened with half an ear to the conversations around him. He had issued her an ultimatum and was sitting here nervous it would blow up in his face. He had known about the function tonight

for some time and had deliberately not mentioned it to her while they had been together.

The reasons were simple. He had not wanted business to intrude on their time together, and he knew she wanted to keep them a secret, something he disagreed with. So, he had waited until he could call and order - he shook his head mentally.

Requested that she meet him there. He had already ordered the outfit, complete with cosmetics, and they should be en route to her place by now. He would have preferred it at his loft but had not wanted to push it.

Stirring himself from his troubling thoughts, he concentrated on the oral report of the CFO standing at the screen. The man was very competent at his job but had no oratory skills to talk about.

“Cut through the financial drivel and get to the bottom line, Calvin.” he interrupted midstream. “I have a meeting in the next ten minutes.”

“Yes, sir.” He started again, his face flushed from the court order and the snickers going around the table. “Channing’s Pharmaceutical is a high-level risk and has been flagged several times by the FDA.”

“And in your opinion, it is not worth the trouble.”

“Precisely.” Calvin adjusted his polka dot bow tie and cleared his throat. “The overhead is too costly; the management team has been dipping into the expenses-”

“What’s the bottom line?” Callum asked impatiently.

“It will take a lot to clear through the debris.”

“The company has been around for more than a hundred years.” Callum pointed out.

“And older than some of the more established companies.” A member pointed out.

“That’s beside the point,” Calvin said stiffly.

“That’s precisely the point.” Callum picked up the conversation to wind it down.

“The company is old and established, and people trust them. I have written reports from the R&D team, which show a considerable stream of income and profit to be made as soon as the hiccups have been dealt with. As CFO, I need you to get to the bottom line, nothing else.”

“But-”

“This meeting is over.” Pushing back his chair, he strode from the room.

“I need updates.”

“Yes, sir.” Barrington jumped up from his chair. Grabbing his iPad and several files, he followed his boss into the sumptuous office with a stunning view of the city and the antique furnishings. “Your four P.M. is waiting in Conference room B, and you have a call from Cairo in ten minutes.”

His eyebrows lifted. “isn’t it a bit late for them?”

“Something urgent came up.”

“Put the call through and ask that refreshments be served to Grady.”

“Right away, sir.”

“I also need a tux for later. I will not have time to swing by my place to get changed for later.”

“Right away, sir.”

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She was female enough to admire his incredible style. He had not called her again, and she told herself that it was good that he had not done so. She had also said to herself that she was not going. Being seen at an upscale hotel that belonged to him (She had checked, of course) would mean that she acknowledged that they were in a relationship and it was too soon.

But he had done them an enormous favor - and no! It was much more than that. The man had his hooks in her, and she - sitting on the side of the bed- stared at the hammered gold of the dress. It was a sheath, shapeless until she put it on, and then it absorbed all of her curves.

It came with a bodysuit that would ensure no lines and the body suit was made up of skimpy nude material that was as light as a feather and stunning in design. He had even thought of shoes, the glittering gold with black patent heels. A jacket, the softest cashmere she had ever seen or felt, had her whimpering in appreciation.

The costume jewelry completed the outfit with a silly-looking beaded purse. He had left a message for her. 'The car will pick you up at precisely seven forty-five.'

She thought about calling him and shoving the invitation down his throat. But she wanted to have it out with him face to face. No one handled her, and that was what he was doing.

Biting off a sigh, she headed for the bathroom to take a bath.

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Callum shot back the sleeve of his jacket to look at the time again. He had deliberately stayed away from calling her and was waiting for her to arrive. He had left his associates and their wives inside the hotel's private dining room to head her off. He knew there would be fireworks and wanted it done in private.

Where the hell was she? He was just taking out his phone to call the driver when the car slid smoothly through the winding path leading to the hotel's entrance. Before the very eager valet could rush forward, Callum stepped forward to open the door and had to take several breaths to control himself as he got his first look at her.

Without a word, he took her hand and helped her, nodding to his driver as the man approached. "We won't

be needing for the rest of the night.”

Sensing she was about to drag her hand out of his, he tightened his hold and led them inside. His breath became strangled again when she shrugged the jacket and turned towards him.

“Christ Jesus!” his voice was reverent as he stared at her. Ignoring the coat checker, he clamped his hands on her arms, his gaze sweeping from her ruthlessly brushed hair tumbling down her shoulders to the dress that highlighted the curves he had come to admire so much. “Look at you.”

Lynn felt the sizzle of anger drain away at the dazed look on his handsome face. “We are going to talk, but later.”

“I am sure we will.” Lifting her hand, he kissed the knuckles slowly, sending hot darts of fire inside her belly. “I am the most fortunate man in the entire hotel.”

“You are going to change your mind later tonight.” She warned, feeling warmed by his compliment.

“Ah, here we are.” He led her into a room where several waiters were hovering and to a long table with about six men and an equal number of women seated. The men rose instantly, and introductions were made.

She relished the quick admiring looks from the men and the slight envy on the women’s faces. Callum left no doubt about the nature of their relationship as he insisted on keeping his hand on the small of her back as he made the introductions and placed her right next to him.

“Ms. Peterson,” A swarthy-looking man with a German accent bent a smile on her. “Callum tells me you are a very talented actress. We are hoping to see you perform before we leave the country.”

Her eyes flew to Callum’s, and he stared at her with lifted brows before indicating that the first course should commence.

“I will be certain to get you tickets-” She looked around the table. “All of you?”

“But of course.” The man smiled at her. “But Callum has already procured seats for us for the day. He has been waxing eloquent about your character.”

“He might be somewhat biased.” She told him easily as she reached for her wine.

“He just might be,” Turning to the man seated at his right, he struck up a conversation, allowing her to concentrate on the man next to her.

“You were that certain I would be here?” She asked quietly as she sipped the excellent wine.

“Let’s just say that I had it in mind to come and fetch you myself if you had not turned up. Happy that you did.” He smiled winsomely as she glared at him.

“Of all the arrogant-” She clamped her mouth shut and hissed out a breath when his hand touched her thigh. She could feel the warmth of his skin through the thin material searing her skin.

“Stop.”

“I want to sink myself inside you and never come back out.” His deep voice and the look in his amazing eyes weakened her. She was about to blast him when their meal came wheeling in.

She had to admit that she enjoyed the evening. The food was excellent, and the conversation stimulating. It was the first time she saw him in this light - the powerful businessman entertaining other powerful men, but it is evident that Callum controlled the room.

He did not shut her out of the conversation, even when discussing business mergers and cents on the dollar. He would turn to her, his hand resting possessively on her arm to include her in the conversation. She had to admire that about him.

The other women were not so fortunate and had to fend for themselves. The seven-course meal dragged on, but it was not a chore. At the end of it, he suggested they



join some of the others on the dance floor before dessert and coffee had been brought out.

“You are just looking for an excuse to feel me up.” She accused as she turned into his arms. The heels on her shoes allowed her to come up face-to-face with him.

“I do not need an excuse.” His hands drifted to the small of her back. “It feels like you are not wearing anything under the dress.”

“I am not going to satisfy your prurient sexual fantasy by answering you.”

He chuckled softly, hand drifting further down and drawing her closer. “Prurient? I like the sound of that.”

“You would.” She muttered. “Where are the reporters?”

“Banned from this room, but I saw some of them lurking in the lobby when you arrived. I imagined they got off a few shots that will appear in the morning tabloids.”

Her eyes flashed at his unconcerned manner. “And that was what you wanted.”

He eyed her mutinous expression, the lust punching a hole inside him.

“More or less.”

“I asked you to wait.”

“And I did not agree.”

“I do not want the publicity.”

“It was bound to happen sooner or later.”

“You took the decision away from me.”

“I did, yes.” His hand drifted to her bottom as he pressed her against him, acknowledging the startled gasp when she felt his desire. “I am an adult and have never felt this way. I don’t give a damn who knows it.”

“I do. I-”

He ended the retort by crushing his lips to hers. She put up a token resistance for form, but it was to no avail. Her

body went limp as he devoured her lips. She felt the enormous and powerful desire crawling through her, crowding out her commonsense and the fact that people were present.

The clapping sounds had her pushing at him, and he allowed her to ease away. "Let's hurry up and get dessert, shall we?" he whispered hoarsely in her ear. "I have this powerful need for you that is threatening to erupt."

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He had ripped the front of the dress in his haste to get to her as soon as they made it into the bedroom.

"I liked the dress." She was sprawled half on top of him, trying her best to catch her breath.

"I will buy you another or two." His hand slowly circled her back, his heart beating unsteadily against her cheek.

"You could have waited two minutes to take it off."

"What do you do to me?" He shifted so that he looked at her. He had destroyed the immaculate styling of her thick, dark brown hair and ravaged her lips. He had also put bite marks on her flawless skin, something he should be ashamed of but was not.

He had been hot and ready to have her and had ended the dinner abruptly with the promise to have breakfast with the men tomorrow. He had barely made it into the bedroom before he started tearing at her.

Lifting her head, she gazed at him, her lips swollen by his kisses. "We need to talk about the big fat check you gave Jack."

"What about it?" He tugged at a fat curl and watched as it sprang back.

"He said it's a lot."

"And?"

"Was it because of me?"

He quirked a brow at her. "I believe you already asked that question."

"My name is in the contract."

"It is, yes. And?" He repeated.

"You never discussed anything like that with me, and I do not appreciate being blindsided."

"It's a simple contract."

"That's bullshit. Was it for services rendered?"

A light went on behind his eyes. "What services would that be?"

"This. Sex. Damn you, Callum; what if it comes out that you invested heavily in the play, one that I happen to have a starring role in. What will people think?"

"I am a businessman who knows a sure shot when one is right before him. I already told you that I did my research, which is a sound business investment. Drop it."

"I will not. I am not going to."

"Most people would be saying thanks, but not you." His eyes darkened.

"You had an ulterior motive." She felt like an ungrateful bitch, but could not stop. It did not help that she was also starting to be drawn in by him, deeply drawn in. He was Callum Hammond, and she was a plus-sized actress just on the rise. What if he realizes further down the road that he could do better? What then?

"Where are you going?" She demanded when he put her away and slid off the bed.

"To get a drink. Want one?"

"I am not finished."

"I am. I don't see the need to argue and spoil a wonderful night just because you cannot accept a gift handed to you."

She watched as he strode with a sloping grace over to the recessed button near the fireplace and touched it. Sitting up against the pillows, she drew the sheets up, watching as he poured the amber liquor into the glass. His body was tough and muscled without an ounce of extra fat.

His shoulders were broad, and his skin tanned all over. His stomach was flat, with a line of hair arrowing down to his rather impressive sex, and she could feel her mouth watering. "What will it be, Lynn?" His deep voice cut through her dazed admiration and desire.

"What?"

"Are we going to spend the night arguing or enjoying each other?"

"Why can't we do both?"

He smiled at that and took a sip of his drink.

"I want to make love to you again; it is a constant condition for me. I have resources and can pretty much do what I damn well please. It pleases me to invest in your play as I see you as a talented actress. Does that clear it up for you?"

"Not quite." She admitted with a sigh. "I am not used to this." She swept a hand around the elegantly decorated room. "I am not used to you and how you are railroading me. You are sweeping me off my feet, and I am getting whiplash.

I keep asking myself what he is going to do next. The first time, you zipped me off to Paris to do shopping, and you kept me here for days, making love to me. You invited me to dinner with some associates and bought me more clothes.

You kissed me right before them, and I—" She dragged a hand through her tangled hair. "I keep asking myself when this will end. When will you meet someone else and decide we are not suited?"

Finishing the drink, he put away the glass and returned to join her on the bed. Turning her to face him, he tucked a hand under her chin, his gaze direct. "I have never done this with anyone before. I am not the impulsive type.

I like women, and I am not against giving them gifts. But I have never felt the need to do what I am doing with you before. Naturally, it confounds me, but I love how it makes me feel. I love the way you make me feel."

He passed his thumb over her lush bottom lip and felt the stirring of his cock. "I want you in my life, Lynn, and the sooner you realize it, the better it will be. I do not want to fight with you about nonsense involving money.

I have more than enough of it. I want to cherish the time we spend together without arguments coming between us. Is that understood?"

She nodded, her eyes luminous. "We are going to argue now and then."

"I suppose we will."

"You are a very domineering man, and I am pretty fiery."

He smiled at that. "That has been proven."

"Okay, I am one fighting."

"Is that so?" Pushing her back, he covered her body with his. "In that case—"

## Chapter 7

Of course, they made the papers. Their pictures were plastered all over the tabloids with hints and suggestions. It had also been leaked that Callum Hammond had invested in the play, heavily invested, and there was the speculation that it was because of their relationship, a sudden one, an unexpected romantic entanglement between the couple.

She was bombarded by phone calls, or rather, Jack and his staff were. But reporters would be there each time she arrived at the theater to throw questions at her. She took out her justifiable anger on Callum.

“It’s even worse than I anticipated.” She said furiously as she shrugged out of her jacket and sat at her dressing table. “I warned you that they were going to salivate over this. I had to rush inside for fear of being trampled. At times like this, I hate you.”

“I will deal with it.”

“How?”

“Don’t worry about it. How are you?”

“Pissed.”

“I am also being bombarded here and will get the PR department to send something out. Don’t you have a press secretary?”

She laughed at that, the tension slowly slipping away. “That’s for megastars, and I am not one. I told you to give me a few weeks at the most-”

“What would a few weeks accomplish?”

“It would give me time- Oh crap!”

“What?”

“My brother. I have to call Jason. I am sure they have made the connection, probably giving him hell. I hate you.”

“You don’t mean that.”

“Oh, believe me. Right now, I do.” Sighing, she rubbed her forehead. “I have to go.”

“I miss you.”

“Oh, just go away, Callum.”

“I will see you tonight. How about we stay in? We could have dinner out on the patio.”

“The way I feel, I am tempted to stay away from you.”

“But you know better. I would have to come and find you.”

“You do not run my life.”

“You run mine, and I don’t mind one bit.”

“Yeah, right.” he snorted. “Just go and buy an airline or an oil well or something.”

“How do you feel about an apartment building in Manhattan?”

“What?”

“There is this derelict building that is slated to be demolished. We are thinking of investing in and fixing up the place. It’s perfect for young professionals - a fully-equipped gym, several trendy restaurants, an entertainment center-”

“Why are you telling me this?”

“Because we are a team. What do you think?”

Her heart fluttered inside her chest at the question. “I can’t think about that right now.”

“We will talk later.” He hung up before she could say anything else. Sitting there, she stared at her image and shook her head. The man was a typhoon; she must admit she loved his take-charge attitude.

She usually took over and did not approve of anyone telling her what to do. But with Callum, it was decidedly

different. The man knew how to handle her, and that was not something she was sure she liked.

Picking up the phone, she dialed her brother's number.

"There are reporters camped outside the building." He said without preamble.

"That's why I called. I am sorry, Jace."

"You could have warned me."

"I did not get the chance to. I asked Callum to wait, and he insisted-" She rubbed her forehead. "

"I have never met this guy."

"He wants to meet you. Something about dinner on Sunday with his sister."

"This is serious?"

"So, it appears."

"You don't sound too sure."

"It's just happening so fast that my head is spinning."

"You are not being forced into anything, are you?"

She laughed at that. "I thought you knew me."

"You only just met him."

"And it seems like I have known him for years. He is annoying and distressingly arrogant, but I -I have feelings for him. Complicated feelings. I cannot seem to be able to stay away from him."

"It might be the allure of his money."

"That's insulting on every level."

"I apologize. It's just that he is Callum Hammond."

"And when I am with him, he is just Callum. Someone I can talk to. We argue a lot, but he does not let me get away with anything. Anyway, how are you?"

"I am not the one whose pics are plastered all over the tabloids and the internet. You are famous."



“Not for the right reasons. I will talk to you later. I have rehearsals. Are you coming on Saturday?”

“Would not miss it for the world. Love you.”

“Love you too.”

As she hung from him, Jason came hustling in. “We are not doing this right now.” She told him firmly.

“I need a statement for the press.” His light blue eyes shone excitedly, and she realized he was in his element.

“Tell them to mind their own damn business.”

“You know that’s not going to fly, darling.” His eyes gleamed. “You are a power couple-”

“And I want to concentrate on the play. Just-” She waved a hand. “Just tell them whatever you want to.”

“Is there a marriage proposal in the mix?”

She laughed at that, a genuine one that loosened the tension in her belly. “You are a funny guy. We just met.”

“And yet you are practically living together.”

“Go away, Jack.” She waited until he had left to let out a silent scream.

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“I am not in the mood to talk.” She told him as soon as she stepped into the foyer and shrugged out of her coat.

“All right.” Taking the coat from her, he put it away and was careful not to touch her even though he wanted to. “You are late - not that I am complaining,” he added hastily when she blasted him with a look. “I was beginning to worry.”

“You are not my damn mother.” Brushing past him, she marched through the living room and up the stairs.

“I am entitled to be worried. I called you several times.”

“I chose to ignore that. What-” She broke off as he clamped a hand on her arm and turned her to face him, just outside the bedroom door.

“You could have been involved in an accident.”

“And I am sure you would have heard about it.”

“I understand you are angry, but do not ignore my calls. Is that understood?”

Her eyes flared. She had been bombarded by a tenacious reporter, who followed her halfway to his loft until she managed to shake him. Not to mention that rehearsal had been plagued with one misfortune after another. She was tired and hungry and very close to tears.

“Anything else?” Her voice was dangerously near to breaking.

“What’s wrong?” He sensed the tension inside her and lowered his voice.

“Oh, nothing much. Other than the fact that I was asked a million questions about the status of our relationship and had several of your high-powered women thrown in my face, what the hell could be wrong?”

“I am sorry.” Releasing her arm, he cupped her face gently. “I asked the PR department to put a statement out.”

“I saw it.” She huffed out a breath. “I guess I am just tired and hungry.”

“I can take care of that.” Bending his head, he brushed his lips against hers. “Why don’t we go and get something to eat?”

She nodded and took the opportunity to lean into him for a bit. “Okay, I am fine.”

He led her through the sitting room and the vast bedroom to the patio, where the enclosure offered warmth and a view of the loft’s wooded area.

The remnants of snow were still dripping from the leaves of the palm trees and clinging to the brushes. A wrought iron table nestled into one corner was covered with a

white tablecloth and candles that made everything look romantic.

“Sit.” He nudged her into a chair before removing the silver domes to reveal a meal fit for a queen.

“You did all this.” Her voice was husky with emotions.

“My housekeeper did most of the planning and arranging.” He rubbed her shoulders gently before taking his seat. “I figured you would be slightly annoyed, and I wanted to soothe things over.” Taking up her plate, he spooned thin, savory beef and asparagus.

“Rice?”

“Thanks.” She felt overwhelmed that this powerful man, whose business spans several countries, would consider her feelings. Her day had been crappy, but coming home to him, to this, made it special.

“What is it?” He handed her the plate.

“You get on my last nerves, and on my way here, I thought of ways to light into you. I saved up my temper and intended to tell you to go to hell.”

“I sort of figured you would.” He poured the wine, a slightly sweet golden liquid from his own Tuscany vineyard. “Hence the extra effort to apologize.”

“Is that what this is?” Her eyes were luminous as she took the wine and had a sip, her eyes widening. “oh.”

“Like it?”

“It’s- ” She took another sip in appreciation. “It’s wonderful. What is it?”

“Gold Leaf. It’s from my vineyard. This is just the first bottle sent to me a few days ago.”

“I love it.”

He nodded, a pleased look on his handsome face.

“All of this makes me regret not showering and putting on something more appropriate.”

“You are lovely.”

She glanced down at the thick baby blue sweater and black leggings with a grimace. Her hair was loose around her face, and she had not bothered to wear regular makeup after taking off her stage makeup. “Yeah, right.”

“I am serious.” Taking her hand in his, he smoothed out the long fingers, admiring their elegance. “You are naturally beautiful, and that was the first thing I noticed when I first saw you. You have a glow about you, Lynn, which is not evident in most women.”

“It could be that I am usually fired up about something.”

His smile came as he lifted her hand to his lips. “You are passionate about things.”

“I can be.”

“You are involved with several charities.”

“Some.”

“The homeless shelters downtown. You were there on Christmas Eve.”

“We all were. It’s a joint effort. Jack might be a pain in the ass and very nosy about it, but he cares about what happens to less fortunate people. I need my hand to eat.”

Kissing it again, he removed his and picked up his wine glass. She intrigued him on so many levels. Her dark brown eyes were alight with life and a zeal for living. She was not coy, which was something else he liked about her. She had no hidden agenda, was not intimidated by him, or thought she had to impress him.

“You are also involved in several children’s homes.”

She nodded as she resumed eating. “It’s heartbreaking to see how many children are abandoned or whose parents have died and they have nowhere to go.

We started a toy drive, a coat drive, a fill-up pantry drive, that sort of thing. One monthly performance is geared towards making money to school these kids, and the response has been overwhelming.”

“I want a child with you.”

The sudden statement had her staring at him in shock. “Excuse me?” She squeaked.

A smile touched his lips as his eyes settled on hers. “That got your attention.”

“I must not be hearing right.”

“It would not be right now because I am selfish enough to want to keep you to myself for a bit. But a year, perhaps two. I am thirty-five and want a child -” He shook his head. “This is the first time I have ever contemplated being a parent. Not until I met you.”

“Callum-” She took a deep breath. “We just met.”

“I am willing to wait for a bit,” He repeated. “But eventually- As you have noticed, we are not using anything. Are you?”

“No.” She cleared her throat, her mind reeling. “I was about to ask you to - that you should consider using-”

‘No.’ He shook his head firmly. “I have felt your bare flesh against mine, and it has become addictive. I love the feeling of you against me, and I don’t want to change that.”

“I could have something inserted or get an injection-” She shook her head. “Look, this talk about a child; surely you are not serious.”

“I am.” He smiled at her as he took a sip of his wine. “In due time. Now tell me about the charity.”

They resumed the conversation, talking about various needs, and before she knew it, she had cleaned her plate.

“I will go and get dessert. Tiramisu. Mrs. Blake makes the best kind. And some coffee.”

“Need help?”

“No. Just stay, and I will get it.”

Leaning back against the chair, she stared out at the stunning backdrop of green against white. The snowdrops had hardened into drops of ice on the leaves.

He returned just then with a tray of coffee and dessert.

Setting it on the table before her, he pulled her out of her chair.

“What?”

“I want to dance with you. Play R&B classics.” He ordered. The music flowed out immediately, enveloping them with soft, soothing sounds as he gathered her close to him, his chin on top of her head. His hands drifted soothingly up and down her back, sending warmth throughout her body.

“That was pretty smooth.” She murmured into his chest.

“I thought so. Still tired?”

“Not as much as I was before.” She was enjoying his scent, the subtle smell of his expensive perfume, and the feel of his muscled frame against hers.

“Good.” His touch became more personal, his fingers trailing down her back and lifting her sweater to get to her skin.

“The coffee is getting cold.” She whispered.

“Hmm.” Shifting his head, he nudged her chin up so that he could look into her eyes. His senses reeled from the warmth and the slumberous quality of the dark brown depths. “When I saw you on stage that first night, it struck me how beautiful your eyes were.

You captivated the audience with your passion and talent, but I saw beyond that.” His fingers wandered over her skin. “I saw beyond your role to the woman behind

the makeup. And I was entranced. I decided there and then that I wanted you.”

“And you always, always get what you want.” She whispered huskily.

“Almost always.” He parted her lips with his thumb, feeling the familiar jolt.

“When you decided you wanted me, that was the end.”

“I suppose.” Bending his head, he brushed his lips against hers and felt the tremors which only heightened his awareness of her. “Give me your tongue.”

He whispered against her lips. She was helpless to do anything but - and she obeyed automatically. He toyed with her, destroying her senses as he slowly sucked, pulling her in, the kisses soft and deep and sweet. She clung to him, body trembling.

He could do this with just a touch, a look from those fantastic eyes, and while it pleased her, pleased her, it also gave her a jolt of fear. He had a hold on her that was too strong to ignore. Her hands gripped his sweater as his own hands branded her skin.

The kiss deepened, sending them into a passionate spin that had them clinging to each other. The music had changed, and the mellow sound of Luther Vandross filtered around the room but was ignored by them.

Ending the kiss, he put her away from him and walked over to lean against the rail, his shoulders hunched, his profile harsh with passion. “Music off!”

The silence was thick, and the atmosphere tensed. Lynn stood in the center of the room, uncertain what to do. Deciding she needed the coffee, she walked over to pour the two cups and stood by the table, watching him. He turned then, eyes meeting hers.

“Just needed a minute.” He had himself under control by then, or so it seemed.

He was still painfully hard, his body vibrating with need as he strode over to the table to take up the cup.

“I have decided to have dessert in bed.” She murmured as she looked at him over the rim of the cup.

“Is that so?”

“Yes. What do you think?”

“I think you just read my mind.” Taking the cup from her, he put it away along with his. “Shall we?”

She nodded and picked up the tray with the dessert. Sliding back the glass doors, he waited until she had stepped in before locking it. She placed it next to the table by the sofa and took off her clothes on her way to the bathroom. “Care to join me, or have you already showered?”

“Even if I had, that invitation is too much to ignore.” He started taking off his clothing as well and followed behind her.

“I am thinking of taking a bath.” She was naked, skin gleaming in the soft light.

“Hmm. You know where everything is.”

“I do. How do you feel about ambrosia?”

“What’s that?” He watched as she picked up a bottle off the shelf and sniffed.

“Something new and heady.”

“We should go with it.”

The water was already full from the multiple pipes fitted to the claw-footed bath. She poured in a liberal amount and added a touch of cinnamon. Testing the water, she stepped in, sliding down into the bubbles. “It feels good. Aren’t you going to join me?” She asked him huskily.

“Of course.” Moving forward, he climbed in so that he was facing her. “Smells good.”

“Hmm.” Her toes edged to his crotch and nudged at him.



“What are you doing?”

“Enjoying the package.” She smiled at him, a seductive movement of her lush lips. “We should do it here.”

“It’s going to make a mess.”

“We could clean up after.”

“We are not going to have time. After I am finished with you, we will both be too exhausted to move.”

“I love a challenge.”

“I am sure you do.” His hands snaked up her thighs as he scooted forward. Her hair was piled on top of her head, with tendrils escaping at her neck. His long fingers edged even further until they were tangled in the hairs of her sex.

“Callum.” She whispered, head drifting back against the padded headrest.

“I love the feel of you.” He pressed his fingers against the swollen flesh and watched her eyes glaze. “The texture.” Those clever fingers dipped into her, the suds making it easy for him to go even deeper. Her breath became choppy, her hands resting on the lip of the bath, dropping nervelessly into the water.

He scooted even further, legs lifting to cover hers. He was near enough for her to feel his erection touching her, barely, softly touching the core of her.

“Oh.” She whispered, teeth biting into the fullness of her bottom lip.

“I love your passion.” He was going even deeper, his own breath backing up inside his throat. “How your face looks when I am doing this to you.” His fingers were slowly thrusting like he had all the time. She hissed out a breath when he removed his fingers and slid in next to her and then behind.

Lifting her, he planted her firmly on top of him, his cock sliding in without the slightest bit of resistance. His hands

cupped her breasts, mouth seeking hers as she turned her head towards his.

The silky feel of her soaked in the bubbles and warm water was more than he could stand. He thumbed her rigid nipples even as he rotated his hips, driving into her, his mouth ravishing, devouring in a way that had them spinning out of control.

The water splashed over the bath's rim, making puddles on the shimmering blue-green tiles, but none mattered to them.

They were too far gone to think about anything except feel the powerful sensations, the emotions gripping them and pushing them out of control. She came first, her body gyrating frantically as the powerful orgasm slammed through her. He came after, body shuddering as he poured himself into her.

## Chapter 8

He was at the front of the theater, premiere seats, of course, where he could almost touch her. He had earned the seats, and along with several of his associates and their wives who had turned out in full, they were treated like VIPs, which they were.

He had seen her glance over at him, and their eyes met and held for a few seconds. He had wanted to go backstage to see her and wish her luck, not that she needed it, but she had told him firmly that she would not appreciate that.

“You are going to break my concentration, and since you have invited all those bigwigs, I have to be my best. You will see me after I am finished.”

So, he had done the next best thing by sending her two dozen yellow and white roses. He had contemplated red but had decided against it. Another time, perhaps. And her brother was also present. Callum had identified him from the photo he had in her file.

They look alike, with the same caramel complexion and graceful shape of the face. He had come solo, and Callum also recalled that the man was going through a painful divorce.

Every rational thought was wiped from his brain within minutes as he concentrated on the performance. She was good; no, that was too tame a term for her. She engaged the audience, flashing her dazzling smiles whenever the moment called for it, and drew them in when she found out that her son was taken away from her.

His hands gripped the edges of the seat as he unconsciously scooted forward. He watched the tears fall and could feel the grief encompassing her as she sobbed her heart out as if it was going to break.

When the curtains came down, he sat there spellbound. He had seen the performance before, of course, but

somehow it was more potent, more significant now. Perhaps it was because he was involved with her. Getting to his feet, he followed the rest as they gave a standing ovation and thunderous applause.

A smile touched his lips when she returned for the third curtain call. Flowers were thrown on stage, and an enthusiastic fan said he loved her.

“I love you too.” Blowing him a kiss, she bowed before turning to find him. His lazy and intimate smile touched her, and she smiled back at him. She was his, and he wanted the world to know.

“My God!” Jack was bursting at the seams as he hurried after her. “Did you hear that?”

“I was there, remember?” Pushing the door of her dressing room open, she was about to shut it but resigned herself to a glowing review from Jack as he made his way inside.

“And your man was riveted.”

“He is not-” She breathed, dropping down on the vanity stool to drag off the wig. “I need to get dressed. “Jason and Callum will be waiting for me.”

“You should have invited him backstage.” They both turned at the knock on the door.

“Perhaps that’s him.” Before she could stop him, he was already opening the door.

“Mr. Hammond, how nice to see you.” He gushed. “And Jason. I will leave you with it. Splendid performance, darling.”

“I have to agree with him.”

“I presume you two have met?” She asked as Jason came forward to drop a kiss on top of her head.

“Yes, we have.” Callum was itching to be alone with her.

“I just came back to offer my congratulations,” Jason told her, pulling her up and into his arms. “You have an

amazing talent.”

“Thanks, darling.” She placed a hand on his cheek.

“Callum is taking me to -” She looked at the man standing just behind her brother. “Where are we going?”

“Mignon’s. A table is reserved for ten. My associates and his wife insisted on seeing you after the show. I could not shake them.”

“It’s fine. Say you will come.” She urged her brother.

“I will be there.” He kissed her again before stepping back and leaving the room.

“Finally.” Callum moved forward to take her into his arms, lips brushing hers. “I am afraid we are going to have an entirely early evening. You were brilliant out there.”

“Thank you. Want to stay while I take off my stage makeup and get ready?”

“As if I would leave. You had a lot of men clamoring to come backstage.”

“I have fans.” She grinned at that as she removed the foundation. “It’s still new to me.”

Sitting on her small sofa, he crossed his legs and watched as she transitioned from ‘Miriam’ to the woman he was fascinated with.

“You almost had me believing you were dying of grief. I was inclined to rush on stage and take you into my arms.”

Her laughter echoed around the room, eyes twinkling.

“Then I consider myself a reasonably talented actress.”

“More than. I am proud of you.”

Her eyes met his in the mirror, emotions simmering between them. Her hand trembled, and she had to tear her eyes from his to concentrate on what she was doing.

“You are pretty distracting.”

“Ditto.” He had to shove off the sofa and pace so that he could will the intense desire for her away. “I - er- I will wait outside until you are finished getting ready.”

She gave him a knowing look that had him raising his brows.

“What?”

“Nothing. I will be quick.”

“Take your time.”

She took a deep breath after he left and finished what she was doing.

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They were into the dessert part of the evening when it happened. Jason had cried off, staying longer, telling her that he would see her the next day.

“Dinner at Callum’s place.” She reminded him. “His sister will be there as well.”

“One big happy family.”

“Jace-”

“I will be there,” He promised. “I hope he is the real deal.”

“I think he is.”

“Your brother seems to like me.” His tone had dropped to almost a whisper as she sat beside him.

“You are enjoying yourself way too much.” She whispered back, nudging him in the ribs.

“If looks could kill-” He broke off, and she saw, when he looked up, a shimmer of surprise and something else altering his expression.

“Who-”

Before she could finish the sentence, he rose and removed his hand from the back of her chair. Turning her head, she felt a jolt as she stared at the woman gliding towards them, an intimate smile wreathing her face. And Lynn knew who she was immediately.

The thick honey-blonde hair brushed back from a stunning face with high cheekbones, almost purple eyes, and a rosy complexion could not be mistaken.

“Callum, darling.” Her voice was sultry, delicate hands outstretched. It was as if everyone else was around the table.

“Bianca, what an unexpected surprise.” Moving forward, he took her hands and lifted them to his lips. “I had no idea you were in town.”

“Just flew in last night. I must look like a hag.”

“You are as lovely as ever.”

“Darling, always the charmer.”

Lynn cleared her throat and had Callum remember where he was and that other people were around.

“Pardon me,” He said smoothly. “Bianca, this is Lynn-”

“I have seen your photos on the internet and billboards. You are an actress.” The beautiful eyes wandered over Lynn’s face and dismissed her instantly before turning to the others around the table. Lynn watched Callum continue making the introduction, the woman’s hand still nestled in his.

“How long have you been in town?”

“A month or two to tie up some old business.” She leaned forward and kissed him on the cheek. “We should have lunch and catch up.”

“Of course.”

“I will call your office and set something up.” Moving away, she flicked a glance at Lynn. “Nice to meet you.”

Lynn forced herself not to be bothered by the woman’s attitude or Callum’s distraction. He was not looking over at the table where Bianca was seated, but it was evident that his attention was not on theirs.

She waited until they were on their way home - for him to bring her up, and when he didn’t, she did.

“Who is she?”

“Bianca Bellacort.”

“I know her name, Callum. She is the sister of an Italian prince and is very high profile. You were involved with her not quite two years ago.”

He glanced at her as he turned into the private road leading to his loft. “It looks like you are all caught up.” Coming to a stop, he opened his door. Before he could open hers, she was out, dragging the coat around her as the January chill seeped through her black cashmere dress.

“She is beautiful.”

“Yes.” Keying in the code, he pushed the door open and ushered her in. “Go on upstairs; I will be right there.”

“Are you okay?”

“Why wouldn’t I be?” He asked her mildly.

Opening her mouth to say something else, she decided against it and went up the stairs. Sitting on the side of the sofa, she slipped out of her boots and massaged her feet thoughtfully. Something had changed, and she would be a fool to think otherwise. Rising, she slipped out of the dress and put on the nightgown she had brought.

Ten minutes had elapsed, and he still had not come up. Picking up the remote, she turned the television on and scrolled restlessly and without interest. She had settled on a romantic comedy and was half listening to the dialogue when he walked in.

“Sorry about that. Had a call to make.”

“Was it her?”

“Pardon?” He sat on the edge of the sofa and took his shoes off.

“Bianca.”



“I had a business call to make.” He gave her a cool look. “What’s going on?”

“You tell me. Ever since she walked into the restaurant, you have been off. It’s as if I am invisible. Look, if you want to pick things up with her, then be man enough to tell me to get out of your life.”

His eyes flickered. “I don’t appreciate your tone or this conversation.” He told her stiffly.

“You were involved with her.”

“I was, yes. So?”

“And I saw the two of you together. You could not take your eyes off her.”

“She is a beautiful woman.” He said mildly as he took off his clothes. “And one I had not seen in a long time.”

“You are planning on seeing her again.”

“I suppose I will.” He climbed the steps and slid in next to her. “Can we shelve this conversation?”

“You don’t want to talk about her.”

“No.” Turning around, he turned out the lamp. “You should get some sleep.”

He did not touch her for the first time since meeting each other, and she felt the fear spiking her heart. She could have demanded they have it out right then and there, but pride was involved.

She could not understand how such a wonderful time in her life had turned to crap like this. Punching the off button on the remote, she turned her back and plumped up her pillows.

Beside her, Callum felt the emotions and uncertainties warring inside him. Bianca had been the only woman who had come close to asking her to marry him. He had been smitten by her so much that he had followed her to Europe to persuade her to return to the States.

But she had turned him down. He had tried a second time, and she had not budged. Seeing her inside the restaurant was like a punch in the gut, bringing back those feelings. He was conflicted. He was so conflicted that for the first time since meeting Lynn, he did not want to touch her.

This was strange because it was all he had thought about ever since he had sat there watching her in that play. He thought he had put it all behind him, but seeing her had brought it back up.

They had unresolved issues, and they had to be dealt with. Turning his head, he stared at the woman with her back turned to him and was about to reach for her when he pulled his hand back. Sighing softly, he turned away and tried to go to sleep.

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She was gone the following day and had left a terse note. 'Have some errands to run. Don't think the dinner thing is a good idea.'

He reread the note and reached for the phone to call her. The call went straight to voicemail. 'Hi, this is Lynn; you know what to do.'

"Lynn, look, I apologize for last night. Please call me back." Hanging up from her, he sat on the edge of the bed and dragged his fingers through his hair restlessly. He should go to her and try and explain why he behaved the way he did last night. But did he have a reasonable explanation?

He had to clear this thing up with Bianca before he could think of going ahead with a relationship with Lynn. He had to find out what he was feeling and remove any residuals before he could move forward.

And perhaps she was right; they should call off the dinner for now. Dragging himself out of bed, he padded off to the bathroom, stopping to look at the signs of her

being there. Her panties were in the hamper, and the damp towels from their last foray in the tub.

Moving over to the triple sink, he leaned against the counter, his fingers tightening until the knuckles turned white. Bending his head, he sucked in his breath and tried to control his rioting emotions. Taking another deep breath, he went to take his shower.

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She was not going to cry. She was a big girl, literally, and she could take it. She had been disappointed before, not like this, but she could damn well take it. The man had swept into her life, charmed the pants off her, showered her with gifts, called her his woman and practically asked her to move in with him.

She had seen him calling her but had ignored the call, and he had not called back. It did not matter that their pictures were plastered all over the society rags and that they were now considered a couple. She could live with the backlash.

She would also have to call her brother and explain that dinner was off. Shutting off the engine, she closed her eyes and realized she was not looking forward to it.

Deciding to get it over and done with, she made the call.

“You had better be bleeding out on the side of the road.”

“Then I would be calling nine-one-one.” She told him mildly.

“Lover boy kicked you out?”

It was so near to the truth that she had to fight the spear of pain through her heart.

“I decided to get an early start. I have been neglecting some things lately, like grocery shopping and meeting with the children in the home downtown. And speaking of which, we are putting off the dinner thing.”

“Why?”

“I just told you-”

“And that’s bullshit. Up until I left the restaurant last night, you made certain to remind me of it. What’s going on?”

“Nothing, o suspicious one. You are such a lawyer.”

“I happen to be one, and my instinct tells me something’s not quite right.”

“I have things to do.”

“If that son of a bitch hurt you-”

“I am a big girl and can take care of myself. I have to go, darling. I will call you later.” She hung up before he could say anything else. Taking a deep breath, she got out and, skirting the ice on the ground, went inside.

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“Are you going to sit?” Julie asked him patiently as he continued to prowl the living room length.

“Not yet, no.” He glanced over at her, seated on the sofa with her legs curled beneath her. He had contemplated just going to his club and chilling for the rest of the day but had decided to come and have dinner with her instead.

“Why was the dinner canceled? Was it her? I saw her in the papers this morning. The play got rave reviews.”

“We disagreed and decided to hold off on the dinner. I need a drink.”

“Let me-”

“No.” He shook his head. “I will get it.” Moving towards the cabinet, he selected a bottle of scotch she always kept in store for him and poured a generous amount into the glass.

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

Bringing the glass with him, he went to the mantle, one hand draped over the tile as he stared into the

mesmerizing flames. "I am conflicted."

"About her."

He looked over at her with a smile. "Her name is Lynn."

"And I was right about her."

"No." he tossed back the drink but stood where he was. "I am the one who is causing this. There is someone."

"I see. Who?"

"Bianca Bellacort."

Julie's eyes widened as she stared at him. "You were involved with her some time ago. A princess or the other, and you told me you were planning to ask her to marry you."

"I did. Twice." He said humorlessly. "She turned me down."

"And now she is back. Is she- does she want to"

"No. I have no idea. We did not get to talk much. I am supposed to be meeting her for lunch."

"Are you still in love with her?"

His expression became grim. "A history between us has not been dealt with."

"So, is it over between you and Lynn?"

"She is not returning my calls, and I cannot blame her. I need to see Bianca, talk to her, and see how I feel."

"And hope Lynn Peterson is still around when you decide what to do."

He sent her a scorching glance. "I don't want to talk about her."

"How about something to eat?"

"I am not particularly hungry."

"You have to eat something to soak up the alcohol unless you plan to spend the night here."

“I can’t. I have an early breakfast meeting in the morning.”

“I made pasta salad.” Uncoiling her legs, she moved towards him. “Come on. You know I hate to eat alone.”

“Even though you live alone.” He pointed out as he accompanied her into the kitchen.

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She buried herself in the work she did for the children. She and Jack and some of the cast members had adopted the home and fought valiantly to provide the things needed for the children to survive or be reasonably comfortable in a place like this.

As far as homes went, it was not that bad. The staff were kind and considerate, and the resources they had accumulated over the period had worked wonders.

A new computer room had been added, giving the children the advantage of technology. There was also the library where Lynn had begged and persuaded several patrons to donate so many books that the small and cozy room was stocked from floor to ceiling.

“It’s so good of you to come.” Angela Baker told her with a beaming smile. “It’s very comforting to see that fame has not changed you.”

“I am still the same person.” She assured the woman.

“And you are with that charming and handsome young man, that multi-billionaire Mr. Hammond. I was hoping he would make the trip with you.”

“I am alone. I just decided to visit. You did say that there are several new children here?”

“Yes. Three more. Two boys and a girl. Would you like to meet them?”

“Yes, of course.”

Forcing a smile to her lips, she followed the administrator to the common room, where the children were watching

a movie on the brand-new television set mounted on the wall. The sounds of children laughing and racing down the hallway of a large school sounded inside the room.

Very soon, they surrounded her, and she was introduced to the new children who were shy at first, but her engaging smile made them feel confident enough to approach her.

She spent more than an hour there, unwilling to return to her empty home where she would be thinking and dreaming about him.

## Chapter 9

He had chosen somewhere discreet. His face had been plastered with Lynn in the papers, and it would not do for him to be seen with Bianca. He had called Lynn again last night, and she had not picked up. He supposed she had the right to be mad.

Usually, he would hammer at her door and demand to see her. But what would he say? Did he have conflicting feelings about another woman and need to sort things out? He was the one who had pursued Lynn relentlessly and insisted that they go public with the relationship, and now this.

Funny, he had not thought of Bianca for months until he had seen her in the restaurant. Then the memories had come flooding back.

She had turned him down - twice. He thought he had moved on, but that was not the case. The restaurant belonged to a friend, and they were assured of the utmost discretion. He had been given a private room, and that suited him fine.

Getting to his feet as the door was pushed open, he felt a quick jolt as she glided into the room. Her hair was loose around her face and streaming down her back. The green silk sweater she was wearing hugged her slender frame, and her coral-painted lips were parted to reveal white teeth.

"Darling," her voice was husky, her hands outstretched. "I hope I have not kept you waiting."

"I only just got here myself." Pulling her in, he kissed both her cheeks before letting go.

"What a delightful little place, and we have privacy."

"I thought it was best." He waited until she was seated before signaling the waiter hovering on the fringe of the room. "The filet mignon is very good."



“Then I will bow to your expertise.” She scanned the wine list. “Bring me a glass of Costa Regal.”

“Right away.”

“Bring the entire bottle,” Callum instructed. He waited until the man had left before turning to look at her. “You are as beautiful as ever.”

“Imagine my surprise when I saw you in that restaurant.” Her lips curved into an intimate smile. “It must be fate.”

“Or coincidence.” He murmured.

“I don’t believe in any such thing. This Lynn person, you are seeing her?”

“Yes.”

“Is it serious?”

“What do you think?”

“Darling, she is not your type.”

“And by that, you mean?”

“She is not petite, is she?”

“She is certainly not. She is beautiful and extremely talented.”

“Are you in love with her?”

“I might be.”

Leaning forward, Bianca placed a slender and delicate hand over his, the ruby ring winking on her finger. “We have a history together, and I must add that on my way here, I have been thinking about you - about us.”

“There is no us.” He reminded her. “I proposed, and you turned me down - twice.”

“And I regret that.” She pouted sexily. “I was foolish.”

“And now you have come to your senses and regret turning me down.”

“I was not ready for marriage. When you asked me, I was scared. I am accustomed to doing my own thing and

going my own way. I miss the lovemaking, darling. You are so talented in bed, so invigorating-" She squeezed his hand gently. "I miss that, how you used to look at me and insist on taking care of me."

Callum waited until the waiter brought over the bucket with the wine nestled in ice. "We will help ourselves," he said, dismissing the man. "Why do I have this feeling - all you are saying is because I am with someone else?"

"You cannot think that."

"I can and do." he cast her an indulgent smile as he eased the cork out. "Does coming to the States have something to do with Lynn and I being in the papers?"

"I have seen your photos splashed across the internet and the society rags."

"Why is this one different?" He poured the amber liquid into two glasses and handed her one.

"Who says it is?"

"Bianca, I happen to know you."

"Yes, you do, darling. And you know that we belong together."

"You did not think so before."

"I was foolish before. Now I am not." Putting away her glass, she leaned forward, the material of her sweater sagging to reveal the creamy white of her breasts. "I have been doing some thinking, lots of it. I am thirty-four years old-" She grimaced slightly. "It is time I settle down, and I am sure you want children."

"Let me guess, you would want me to come and live with you in Italy."

"We could divide our time between here and there. Your business or the bulk of it is here; now I understand that and can live with it."

"You are forgetting something," He said casually.

"What is that?"

“I am with someone.”

“Darling, I am sure it is not a committed relationship.”

“I am committed to her.”

“And yet you are here with me. That means something.”

“It means that you meant something to me, still do, and invited me to lunch.”

She pouted at that. “I am not taking no for an answer.”

“I am not going to hurt her, Bianca.”

“Surely, if you tell her that we have a connection-”

“She already knows.”

“Have you spoken to her about us?” The glint in her almost purple eyes showed interest.

“Not really. Ah, here is the meal.” Callum was unsure why he was so relieved at the interruption, but he was.

“It smells divine.”

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“You are going away?” Jack stared at her blankly. “What about rehearsals?”

“We are not going to be performing for the next two weeks. I will be back in time for that.”

“Why are you leaving? Are you going somewhere with Callum? To one of his island retreats or somewhere in the Caribbean?” His eyes glinted with curiosity. “It would be just like him.”

“I am going off by myself to take a much-needed break. Just leave it at that.”

“Do I sense trouble in paradise?” He asked curiously as he followed her out.

“You are getting on my nerves.”

“Does he know you are going away?” He called out as she hopped into her car. “Lynn!”

Ignoring him, she slammed the door shut and drove away. She left a message on her brother's phone to let him know she would be out of touch for a couple of weeks. It was taking the coward's way out, but she knew that if she called, he would grill her, wanting to find out why she was running.

And that was what she was doing, even if she admitted it to herself. She had spent the past two nights tossing and turning in her bed and chiding herself for wasting time on a man who had lost interest in her.

His ex had come back into his life, and it was apparent he had feelings for her. It had been as plain as the nose on her face. She would not be the one to stand in the way of true love.

She had fallen; she had to admit that it had been less than two weeks, and he had managed to bowl her over. And after he had done that, after telling her all those pretty words and making those promises, he had gone back to her.

Could she blame him, however? The woman was exceptionally beautiful with all that white skin, honey-blond hair, and purple eyes. What man could resist her? She had tortured herself by digging up photos of them on the internet, and they had looked good together.

So, she was going away to get her head on straight. She had turned off her phone, not that she was afraid he would call. He had called twice and left two bland messages. Usually, he would come and find her, but he had not done that, and it had sent a clear message. He was no longer into her. Well, to hell with him! She was through pining.

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He was not getting her. After the hour-long lunch, he had brought some clarity and felt guilty for how he treated Lynn. He had some explaining to do and possibly some groveling. But he was prepared to do so. He had not handled things well, but he would fix that.

He tried her again, and it went straight to voicemail. "Lynn, look, I need to speak with you. Please call me back." he thought about saying more but decided to leave it until they were face to face.

He had gone through the day when he realized he had not heard from her. Trying again, he ended the call without leaving a message. Where the hell was she? And why was she not answering? Out of sheer desperation, he decided to call Donaldson.

"Mr. Hammond, how are you?"

"Very well. You?"

"Wonderful. No doubt you are calling about the investment. I can assure you-

"Where is she?"

"Lynn?"

Callum wanted to snarl but managed to keep his cool.

"Who else?"

"Ah, she said she was going away for two weeks. We are not on again until the end of the month-

"Where did she go?"

"I asked if she was going away with you, and she said no."

"So, where did she go?"

"I have no idea. She has done it before; after a heavy round of performances, she would take off to regroup."

"And where would this regrouping take place?"

"She does not usually say where she is going. I am sorry."

"Thank you."

"Have you tried calling her phone?"

"What a novel idea." The sarcasm did not escape the other man.

“Of course you did. How foolish of me. If I hear from her-”

“Have her contact me.” he hung up without saying goodbye, his expression brooding. He had hurt her, and now she is gone. Where the hell would she go? Giving into desperation, he looked up the law firm where her brother worked and dialed the number. “Mr. Jason Peterson, please. Tell him it’s Callum Hammond.”

“Right away, sir.”

He was put on hold for a minute.

“This is Jason.”

“It’s Callum Hammond.”

“So the very impressed receptionist told me. What do you want?”

His sister had told him something; the man’s voice reeked with dislike. “I am trying to find Lynn.”

“She does not want to be found, especially by you. I warned her that you were a player, and she did not listen.”

“Look, I don’t know what she told you-”

“Oh, she has not told me anything, but I am smart enough to read between the lines. She called to cancel the Sunday dinner you insisted on in the first place and left a message on my phone that she was heading out of town for a while. I have been trying to reach her to no avail. The only conclusion I can reach is that it has something to do with you.”

“You don’t know where she is.”

“No, even if I do, I would not be telling you. What the hell did you do to her?”

“It was a misunderstanding and one that I need to clear up. Is there any place - any familiar destination she would go to?”

“She is not one to just run off like that, so I have no idea where she would go.”

“If you hear from her, please have her call me. I need to sort things out between us.”

“We will see. I have to go.”

Leaning back in the chair, he closed his eyes wearily. He had pursued her relentlessly and made all sorts of promises, and now she was hurt and had taken off. How was he supposed to fix it if he had no idea where she was?

His intercom sounded just then. “Mr. Hammond, you have Ms. Bellacort on the line.”

Another complication, he thought grimly. “Put her through.”

“Darling, sorry to disturb you at work, but I was hoping we could have dinner.”

“I am swamped, I am afraid.”

“Another time, then?”

“We will see. I have to go.”

where are you, darling? He wondered dismally.

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The remote cabin belonged to a patron she had met during one of her performances. Madeline Grayson was an eccentric woman in her sixties who had inherited the property when her late husband died several years ago.

“Darling, it’s up the mountains and unused. Here is the key; use it whenever you need to avoid all of this.”

She had not felt the need to get away until now. The drive was long, and the stupid navigation had turned her around twice until she sat on the roadside in frustration before deciding to start again.

Now she was here, and Madeline was right. It was isolated and miles away from the nearest town. Not to

mention, the snow was piled high on either side of the driveway.

“I have someone cleaning the place and stocking up with logs for the fireplace. There are groceries in the cupboard, and the fridge is full. Enjoy.”

She doubted she would, but it was exactly what she needed.

She had turned on her phone to receive several messages from Jack, Jason, and Callum and listened to them before turning off her phone. She had sent a message to Jason to let him know she was okay and that she would call eventually. She had ignored the ones from Jack and Callum.

Dumping her case in the tiny living room, she took stock of the place and decided she liked the intimacy. First things first, she thought. It was cold, so it was time to put some logs into the surprisingly large fireplace that covered one wall section.

The flames were shooting upwards not long before, and the place had turned warm and cozy. Dusting her hands off, she stood before the fire, warming herself before leaving to go into the antiquated kitchen with its old-fashioned range and quaint ice box.

Taking out a packet of steak and potatoes, she made something to eat. She did not want to think about him or remember the feel of his hands and mouth on her body. She had made a mistake and was set about correcting it. It was that simple.

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He had started drinking as soon as he came home. Trying her several times during the day had not yielded anything.

The housekeeper had left a rack of lamb inside the warmer for him, but his appetite was shot to hell.

He was brooding in the fire when he was alerted that he had a visitor. For a minute, his heart lifted and quickened



as he wondered if it was her. But a look at the monitor revealed that it was not.

The woman's face in the monitor had a quick slide of annoyance, and he contemplated refusing her entry. Pressing the buzzer, he released the lock and went to open the doors.

"I thought I would drop by to see where you live."  
Shrugging out of the black cashmere jacket, she handed it to him and looked around.

"I am not in the mood for visitors, Bianca, and you should have called first."

"I did, darling, and you did not pick up." Taking the glass out of his hand, she took a sip and followed him into the living. She had come with seduction in mind. The dress was low cut and flaming red—startlingly contrasting her honey-blond hair and white skin.

Callum looked at her and felt nothing; if he was honest, there was a slight hint of appreciation for her beauty. But she was cold. It was funny that he had not noticed that before. Lynn was warm, hot, fiery with passion, something that came out in every pore.

"Where is the actress?"

"Out of town." He went to fetch her drink automatically and realized he did not want her in his space. He had been a fool before when he saw her at the restaurant, which had cost him dearly. Lynn was gone and was not picking up her phone. He could not blame her, but he could be pissed, and he was. He was also scared of losing her.

"And here you are alone, drinking."

"I was about to go over some documents." He had not bothered to change his work clothes and had just removed his jacket and rolled up his sleeves. His hair was tousled as he dragged his fingers through it for the past twenty minutes.

"Darling, you don't look well."

“I am fine.” He walked over to fill up his glass. “What do you want, Bianca?”

“Is that any way to talk to your lover?” She pouted at him and sat with her thighs slightly parted.

“Ex.” He nodded at the parted thighs. “And that’s not going to work. You no longer have that effect on me, something I had to find out when you came back to the States. I am in love with her.” The declaration out loud stunned him.

He had been shying away from putting a name to what he was feeling, and now that it was out, he felt his heart racing. “Oh Christ!” he whispered shakily. “I am in love with her.”

“You don’t know what you are saying.”

He laughed and tossed back the rest of the drink. “I am sorry, Bianca, but you have to go. I have work to do.”

“I am not leaving until I make you come to your senses.” She told him coolly. “You loved me-”

“I thought I did. I was obsessed with you, with who I thought you were. Your classic beauty, your flagrant disregard for anyone but yourself. You intrigued me, and I was dazzled.”

He smiled at her. “But it was not love. What I feel for Lynn is the real thing.” He pressed a hand to his heart. “I have to find her and tell her how I feel. I might have some groveling, but I am okay with that.”

“You are a fool,” Bianca said furiously as she rose. “Here I am offering you me, and you are turning me down. Well, I am never one to be where I am not wanted.”

Callum saw her to the door and, anticipating her move, stepped back when she would have flung herself into his arms.

“I had to try.” She told him sulkily when he took her arm and nudged her out.

“I know.” He smiled at her and nodded. “Goodbye, Bianca.”

“I am staying here for a few more weeks-”

“I will not be seeing you again.”

“We’ll see. I cannot believe you are in love with that woman.”

“I am.” Shutting the doors behind her, he leaned against it and closed his eyes. Pushing away, he returned to the living room to pick up his phone. She had not called him back, not even as much as sent a message. He redialed her number and listened as her voice came on. “It’s Lynn, you know what to do.’

“Lynn, I am past pissed now. If you don’t call me back, I will - Christ! I have no idea what the hell I am going to do. Where are you, darling? Please call me and let me make this right. I have been a fool. I-” The recorder came on just then, cutting off his call.

Hanging up the phone, he stalked to the cabinet, intent on pouring another drink. Shaking his head, he returned to get his phone and called Jason again.

“I have not heard from her. Harassing me is not going to make a difference.”

“Aren’t you concerned?”

“My sister can take care of herself.”

“What if something happens to her?” The frustration in his voice was thick.

“I am assuming there are hospitals or health centers wherever she goes. I know Lynn, and if she is bent on being by herself, she will take the time. And if she doesn’t want to be found, you will not find her.”

“We will see about that.”

## Chapter 10

A week had passed, and he still had no word from her. By the time he came around, he felt like he was leaving his mind. His assistant felt the brunt of his anger and frustration, and several attempts from Bianca to contact him had been denied.

He did not want to see her. She had inadvertently caused this rift between him and Lynn, and he could not even look at her.

It was late in the afternoon on Friday that he received an email from her. She had sent it to his inbox, and he recalled giving her a card with his information. His heart quickened, and he was about to open it when Barrington entered the room.

“What is it?”

“The call from Japan.”

“I cannot deal with that right now.”

“There is a crisis with the import/export division of the trading company-”

“And you are my assistant for a reason. I pay you an enormous sum of money to handle things like that. Go and do what I pay you to do.”

“Of course.” The man bowed and left the room, closing the doors behind him.

Taking a deep breath, he clicked on the message and felt the desperation and anger surfacing.

“Callum, I have received your messages and heard from Jason that you are trying to contact me. There is no Internet where I am, and I prefer it this way. I just went into town today to send off some messages and to tell you to stop contacting me.

What we had was very passionate, and I will always treasure it. But it’s over. We were foolish to think that it would have worked between us.

I saw you with Bianca Bellacort at the restaurant, and it is evident that you two have a history together. You should go back to her and try to make it work. Anyway, I am unavailable for a relationship and want to concentrate on my career. I hope this is not going to affect the business side of things. Sincerely yours - Lynn.”

He read the mail twice and felt the anger burning through his gut. She was leaving him, breaking up with him via a damn email. Not even a phone call because she did not want to get personal. Well, she can just think again. He was not going to let her get away with it.

With a set look on his face, he pressed reply.

“That is not acceptable. I made a damn mistake, and yes, there was something between Bianca and I, unresolved feelings, and I should have taken the time to explain them to you before.

I have not been with her, and dammit, Lynn, I am not going to accept that you are through with me. I need to see you to touch you, for Christ’s sake, and if you think I am just going to sit back and allow you to leave, then you have another guess coming.’

He did not bother to add a conclusion but just pressed send and hoped she was in whatever internet cafe so she could read. Where the hell was she? It had been a week - seven days that felt like a month.

Pushing back his chair, he lunged to his feet. He was going to find her and make love to her until she was too weak to stand. And he was going to impregnate her. When she was carrying his child, she would never entertain the thought of leaving him. He would see to it.

By God, he missed her. The ache inside his chest was spreading, and he felt as if he could not breathe. How could he think he had feelings for Bianca? How could he have been so damn stupid?

With a drink in hand, he prowled the length of the office from the cabinet to the desk. He could not mess up; he had finally found someone who meant the world to him and could not lose her. He was not going to.

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“Are you sure about this?” Jason demanded.

“I already sent him an email, and yes, I want you to go to my place and return the things he bought me.” Lynn passed a hand at the back of her neck. She was tucked into the corner booth of an internet café where the latte was reasonably good and the raspberry crumble stupendous.

It was a tiny town with quaint little stores and snow dripping off the various roofs. It made for a beautiful picture. She should feel at peace. She should be getting ahead and getting him out of her head.

“The guy has been calling to ask if I spoke to you. Darling, I cannot believe I am saying this, but he seems genuinely suffering.”

“I don’t care.” Lowering her voice, she continued. “It was a mistake, something that should have never started.” She shook her head.

“Where are you?”

“Somewhere beautiful.” She looked out as a mother, and her toddler sloshed through the snow that had been shoveled to the sidewalk. The tiny clutch in her heart as she looked at the child did not surprise her.

For the past week, she had been thinking about a child, his child, which was foolish. She had read his reply and had not bothered responding. What would be the point?

“I thought you did not have an internet connection? It must be in the middle of nowhere.”

“I am in town or what passes for one, and it snowed last night. Oh, Jace, you should see how white and virginal everything is!”

“You sound like you are planning on staying.”

“No. As much as I love the place, I will return home.”

“When?”

“I have a week left. Jack gave me a new play to read, and I have some books on my Kindle. Remember how I used to love reading?”

“You were voracious at it.” He said wryly.

“I was. And I have not had the time to do so. I am taking walks, yes, in the snow and communing with nature.”

“It sounds like you have been in nowhere for too long.”

She laughed at that. “I am fine.”

“And I don’t believe I should be the one to send back those things to Hammond. I will leave you to do it when you get back. You are going to have to face him, Lynn.”

“I know.” She said with a sigh. “I know. And you are right, it should be me. I should be the one to send them back to him.”

“Are you okay?”

“I am getting there. How are you?”

“Fine. Come back home soon.”

Hanging from him, she cupped her hands around the cup to absorb the warmth. It had been impulsive and heady and wonderful while it lasted. Callum Hammond knows how to treat a lady; no wonder he was so popular with the opposite sex.

She had been dazzled by the attention and the lavish gifts. Not that she was materialistic or anything like that. She loved beautiful things, of course, and over the years had been able to afford to buy them for herself.

But his wealth was way above anything she was used to. He entertained kings and politicians and made million-dollar deals daily. He was powerful and arrogant. She

had devoured articles about him and was astounded at the vast holdings of his company.

Oil wells in Texas, a small charter company his company had taken over, were now yielding profit. Apartment buildings, townhouses, a cruise line, an island in the Caribbean, a vineyard in Tuscany, flats in London - her head was pretty spinning when she read his bio.

The man was a force to be reckoned with, and she had fooled herself into thinking she could hold his interest for long. He had talked pretty, had her believing his words and his promises, had sucked her in with his expert lovemaking, and now she was finding it difficult to sleep without him.

Staring at the pie, she pushed the plate away and realized she was not hungry. Finishing the latte, she paid the bill and went on her way.

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He would spend the weekend at the club, he decided. She had not responded to his email, and his calls were unanswered. He thought grimly that The woman knew how to hold onto a grudge.

Well, he was going to his club for the weekend and trying to regroup. There were always things going on there. He would bury himself in the various activities and decide what to do afterward. He had to do something as he felt like he was going mad.

And he would not call her again. A man has his pride, after all. He had been reaching out to her for days and only received one response telling him it was over. They will just see about that. She was going to have to come home sometime. She had a show to do.

The billboards were up advertising the resumption of the play at the end of the month. If he had to resort to blackmail, then so be it. He would not slink into a corner and go away just because she said he should. He was in



love with her for the first time in his blessed life, and he was going to fight.

He had made a mistake, and she would allow him to fix it. If he had to camp out at the theater or her place to get her to talk to him, that's precisely what he would do.

Damn stubborn woman! He was going to get through to her, somehow, to get her to see that he was serious. He would catch her alone at her place and make love to her until she was forced to acknowledge him. Scrubbing his hands over his face, he sat on the edge of the bed and stared at the slip of material next to him.

She had left some things behind, and he had been sleeping with her panties, a pair of black lace with a tiny red bow at the front.

He had been sleeping with it under his pillows like a lovesick moron. But it was the only thing that steadied him and allowed him some sort of peace. It had touched her skin, and since she was not near him for him to feel her, this would have to suffice.

Picking up the material, he brought it to his nose and inhaled her scent. "Where the bloody hell are you?" He whispered hoarsely. "I need you so damn much.

Please come back to me, Lynn. God, I want to hold you in my arms and hear the sound of your laughter. Dammit, I want to apologize for being so stupid. Please come back to me." Taking a deep shuddering breath, he packed the panties away into the overnight case he was carrying with him and readied himself to leave.

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She took long walks. It was cold, and it had snowed again last night, the white powder covering everything in sight, the starkness of it almost hurting the eyes. The sky had cleared, going from the ominous grayness of the clouds to the brilliant blue sky. The sun had come out, a watery version struggling to melt the piles of snow on the ground.

It had not turned to ice yet, which was very good. She shoved her hands into her thick jacket's pockets; Lynn felt like an Eskimo, covered from head to foot as she was. And even so, she could feel the iciness sliding across her face. The wind picked up speed, weaving through the stark branches and sending snow clumps to the ground.

She had brought her Kindle and the script Jason had forced on her when she told him she was leaving. She had tried reading to dull her senses and make her forget, but it had not worked.

She was in love with him. Hunching her shoulders in defense, she finally brought it to the forefront of her brain. It was something she had been avoiding ever since she met him.

She had fallen in love with him, a fact that she had wanted to avoid. Skirting around a fallen branch heavy with snow, she made her way towards a stream that had been frozen, the ice reflecting the rays of the watery sun.

She would get over him; she was determined and would not allow this to ruin her life. She had her career. It was ridiculous for her to be pining over the man and wishing that she was carrying his baby. It had to be something he said.

"I want a child with you. Not now, of course, because I want to spend time with you. But eventually, I would like you to bear my child."

She could hear his deep voice inside her head as if he were standing beside her. She had reread his email and thought about deleting it. She still thinks she should. Taking a shuddering breath, she returned to the cabin and forced herself to eat.

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He was certainly not in the mood for conversation, and with that in mind, he had gone straight into the card room

after having his bag taken to the room he would be occupying later tonight.

How strange to think he was a member of such an exclusive club as this one. The Elite Club had members ranging from princes to politicians, all with one thing in common: their deep pockets.

He never thought he would be interested in such frivolity as he liked to think of it as a member of the Elite Club. Indeed, a few years back, he would have been denied entry because of his background.

He was not from old money as several of the members were. He was a self-made billionaire, and that would have made the difference. But things had changed or evolved, he did not know which, and now he was rubbing shoulders with royalty, a few of whom he even considered friends.

He had visited Alexander while he was in Spain; the man had even married his mother's admin assistant of all the things to do.

Love had charted the course and taken over as it was with most of the club members. Liam Moses, whose blood was as blue as they came, had fallen in love with a former con artist, and the man was still besotted. There were so many others like him.

Adam Whitmore had caused a scandal when he fell in love with an enemy of the family. The stories surrounding them would make for entertainment on the small screen.

The room where the card game was being held was supposed to be a non-smoking area, but that was ignored, and the smoke filtering around made the room thick with shadows and the scent of expensive tobacco.

The game was intense, the expressions of the various players sober, with some going for neutral and not entirely pulling it off. It was a high-stakes game, with lots of money involved, monies that would, of course, go to some charity.

Callum did not mind it one bit. The 'wives' of the club members had all sorts of dealing with. Leesa Wellington and Kelly Takahashi were the women responsible for most of them. And those two women were like typhoons when it came to fighting for various causes.

"I am folding." David Snyder put his hand down with a resigned expression on his face. He and his wife and children had made their home in France, where he headed the business.

"So am I," Adam said after a few minutes. "I am completely wiped out. Amber is going to kick my wonderful ass for losing all this money."

"I am sure she will turn around and kiss it after." Liam Moses gave him an amused look.

"I might have to be the one to do the kissing." Adam glanced over at Callum. "You have been raking in all of the winnings, my friend. Want to tell us your secret?"

"I don't have a wife to kick my ass, and I believe in concentrating on the game. Full house." He fanned his cards out and had the others groaning in defeat. "Why don't I assuage your pride by springing for drinks? My treat."

"Of course, it would be since you cleaned us out," Liam told him mildly.

Pushing back the chairs, the men rose and left the table littered with the cards, various chips, and cigars smoldering in crystal ashtrays to make their way into the dining area a few feet away.

The signature colors of gold and blue could be seen in the drapes covering the windows, the carpet on the floor, and the dining room chairs. Bypassing the tables set for the morning meals, the men made their way to the bar. The staff were few at this time of the night as most of the members had turned in for the night.

Classical music was filtered into the room courtesy of the excellent sound system in various places, hidden from

sight. The men took their seats and were served with an efficiency that was the club's trademark. Nursing his bourbon, Callum looked around the vast room with a slight smile touching his lips.

"What's going on with you?" David's voice jarred him from reverie and brought him back to earth.

"This place." His eyes swung to David. "You were born a member."

The other man's brows lifted as he sipped his drink. "I guess you could say that. Generations of Synder's were members."

"Because of the name." Callum flicked a glance at the others. "That includes Adam and Liam."

"I guess so," David murmured as he looked at the other men involved in a lively discussion about some racehorses they own. "What brought that on?"

"Just thinking how things have changed."

"Membership in the very distant past had only been extended to men, and those men had to be established - old money, so to speak."

"Membership is still extended to men."

"But the difference is - our wives have now become a significant part of the goings on. Most of the functions are arranged by them; from what I gathered, that would not have been the case before."

"Hmm." Callum sipped the drink and felt the emptiness inside his chest. He thought coming here for the weekend would have made him feel marginally better, but it did not. And David's next question only made it worse.

"I thought you were seeing some actress? Lynn Peterson."

The sound of her name had his heart twisting inside his chest. "I am."

“Where is she?”

“Out of town.” Tossing back the drink, he slammed the glass down and rose. “I am turning in.”

David looked at the other two men. “I think I just put my foot in my mouth.”

“It seems to be a constant condition with you,” Liam said mildly as they watched Callum leave the room. “I hear that Bianca Bellacort is in town.”

“Ah.” David shook his head at that. “That explains it.”

As soon as he entered his room, he sprung for another drink and locked the door behind him. There was no appreciation for the lovely decor as he walked right over to the cabinet and made his selection.

A headache was brewing, and he recalled not eating much at supper. His appetite was non-existent, and there was a funny hollow in the pit of his stomach.

Taking the drink with him, he went to stand by the window, staring blindly out at the encroaching darkness, the glitter of snow on the trees and covering the various bushes. Bracing a hand on the window frame, he sipped the drink, his mind drifting to her as usual.

The lovemaking that had blown him out of the water, the feel of her against him. Was she thinking of him? Because he was undoubtedly - could certainly not think of anything else but her. And it was time to stop thinking and do something about it.

## Chapter 11

By the time the week had rolled in, he was fit to be tied. He had sent out searchers for her, to no avail. It was as if she had vanished off the face of the earth. On Wednesday, he took matters into his own hands and saw her brother.

“Is he in?” He asked without preamble as he stepped into the building and was shown to the offices by the receptionist.

“Yes. He is in conference with a client-”

“I will wait.” He told the woman, determination stamped on his handsome face. He was dicking around. He had spent the last week and a half in pure, unadulterated hell, not able to sleep or eat or concentrate on work, and he was not going to stand for it any longer.

He was going to find him, and God help her when he did that. She was punishing him, and he was pissed.

“Mr. Hammond?”

“Yes?”

“Jason will see you now.’ She inclined an elegant head towards the closed door, and rising, he ignored the invitation in her large dark brown eyes as he strode towards the door and pushed it open.

“You should have called.”

“I was just in the neighborhood.” Shoving his hands into his ash-gray dress pants pockets, he rocked back on his heels and took in the small, competent-looking office.

“Nice.”

“I am sure it’s a shack compared to yours.” Jason stood behind his desk.

“A shack would not be the word I would use.” His eyes tracked over to the man who looked enough like the woman who had him twisted into knots to have him feeling the ache even more. “Where the hell is she?”

“You already asked me that, I believe, twice already, and I am giving you the same answer. I don’t know.”

“Why don’t I believe you?”

“It does not matter what you believe. I happen to be telling you the truth.” Jason picked up a file and then put it back down. He had a consult in a few minutes and needed a clear head. He certainly did not have time for this.

“She called me once and told me that she had made a mistake and that the thing between you was over.” He saw the flicker of pain before it was expertly masked.

“She discussed us - our relationship with you?”

“She is my sister. And it appears you were seeing an old flame.”

“Past history,” He said dismissively.

“She does not think so. Look, my sister is strong-headed and determined. You swept her off her feet, and afterward, you showed interest in someone else. I have seen Bianca Bellacort’s photos, and I must admit, she is out of this world beautiful. If you showed the slightest interest in her and my sister saw that, she would step back.”

“I made a damn mistake.”

“Did you sleep with her?”

“That’s none of your damn business.”

“Lynn is my sister, and I warned her about you, so yes, it is my business.”

Callum glared at him and struggled with his anger. “I am in love with your sister.” Lifting a hand, he passed it over his hair, and it struck Jason that what he saw was a man twisted up into knots, and it showed.

“You need to tell her that.”

“I cannot exactly say it to her in an email; she has not responded to my last one. She is punishing me



needlessly.”

“I don’t think she would see it as a punishment. She is taking a step back.”

“Which need not be.” Callum bit off an oath as he dragged his fingers through his hair. “I am not giving up. I can’t. You don’t know where she is?”

“No. I really don’t. And I am guessing that your investigators could not find anything.”

Callum’s eyes flared at that, and he was not surprised that the man knew the length he had gone to find her. “No, they did not.” Walking over to the window, he looked out at the streets below, the traffic crawling along and zipping whenever there was a break.

He had driven himself and was supposed to be on his way to a meeting. He had hit another dead end again, and he could feel the frustration eating away at him.

The desolation was like a cloak he had been wearing far too long. He was aching for her, and it was not going away.

“If you hear from me, I hope you will contact me immediately.” Turning from the window, he looked at Jason. “Tell her that I am determined as hell, too.” With that, he walked out, leaving Jason staring after him.

A smile touched his lips. “Oh, sis, I think you have bitten off much more than you can chew.”

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She was back on Friday afternoon and called Jason the minute she arrived.

“I am on my way home. Let me swing by.”

“You don’t need to.”

“I have to. We need to talk. Have you had supper?”

“Not yet. I just arrived and did not think to pick anything up.”

“I will pick up Chinese. See you in a few.”

Turning a circle in her bedroom, she felt she had been gone for months instead of two weeks. She wanted to take this time to mellow out and prepare for rehearsals tomorrow. She was not going to call Jack and have him harass her, and she was sure he would have all sorts of questions for her.

Putting away her bags, she stripped off her worn clothes and took a quick shower. She would have to go to the salon and have Theresa do a deep condition for her hair.

Dragging on a pair of old leggings and a bulky sweater, she passed the brush through the somewhat tangled strands and headed downstairs. It was cold enough for her to put the kettle on and make some tea.

As soon as she did, she heard the door lock disengaging and hurried out to greet her brother. Her smile faded as she looked past him to the tall man behind him.

“Hate me all you want, but he has been hounding me for news of you.”

Thrusting the bag with carry out into her hands, he stepped back and allowed Callum entry. Turning on her heels, she entered the kitchen to turn off the flames.

“Is that all I am going to get?” The deep voice still had the power to make her weak.

“I will have words with my brother later, but for now, I want you to leave.” She told him stiffly.

“Not going to happen.” Leaning against the door jamb, he let his hungry gaze wander over her face, settling on her lips. He wanted to drag her into his arms and simply devour them. But he would have to control himself a little longer and owed her brother a debt of gratitude.

“I don’t want to see you. I already told you it’s over.”

“And I refuse to accept that.” He did not move, but she could feel his presence so vividly, like he was touching her. “I want to explain-”

“I don’t want to hear.”

“Dammit, Lynn, please listen to me.”

Turning her back on him, she went to get a cup and a bottle of honey and set about making tea. “I thought something was there and wanted to figure things out. I went to lunch with her, that’s it.

We discussed old times, and then I realized I did not feel anything for her. You were gone when I was ready to explain it to you. you made me suffer.” Now, he was easing away from the door jamb and coming towards her, and she was not sure she could stand his nearness.

“Please don’t touch me.”

“How can I not?” Taking the steaming cup from her, he clamped his hands at her throat, feeling the unsteady beat of her pulse. “I tore the place up looking for you.” His thumbs pressed the hollow of her throat.

“I hassled your brother, including that playwright fellow, for news about you. I have been unable to sleep, eat, or concentrate on business because I yearned for you.”

“I don’t care.” She muttered, but she was not relatively steady.

“I don’t believe you.”

“You hurt me!” She flung at him. “You pushed for a relationship and refused to take no for an answer, and as soon as that bitch walked back into your life, you ignored me. Let me go, Callum. Just leave me alone.”

“No.” His face was harsh and intense, his voice strained.

“I was confused, but it only took one meeting to realize it was over between us - Bianca and I. “When she came to the loft-” His voice petered off at the look on her face.

“Nothing happened, dammit. She wanted to talk, and I let her in. She talked, and I showed her the door.”

“I don’t care.” She repeated. “I do not want to be in a relationship with a man like you. You have been with many women, and I would be afraid that one of them -

that your past will come knocking again. You asked her to marry her.”

“Yes,” he said urgently. “I did, and she turned me down.” His grip tightened. “I am in love with you-”

“You are not.”

“Please.” His voice was weary, his face shadowed with it. “Don’t insult me by dismissing what I just said. Be angry with me, hurl insults at me, but don’t do that. I am in love with you, and I know it will take some time for you to forgive me, but I am here and not going anywhere.”

“I can’t.”

“You can.” He shook her, eyes darkening. “I am not leaving Lynn, and if I have to darken your doorstep and follow you to the theater, then that’s what I will do.”

“I need time.”

His mouth tightened. “Then take the damn time, but in doing so, I am going to be here.”

Closing her eyes briefly, she fought him, and he knew it. Watching her struggling to resist him, he did what he set out to do. Moving his hands from her throat, he cupped the back of her head and lifted her face to his. Her eyes flickered open, widening as his head descended.

She made a token resistance, but it was already too late. It was just a faint brush of his lips on hers, a mingling breath, but it had her weak at the knees. Callum held back - he wanted to ravish her; it had been too long, but he was going to take his time.

To give her time to draw back if she needed to. Her hands curled into his sweater, and she could feel the warmth of his skin. The familiarity- the flexing of his chest had her quivering. Her lips parted slightly, giving him access to her mouth, and still he hesitated. If he deepened the kiss, it was going to be too late for him to take and keep control.

The sweetness of her breath, the addictive taste of her that he had had to do without for two weeks, made his heart hammer inside his throat, his bones waxing liquid. His hands gentled, moving over her shoulders and down her back until he was tugging at the ends of her sweater with the aching need to feel her flesh.

When he lifted the sweater to touch her skin, he felt himself staggering, his heart picking up speed. "I need you." His eyes had darkened, the powerful desire naked on his face. "Now. We can resolve our differences later, but I need you now.

Let me feel you. Christ!" He cupped her face. "Put me out of my misery darling, just -" He kissed her again, his tongue darting into her mouth, the kiss taking on a wildness that swept through them, over them like a tidal wave.

Lynn clung to him, fingers digging into his chest and shoulders before linking behind his neck. Her body molded to his, pressing against his with an urgency that he met. He crushed her to him, the familiar curves making him giddy with incredible need.

He had the urge to drag her down to the floor and sink himself into her like a rutting animal. Appalled at the lack of control she and only she could drag from him, he ended the kiss and stumbled back, breathing like a man on his last lap after a very hectic marathon.

His eyes were blazing, his body shuddering as he fought to regain control. Without a word, he turned on his heels, and she heard when he bounded up the stairs.

She leaned back against the counter and took several deep breaths to steady herself. She was moist, and she was trembling. And if she did not give herself to him, she would not make it through the night.

She ensured the door was locked, the alarm engaged and went up the stairs. He was already undressed, the light from the lamp she had turned on glowing on his tanned nakedness. He was standing in the middle of the

room, his erection impressive and making her hot all over.

“Come here.”

She did, stopping just short of melting into his arms.

“I want to take it slow, but it has been so damn long.” He undressed her, taking the time to kiss the exposed skin. The sweater was flung carelessly on the board floor.

His voice hummed in his throat at the lack of a bra. His hands came up to cup her generous breasts; his throat dried as he stared at the nipples he had dreamed about so many nights.

“My boots.” She moved away from him to remove them and wriggled out of her leggings. His heart raced as he approached her, shaking his head when she would have straightened against the pillows.

“Not yet.” Parting her thighs, he knelt between them, hands spanning her waist. “You smell wonderful.” His head dipped, and her body arched as he took a nipple into his mouth to tease, just a light stroking of his tongue against the flesh. Her hands gripped his muscled shoulders as she arched against him.

Pulling the tight bud into his mouth, he swirled his tongue around the flesh before suckling. He tried to take it slow, take his time, but the cries coming from her only served to increase his passion.

Fingers digging into her waist, he loved her nipple thoroughly until she was a trembling mass of nerves and emotions. Switching to the other one, he gave it the same treatment until she was maddened with longing.

Pushing her back, his mouth traveled down her quivering stomach, taking little bites out of the flesh until she was thrashing against the sheets. When he touched his mouth to her clitoris, she became delirious with need.

Using his fingers to part the folds of her pussy, he lifted his head to look at her as he slowly and ruthlessly destroyed her senses. Watching the climax claim her

sent his blood sizzling inside his body and almost undid him.

Bending her legs at the knees, he entered her slowly, eyes still holding hers. Gritting his teeth as she closed around him like a greedy fist, he inched in until he was deep inside her, and even then, he had to take a minute.

“Darling.” He gasped as she lifted her legs to clamp around his waist. “My sweet.” Bending, he claimed her lips in a kiss that almost blew him away.

He moved then, the thrusts becoming even more demanding as she moved with him. She came again, her cries echoing around the room, fingers digging into his taut buttocks as she met his thrusts with desperate ones.

Wrenching his mouth from hers, he called out her name - over and over as he shot his load inside her. Even when he was finished, he could not move, his heart hammering inside his chest like a jackhammer.

Her legs slid off him weakly, her body still trembling. Rolling away, he eased her up against the pillows and settled in next to her, arms coming around to draw her into him.

She stayed there, taking in the scent of his expensive perfume and the sweat covering his body. She brushed her lips against his chest and felt him shudder. Callum closed his eyes and felt himself settling like he had been unable to do since she left.

“Tired, my sweet?” He asked her tenderly.

“A little.” She admitted.

“Want to go and rescue the food downstairs?”

“Not yet.”

“I am spending the night.” A steely inflection in his deep voice warned her not to argue.

“I figured as much.”

“Good.” His hand ran circles up and down her back.  
“would you mind telling me where you went?”

She contemplated refusing to do so, but after what happened between them, she knew she could no longer pretend to be upset with him. “Virginia.” Lifting her head, she looked at him. “A patron has a cabin in Suffolk and said I could use it. It was pretty isolated, and I wanted time to think.”

He smoothed the hairs from her face. “I went crazy when I did not hear from you.”

“You tried to find me.”

He nodded, eyes darkening. “I hounded your brother to find out if he heard from you or if you told him where you were.” his hand cupped her face. “You punished me, Lynn, and I do not appreciate it.”

“I was not trying to. Callum, you looked at her. I saw the expression on your face when you did, and it tore at my heart.” Even now, she could still feel the hurt of it. “And when we got to your place, you were so detached that I knew what was coming. I left to try and get over you.”

“I hurt you, and for that, I am sorry as hell. I thought something was there and wanted to sort it out before I said anything to you. I did ask her to marry me twice.” He felt her easing back from him and did not allow it.

“No.’ he shook his head. “I want it out in the open, in front of us. I was dazzled by her. She was out of my league, or so I told myself. She was the sister to a minor prince, but a prince nonetheless, and she was beautiful.

She was an intriguing and daring woman and did whatever she wanted. She toyed with me, dangling herself in front of me, promising but never making good of it, and it worked. I wanted her.”

He touched his lips to hers as if the contact steadied him. “But she also did it to several others. I thought I was special, but I was wrong. I also thought my feelings for her were love, but it was not. She was flirtatious and



flighty out of bed, and I started seeing flaws and a selfishness that was not appealing.”

He kissed her again, this time softly, his lips moving over hers with a purpose and gentleness that had her leaning into him. “I had to be certain,” he whispered against her lips, his heart racing. “She is not you, darling. You are the ideal woman, my ideal. I have never felt this way about anyone before.”

He punctuated the words with kisses until she was weak. “You make me vulnerable, scared, and desperate not to lose you.” He kissed her ear, the side of her cheek, and moved down to her neck. “I want to spend the rest of my life with you.”

Pushing her back, he climbed on top of her, the amusement vying with yearning at the surprised look on her beauty as he filled her - hard and pulsing and completely ready.

“See what you do to me.” He moved slightly, fingers caressing her throat, stopping where the pulse was beating madly. “I am hooked. Completely hooked, and I do not mind a bit. Tell me you are, too.”

“I am.” She whispered, her fingers curled into his chest. “Oh, Callum.”

“I love it when you say my name. So damn much.” And he proceeded to show her.

## Chapter 12

“Marry me.” He was tireless as if he was making up for the past two weeks when he was not with her. She felt drugged, her limbs lax and nerveless. He had barely given them time to recover from the about of lovemaking before he was at it again.

She felt as if she had imbibed wine and a combination of drugs, but she was not so far gone that she would agree to his proposal.

“No.” She whispered, limbs trembling as he moved back up to her breasts.

“Why not?”

“We need time.” Easing out a breath, she slapped a hand on his chest. “Stop that.”

“I want to know why you will not marry me.” He was blowing on her nipple and sending quivers all over her body.

“We need time.” She repeated.

Abandoning his pleasant task, he propped his head on his hand and gave her an assessing look. Her hair was spread over the pillows, her dark brown eyes slumberous. Her lips were swollen, and he had never seen a more seductive woman. His woman, he thought fiercely. “I am still being punished.”

“If you like.”

His eyes darkened at that. “What is it going to take?”

“Time.” She repeated. “For me to believe that this is something we both want.”

A frown pleated his brow. “I want to marry you, so that leaves you.”

“Then it is me.” Pushing herself up against the pillows, she tugged at the sheets, but he was lying on them and refused to budge. “We do this right by going out and getting to know each other.”

He placed a hand on her flat stomach. "Even now, you might be carrying my seed."

She had thought of that and realized that she did not mind. "That's a possibility."

"And that is not going to make you change your mind?"

"You think I do not want to marry you?" She threw up her hands in exasperation. "I happen to be in love with you. I-" She gasped when he sat up and gripped her face between his hands.

"What did you say?"

"I said I am in love with you." She smiled at him tremulously. "That's one of the reasons why I decided to leave, to get my head on straight."

"And I am in love with you." He said hoarsely. "I already told you that. We are in love with each other, so there should be no impediment to us tying the knot."

"We get to know each other." She told him firmly.

"Lynn-"

"No." She shook her head. "I am not going to be swayed. I have to deal with the women from your past, and I can live with the fact that you had a past. So did I, even though it is not as lurid as yours." She gave him a slight smile.

"You slipped up once and caused me unimaginable hurt, and I can still feel it here." She pressed a hand to her chest where her heart was beating unsteadily. "I am not prepared to go through that again. We are going to take it slow-"

"At least come and live with me."

"No."

"Why the hell not?" The frustration was sharp in his deep voice.

"I need my space."

His expression turned blank, and she could feel him withdrawing mentally.

“I see.” Letting go of her face, he swung his legs off the bed.

“Callum-”

“What do you have to drink here?”

“Nothing. Please come back to bed.”

“Why? I thought you needed space.”

“You know that is not what I meant.”

“Then pray. Tell me what you mean.” He had come back and was sitting on the edge of the bed, his expression neutral.

“You don’t have to sound so patronizing.” She threw up her hands in exasperation. “You are very visible, and I am beginning to be that way too. I just want us to maintain our separate places for now.” A smile crossed her lips.

“I am old-fashioned enough to want the guy I am seeing to come and pick me up and take me out. And meet me at the door with a kiss. It might sound foolishly romantic, but that is what I want.”

He studied her for a minute, his expression inscrutable.

“I am thirty-five years old. In two months, I am going to be thirty-six-“

“Your birthday is in March; mine is in April.”

“I already knew that. I want a family, Lynn; I never thought of it before or felt this urgency to be with the woman I love and start that family.” He took her hand in his. “I respect the need for you to want to be courted, and I will do my best to see that it happens. But hopping from my place to yours is a complete waste of time.”

Lifting her hand, he kissed her knuckles. “I want you in my bed every night. I want to wake up with you every morning to see your hair spread over my pillows. Talk

about my day and listen to yours. Is that too much to ask?"

She was melting at his words and realized with a pang that she also needed that. "I do." She whispered.

"Then say those words to me in front of witnesses." His expression became pleading. "I need you in my life."

"And I feel the same way. I just want you to be certain." Her hand tightened on his when she felt him easing away. "Please, darling, I am just asking for this. We go out together and sit down to dinners, be seen at functions, that sort of thing."

"How long?" He asked her stiffly.

"A few months. That's all I am asking."

"And in the meantime, what do we do about the sleeping arrangement?"

"We alternate."

"I work late most evenings."

"And I am in rehearsals for most of the day. I will come to you if you are running late. Compromise darling, I am willing to make it."

He was silent for so long that, at first, she thought he would reject the idea.

"All right. fine, we will do it your way for now." He agreed grudgingly.

"Thank you."

"If it is becoming a problem—"

"It won't." She interrupted swiftly.

"If it does, I will insist on a different arrangement."

"Fair enough. Now, would you please come back to bed?"

He stared at her for another minute before sliding in next to her.

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“It’s so good to have you back, and you have a bunch of mail. Darling, you should look into getting an assistant.” Jack eyed her closely.

“The break seems to have done you a world of good.” He followed her into the dressing room and made himself comfortable. “I see that lover boy has found you. Is everything good?” He settled himself into the small sofa and crossed his legs.

“Yes. It is.” She frowned at the bulky envelope and tore through it. “It’s from the same person.”

“The one who has been sending you those adorable letters over the past few months. How sweet.”

“This one is not that friendly.” She scanned it, a frown touching her brow. “He or she is getting pretty nasty. Listen to this: ‘I thought you were clean and pure and all about your career. I have admired you since you started and followed your career, and you have not disappointed me, except recently.’”

Callum Hammond is a ruthless tycoon who does not care who he hurts as long as he gets what he wants. How could you disappoint me so Lynn? I expected better of you.” She looked over at Jack. “And it goes on to say that I should get rid of him or else.”

“You should report it to the police.” Jack shifted from his comfortable position and leaned forward. “It sounds like a threat.”

“I am sure it’s harmless.”

“Who are those from?” He gestured to the rest of the letters in her hand.

“From the same person, at least three more.”

“Open them.”

She did and started reading. “More of the same drivel. I am light and have hooked up with darkness, and Callum will only tamp out my incredible light.”

“He or she sounds unhinged. Are you going to tell him?”

“No.” She shook her head and shoved the letter into the envelope. “He is just going to overreact.”

“You should tell him.”

“If I get anything like this again, I will. In the meantime, we have a show to look forward to.”

“And what a show it will be.” Jack clapped his hands enthusiastically. “You are going to surprise your audience by singing. I bet your man friend does not know you have a wonderful set of lungs.”

“I intend to surprise him.” She said with a smile, putting the content of the letters behind her.

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Alton Cosgrove was an unassuming man with pasty white skin, receding sandy brown hair, and unremarkable hazel eyes. He lived in his mother’s basement and was always shy around people, especially women. His one encounter with the female sex had been in community college, and it had been a complete disaster.

He had been unable to perform when it was time, and the girl had laughed at him and whispered to her friends. It had been humiliating for him, and after that, he kept to himself.

He had graduated, not exactly first in his class, but he was very good at computers and had been hired by a software company nearby. He kept to himself, never socializing. He went to work and returned home, sometimes picking up takeout when his mother was too busy to cook. They did not get along much because she always picked on him.

“Alton, get yourself a girlfriend, why don’t you?” Or: “Alton, why can’t you be more like Sherry’s son, who has a very active social life?”. But he considered himself to be pure and chosen by the Lord.

He was very religious, even though he never attended services (he did not care to associate himself with those self-righteous people!). Even though he did not participate in services, he read his Bible every night and wore out his knees praying to the Lord.

And he loved the arts of every kind. On his days off, he would take in a show at the theater and visit the art galleries and museums.

He had considered it fate when he happened to wander into the Langley Theater and was treated to a performance by Lynn Peterson. She had dazzled him, struck him blind and dumb, and he had found himself sitting on the edge of his seat as he stared at her.

She was a natural icon and deserved to be placed on a pedestal. She was also the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, and he had been struck by love from that point. There was nothing sexual about his feelings for her, of course.

She was as clean and pure to him as the blessed Virgin Mary. She had given him a purpose and a new lease on life; from then on, he had never missed her performance. He read everything about her and knew her more than anyone else.

He had her pictures, one that he had cut from the magazine, the playbills announcing her performances, and one that she had signed when he had gotten the chance to go backstage to meet her. He had touched her hand and found that she had the softest skin. It had taken him a week to wash her touch off his skin.

She had replaced the spot in his heart for the blessed virgin, and he held her in the highest esteem and admiration until he read that she was hooked up with that - that man—that multi-billionaire monster who was considered to be a corporate raider powered by greed.

How could she be so pure, beautiful, and utterly talented and fall for his lies? He had raged inside his small space, cut up her pictures in a fit of anger, and refused to see



her performance for a week. But then it came to him. It was not her; that man had swayed her with his looks and money. It had settled him some.

He was still angry with her for falling for someone like him, but she was only human; even someone like her was allowed to fall from grace. He would give her another chance, another attempt to redeem herself. With that in mind, he started piecing the papers together, the ones he had ripped apart in his anger.

After he was through, he knelt beside his narrow bed and, folding his hands, started praying.

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Lynn had never been so damn nervous in her life. She had been doing this for almost six years, was used to the sweats before the performance, and had a way in which she would deal with the nerves.

Jack had told her long ago that she should picture everyone in the audience in their underwear, but she had chosen to do something different. She would show them seated around a campfire eating s'mores and exchanging stories, and somehow, it had worked.

But tonight, it was different. She was just back from a two-week hiatus, and the play was a new one where she was going to be required to sing, something she had not done since she started. And the place was packed.

Callum and Jason would be at the front, looking at her. She was in love with a man and told him she was. She was also practically living with him, and the papers were excited about their budding romance.

She was facing a lot of pressure and could feel the nerves coming on.

"These arrived for you." In his usual dramatic style, Jack swept into her dressing room and put the box of stunning yellow and white roses on the table.

"There is a note." With no thought of impropriety, he opened it and read. 'I have no doubt you will be

wonderful as usual. I love you.' "Isn't that sweet?" He sighed, plucking a stalk from the bunch and sniffing it. "This also came for you." He handed her a smaller box.

"Why aren't you going to open it?"

Her sarcasm was lost on him, of course, as he grinned and shook his head.

Rolling her eyes, she opened the box to reveal some expensive chocolates and a note.

"I have decided to forgive you, Lynn, but I am praying that you come to your senses and dump that man.' I love you." Putting the cover back on, she shoved it towards him. "Please get rid of it."

"These are very expensive chocolates. The guy or girl might be a whack job, but they have taste and are your favorite."

"Precisely. Take them away."

"As you wish." He rose and was at the door when it was pushed open.

"Am I allowed to see the star before the performance?"

"Of course you are." Jack gave him a gracious smile before leaving and closing the door behind him.

"Jack should not have spoken for me." Turning away from the mirror, her eyes glinted as she took in the fabulous frame decked in khaki dress pants and a red sweater. "You will make me even more nervous than I already am."

"You are going to do splendidly as usual." He drew her up and into his arms. "Is it acceptable for a guy to kiss his girl before she goes on stage?"

"Well, since you are already here." She leaned into him, her arms coming around his neck. The kiss was slow and soft, an erotic touch of his lips to hers, but it was enough. Enough to make her lean into him, her body pressing against his solid muscular frame as she enjoyed the kiss.

“Christ!” He whispered, ending the kiss reluctantly. His hands framed her face, his expression dazed. “I arranged to have us go to Lenora’s after the show, but I don’t think it’s an excellent idea.”

“We should cancel.”

“My sentiments exactly.” They both turned at the discreet knock on the door.

“You are on in five, Lynn,” Isabel told her with a grin, sliding an appreciative glance at Callum.

“I have to.”

“I will see you out there.” He kissed her again before turning out of the room.

Pressing a hand to her quivering stomach, she sank and tried to get into the role.

In the front row, on the seat specially reserved for him, Callum watched the performance with a spellbound look. She had hinted at a difference in the performance but had not mentioned that she would be singing or could sing.

And oh, could she! She took the stage after bidding her lover goodbye and sat on a padded stool, crooning her loss and pain by putting everything in the song. The words were poignant and incredibly moving.

Callum felt a jolt to his system as he stared at her. Her eyes met his, and the jolt turned into something so profound that he was unaware he was holding his breath. The song ended, and even then, the audience sat there, unable to move. Jerking out of his daze, he rose and started clapping, followed by Jason, seated next to him.

Before long, the entire audience was on their feet, the applause resounding around the vast room. The curtain came down, but that did not stop the cheers and whistles. Flowers - most of them roses, were thrown onto the stage as the cast made countless curtain calls.

One man in the audience watched, eyes burning with fury as Lynn stepped forward during the final curtain and stretched a hand to Callum. His body stiffened, his hands balled into fists as Callum bounded onto the stage and took her into his arms.

The crowd went wild when he framed her face and kissed her right then and there, ignoring the explosion of cameras and the cheers going up. Taking a painful breath, Alton stumbled out of the theater, his throat on fire, his eyes blurry with tears.

She had disappointed him again, broken his heart, and she would pay dearly for that.

He had been prepared to give her a second chance, especially after that stunning performance, but this last act, with her blatantly cavorting in that disgraceful way with that - that despicable man. He was going to have to set plans in place. There was no hope for her, and that was obvious.

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He was fighting to catch his breath, his body still shaking. They had barely made it inside his bedroom before he was on her.

They had not canceled the dinner reservation because Jason and a few friends had wanted to hang out a little longer, but that made the anticipation even more significant. By the time they got to his place, the passion had mounted to impossible proportions.

"I was rough." He finally found his voice.

"So was I." Turning into his arms, she traced the welts on his chest.

"I am considering it my war wounds," he told her with a soft chuckle. "You sing." He was still not over the performance or the awe he felt where she was concerned. Her talent was phenomenal.

"I sing."

“And I am just knowing about it.”

“I am an enigma.” She smiled up at him, feeling well-being settling over her. The lovemaking had been rough and heated, singeing her body and making her heart race out of control, but she enjoyed it immensely. She loved that this powerful and beautiful man was so soft on her. It made her feel tingly inside.

“That you are. Now you will sing to me in bed and the shower.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes. I adore you.”

Her heart picked up speed and felt like it was going to burst.

“I need to sing more often.” She whispered when she could catch her breath.

“I saw you on that stage, and I could barely breathe. I need you in my life, Lynn.”

“You have me.” Desire was crawling inside her again, and she could see it was the same for him. “Always.”

“Good.” Pushing her back against the pillows, he climbed on top, sliding into her slowly. “Because I am never letting you go.”

## Chapter 13

“You own a farm in Montana.”

“I own several farms.” He was delighted at the pleasure on her face when they arrived at the property. The play was on a two-week break, and he had decided to take her away for a week. He could operate his business from a distance and be alone with her. He also hoped to persuade her to at least move in with her.

It had been three weeks since he had asked her, and he figured it was time for them to advance. He knew without a doubt that he wanted her in his life.

“And this one is not a working farm?” The driver had brought in their luggage and had been summarily dismissed.

“Not yet. There is a couple who take care of the property. I alerted them that we were coming, and they made the necessary arrangements.”

“What are you going to do with it?”

“I have not decided yet. Do you like it?”

“From what I can see, yes. I love it.”

“I was planning on getting rid of it, but if you like it-”

“We are not planning on living here, are we?”

“We could come for visits in the summer. And when the children-”

He grinned at her raised brows. They were in the large living room, and a fire blazed in the hearth, giving the place a warm and cozy feel. She had something to tell him, and he would not like it.

“Children. How many are we talking about?”

“I was thinking of four.”

“You are a funny guy.”

“Why don’t we start working on it?” He drew her towards him and was about to persuade her to let them stay right

by the fire when she tugged her hands away.

“It’s quiet.”

“That’s because we are the only ones here.” He watched as she prowled around the room, touching the furniture.

“The Ingels will come if needed. But I want to be alone with you and all the reporters.”

“Yes.” She wandered to the window to see the snow-covered mountains and the ice dripping off the leaves. She felt when he came up behind her.

“What is it?”

“Am I that transparent?”

“To me, you are.” He turned her to face him, a frown creasing his forehead. “if you do not want to be here, I could call the pilot-”

She laughed shakily, her fingers gripping his gold-colored sweater. “I am not sure I can ever get used to that. You just call your pilot to take us to wherever else we want to go.”

“Yes.” His expression was sober. “What is bothering you?”

Blowing out a breath, she pushed out of his arms and went to get her pocketbook. Drawing out the bunch of letters, she handed them to him.

“What’s this?”

“From a fan.” She bit her lip. “At first, they were harmless, notes of appreciation and admiration and nothing more. Then, a few weeks ago, it became more than that.”

She watched as he opened one and read swiftly and then read the more recent ones, his frown deepening.

“You have been receiving these since before we started-”

“Yes.”

“And you are just now bringing it to my attention.”

“I thought they were harmless.” Shoving her hands into the pockets of her oversized sweater, she went to stand by the fireplace as she felt the chill sweeping through her.

“You could not possibly believe these were harmless. Dammit, Lynn, these threats, and they are bloody threats, started since we started going out. ‘I am going to put out your lights, you worthless bitch.

You broke my heart into pieces, and for that, you will pay. How could you be with someone like him?” He lifted his eyes to hers. “Have you reported it?”

“No.”

He swore viciously. “Why the hell not?”

“Don’t shout at me.”

“I am not shouting. What I should be doing is shaking some sense into you. You have been getting these damn letters from some sick pervert who thinks he owns you, and you have kept them to yourself. How could you? I am the man in your life, dammit, and I deserve to know-”

“I am sorry.” She closed her eyes and wandered over to drop into one of the worn leather sofas. She rubbed her hands over her arms as the cold continued seeping through. “I did not want you to worry.”

His expression softened, and he could feel the anger draining out of him as he stared at her face. She was scared, and he had never seen her that way before. Putting the letters aside, he strode over to drop down in front of her. Taking her hands in his, he felt a jolt at how cold they were.

“It’s my job to worry and to fix. I do not appreciate you keeping this from me, darling.”

“You are right.” Her fingers gripped his. “I decided to tell you as soon as we arrived. Now I am going to spoil the vacation.”



“Don’t worry about that. We need to contact the local police.”

“Yes. As soon as we get back.”

“No. We need to do this now. I have a friend, his name is Wyatt -”

“I know him and his wife Audra.”

“I am going to call him.”

“It’s late.”

“Lynn-”

“Okay.” She nodded. “Call him, and I don’t know who this person is. From the letters he sent, he has seen all of my performances. But the postmarks are local.”

“The bastard could have dropped it into a mailbox.” He was seething with anger and fear. “I will get Wyatt to start doing his investigation.”

“Thanks.” She gripped his fingers. “I thought I could handle it.” She shook her head. “To think that I was flattered by the attention - my fan, one who made me feel as if I had done something spectacular.”

“You don’t need a sick asshole to accomplish that. You are spectacular.”

“And you are my biggest fan.” She smiled wanly.

“Damn right, I am.” Letting go of her hands, he cupped her face gently. “We will figure it out.” He promised.

“Now, let me call him.” Leaning forward, he kissed her gently before rising to go and get his phone.

“I hope I am not disturbing you.” Walking back, he sat on the arm of the sofa, his hand reaching for hers. “I will put you on speaker so Lynn can contribute to the conversation.”

“Hey, Lynn.”

“Wyatt. How is Audra?”

“Out somewhere, one of her endless charities. What’s going on?”

“Lynn has a stalker.”

“I see. Harmless or a sicko?”

“A sicko. I am going to send you the letters. The ones before we started going out are pretty harmless, your basic admiration for her talent and such, but after-”

“They became more mean and vicious. Read me one of the last ones.”

Lynn handed him the most recent one. “I thought about giving you another chance, but seeing you at the theater after that wonderful performance, seeing you with him, kissing him in that blatantly sexual manner, shows that you are nothing but a whore-” Callum’s mouth tightened, and he had to will the anger away. “I think that’s more than enough.”

“I agree,” Wyatt responded. “I suppose it’s no use trying to get prints. The sicko would be careful not to leave prints. How did you receive them, Lynn?”

“Jack has a mailbox where the local post office would put the mail.”

“Another dead end.”

“You have to do something,” Callum said tautly. “And the sooner we find that bastard, the better.”

“I am with you there. When are you getting back?”

“In another few days.”

“I will come to you whenever you get back. In the meantime, I will go to the theater and see what I can find. From his sick ramblings, it is clear that he is a regular there.”

“We will be in touch.” Callum hung up and put the letters away. “Now I am thrilled that I suggested this time away.” he searched her face closely. “I am beginning to think that’s why you agreed to it so quickly.”

“Something like that.”

“I am not going to let him hurt you, darling. I swear to you that will not happen.”

“I believe you.” She took his hand in hers. “Now that it is out in the open, I am not going to give another thought to those-” She nodded towards the hated bundle. “I want those put away, and I would like us to enjoy our time here. The fire is blazing, and I am with you, the man I love. I just want to enjoy us.”

“It sounds like a perfect plan.” Taking her hand, he pulled her up and into his arms. “We should see what Mrs. Ingels left for us in the kitchen.”

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He was determined to take her mind off the letters. Starting, he gave her a tour of the lovely farmhouse with five bedrooms, four baths, and a huge and delightful kitchen that overlooked snow-covered trees and a stable.

“There are horses here.” They had dinner at the small dining table beneath the wide bay window.

“Yes. Want to go for a ride?” He lifted his glass to his lips and eyed her over the rim.

“It’s probably ten degrees below zero. I don’t understand why we could not have gone to somewhere tropical, say, for instance, Hawaii, Jamaica, Costa Rica-”

“Say the word. I have properties in all of those places.”

Shaking her head, she stared at him with a smile. “You amaze me.”

“In a good way?”

“Absolutely a good way. You are determined to sweep me off my feet, right?”

“I have not done that already?” He asked her teasingly.

“Oh, you have.” She dug into the very delicious beef stew. “Why do I feel this is somewhat of a business trip?”

“You caught me.” He grinned at her, thankful her mind was off that mess with the letters. “It’s a recent acquisition, and this is my first time here. I thought it would be nice to look at it together.”

“It’s certainly lovely.” She murmured, looking out the window again at the snow dripping off the leaves and the ice forming on the branches. “What are you planning on doing with it?”

“Get it up and running. It belonged to an old family who was facing bankruptcy.”

“You got it for a steal.”

“You could say that.”

“And the family? The people who were employed here? What of them?”

He studied her over the rim of his glass. “What are you asking me, darling?”

She shrugged. “There are some things that were written about you and the way you do business.”

“Do you believe everything you read?” He asked her mildly.

“No. It’s been said that I have been going out with Brad Pitt and Kevin Costner. I have never even met them.”

“There you go.”

“It’s been said that your company is a corporate raider. You swoop in and take over vulnerable companies for little to nothing and turn them around.” She shook her head at the cold look on his face. “I have offended you.”

“Have you?”

“I am sorry. It’s just that my nerves are shot, and I-” She closed her eyes. “I hate it when people do not like me.”

“Pardon?”

“Those letters are so vile. God!” She gulped the wine.

“When I am on stage, I relish the fact that I am engaging

the audience. They cry when I cry and laugh when I do.

That's why I love the theater so much. The connection with people who pay their hard-earned money to come and see us - see me. I am grateful, and it makes me want to show them my best."

"And you do." Putting away his glass, he reached for her hands, stretching her fingers and admiring the delicacy. His greatest wish was to put a ring on her finger. "I sat in that theater and was wrapped up in the performance. What's not to like?"

"I am being foolish."

"You are scared, and I understand that. I would like to take your mind off it."

A small smile touched her lips. "You just want to have sex."

"I want to make love to you," He corrected her. "And that is the difference."

"You are right, and I would love that. Make love to me, Callum, until I am drowning in passion."

His heart quickened, and he could feel his desire swelling. She could do this to him - make him want her beyond measure and be mad about it. Putting away his glass, he rose and pulled her to her feet. His hands framed her face, eyes bright with longing. "Shall we go upstairs?" He asked huskily.

"What about the living room? There is a fire and blankets. It's snowing again, and I love making love by the fire while the snow is coming down."

"Then that's what we will do." He drew her with him towards the living room. While the snowflakes fell gently against the window panes, he spread the blankets and the cushions in front of the fire. And he insisted on undressing her.

"I love to see your skin against the light of the fire." Her sweater drifted to the floor, followed by her bra. He

kissed her throat, her neck, his tongue tasting the hollow and following the jumping of her pulse. "Your complexion is so flawless, so perfect, it reminds me of satin."

"You sound like a poet." She whispered, fingers brushing through his thick hair.

"I feel like one when I am with you." Stepping back, he made short work of taking off his clothes before pulling her down with him onto the blankets, where he continued to admire her skin before taking off her leggings. Passing a hand over her quivering stomach, he lifted his head to look at her.

"I want a child with you."

"We are not ready."

"Are we not, my love?" He asked her whimsically. "I want to see my seed growing inside you and know I put it there." Bending, he kissed the sides of her mouth, his hand still possessively cradling her stomach.

"I want to water your womb with my seed." His hand drifted down to cup her sex. "To feel it growing inside you, to know that we created something - someone out of love. I want a family with you."

"Callum-" Her hands roamed restlessly over his back and broad shoulders, loving the feel of his muscles and the way they quivered at her touch. "We should wait-"

"If it happens, then it happens." He nibbled at her lip and sent the desire spiraling. Pressing his hand closer to her sex, he watched her eyes widen. Slipping a finger into her, he felt the moistness and drew in a sharp breath.

"You are ready for me."

"Always." She breathed." Her hands drifted to his chest, fingers curling into the hairs there. "Make me come."

"Always," He repeated her word, his body primed and ready for her. He inserted another finger, easing into her slowly, thrusting and probing the tightness, loving the feel of her on his fingers. "Let go, darling." He urged.

“Yes.” Her body arched, fingers digging into his chest.

“Oh, Callum.”

Bending his head, he kissed her lips, sending her heart racing like a trapped bird. Her hands came around his neck, body rocking slowly, hips undulating as his fingers, those long, clever fingers, drove her up and over.

The climax was a slow, heady rush like a river drifting upwards and crashing against rocks. Her body quivered, her heart racing, the moans swallowed deep into his throat. Climbing on top of her, he entered her slowly without breaking the kiss.

He would take it slow; that was his first intention until she started to increase the pace, one leg thrown over him as she lifted her body to his.

The sensations, every bit of it, flowed through his body, taking him further and further until his heart was racing frantically.

This woman, his - the first and only one who had ever made him lose track of time and space, the only one who made him want to be more; this passionate creature with the voice of an angel had captured his heart and soul.

His woman - the fierceness of that thundered throughout his body and caused him to drive into her with a force that was beyond comprehension. She came again, her fingers making grooves on his skin. He came with her, his body stiffening as he poured himself deep into her as if he was never going to stop.

“No.” She whispered when he would have shifted off her.

“I don’t want to make you uncomfortable.” He was still fighting for control, still trying to find his breath.

“You are not.”

“Darling.” He kissed her cheek gently; his erection, even though deflated, was still pulsating inside her. “My sweet. I adore you.”

Tears gathered at the back of her eyes as she buried her face into his chest.

“I love you so much.” She whispered.

“I am overwhelmed by you.” Resting his chin on her head, he took a deep breath and then another before shifting to gather her into his arms.

“I could stay like this forever.” Her head was buried against his chest. “Where the outside world does not intrude. Where I am safe in your arms.”

“As long as I have breath, that’s what you will be. I swear.”

“I know.”

“I want you to move in with me.”

“Callum-”

“Darling, there is a madman out to get you. I am not going to rest easy knowing that you are elsewhere.”

Lifting her head, she gave him a quizzical look, which he met blandly. “Why do I feel you are using this to get your way?”

“Oh, but you are so wrong.” He grinned at her. “That it is convenient is another story altogether.”

“Very funny.” She muttered dryly.

“What will it be?”

She rolled her eyes at him. “Okay, fine. We will shack up.”

“Until you decide to take me out of my misery and marry me. I was thinking of April.”

“You have everything planned, don’t you?”

“It does not have to be a big splash, something small and intimate.” He tugged at a lock of hair. “Unless you want the whole society’s wedding.”

“I don’t, but we are not there yet.”



“What are you afraid of?” He asked her soberly.

“I am not afraid; I just think that marriage is a serious deal, and I have read about enough people like you getting married and then filing for divorce.” The glint in his eyes warned her that she was in for an argument.

“People like me?” His deep voice was soft and menacing, making her squirm.

“I meant society -” She blew out a breath. “That came out wrong.”

“Care to rephrase?” He asked her silkily.

“Yes.” She touched his face. “I love you, and it happened so fast that my head is spinning even now. We hit a bad patch with that princess bitch-” She narrowed her eyes as his lips twitched. “I am happy you find it amusing.”

“I really don’t.” He assured her gravely.

“Oh, just bite me.” She broke off with a scream when his teeth sank into her throat.

“You did ask for it.” He reminded her. She lost her thought when he soothed the bite with his tongue.

“Callum-”

“You were saying?” He was nibbling at the base of her throat.

“I cannot think when-” She closed her eyes as heat tracked through her body. Her fingers clutched at his hair, her breath backing into her throat.

“I don’t want you to.”

“That’s a low-down trick.”

“Is it?” His deep voice was laced with amusement as he headed for her breasts. “What would you call this?” His tongue touched her nipple and sent the fire fanning into full-blown flames.

“Wonderful.” Her fingers tugged at his hair. “Give me more.” She demanded.

He drew the nipple into his mouth and felt when her body jerked in reaction. Before long, there were no words between them as he slowly made her lose what little sense she had left.

Giving into the powerful desire, she sighed and sank into intense passion.

## Chapter 14

“I prefer we meet here for now.” Detective Wyatt Lewellyn’s jade-green eyes flickered over his friend before settling on Lynn. “How are you?”

“Mad as hell.” She admitted.

“That’s a good attitude. The son of a bitch wants you to feel fear. Don’t give him the satisfaction.

“Drink?” Callum rose from his place on the sofa beside her to wander over to the recessed cabinet.

“I am still on duty.”

“I need one. Darling?”

“No.” Lynn shook her head. They had just flown back from Montana and came straight to his place. He had called Wyatt as soon as they were on their way.

“He sent some more letters while you were away. I took the liberty of opening them.” Wyatt drew them out of an evidence bag. “The bastard is escalating.”

“May I?” Lynn extended a hand for them, lifting a brow when Wyatt hesitated. “I am not going to swoon in fright.”

“They are pretty graphic.”

“Let me-” With the drink in hand, Callum intercepted her and took the letters.

“I want to hear what he has to say,” Lynn told him with a determined look on his face.

With a terse nod, Callum opened the first one. The first line had him swearing viciously.

“Callum-”

“You don’t need to hear this-”

“I do. Please.”

Casting a look at Wyatt, who nodded his assent, he took a deep breath and started reading out loud.

"You shameless slut! How could you go away with him? Is it the money? Did he pay for your services?" "I am going to kill the bastard." Callum shoved the letters at Wyatt and walked over to the window. "You had better find him before I do Wyatt."

"That's the plan." Wyatt looked at Lynn and saw the strained look on her face. "He is not going to come near you. The letters are coming swiftly, which tells me he is local and probably lives near the theater. Lynn, I want you to think back to a month ago. Did anything strike you odd about any of the fans approaching you?"

Closing her eyes, she tried to get past the nausea inside her gut to concentrate. "There have been several who approached me." She shook her head. "I am sorry, I cannot pinpoint one person."

"The lighting inside the theater is not good."

"Except on the stage." She pressed a hand to her stomach. "It's for the utmost effect."

"And the place is jam-packed so far. You have performances leading up to Valentine's Day."

"Yes." She took a breath. "We are pretty much sold out for the entire time."

"Audra bombarded me into getting tickets for the weekend."

"Oh, you should have told me - I would have gotten some complimentary ones."

"Already done."

"You are not saying that she should cancel appearing on stage until you catch the sick bastard." Callum cut in impatiently.

"That's not possible," Lynn interjected swiftly.

"I agree with Lynn. We want to catch this guy in the act."

"What if he decides to bring a gun inside the place?"

The question had Lynn freezing.

“We will place plain clothes guys at the front and vet everyone going in.”

“There are several entrances-”

“We will have it covered. In the meantime, I will put someone-”

“I am way ahead of you there,” Callum told him grimly. “I have assigned some of my security details to shadow her.”

Lynn’s eyes flashed. “Without discussing it with me?”

“Damn right.” He snapped. “I am not going to have some sick bastard getting to you. So be it if I must keep you chained to me.”

“I have rehearsals-”

“You think I give a damn about that?”

“It’s my career-”

“Children.’ Wyatt lifted his hands to stop the explosion. “I would like you to go on as usual. We do not want to scare this guy away. We want to catch him in the act to put him away for a long time.” He rose and nodded to Lynn. “I am going to be on this like white on rice.”

“Thanks, Wyatt. I have not asked you about the children.”

“They are both fine and growing like weeds.” He grinned, jade green eyes twinkling. “Audra thinks I spoil them rotten, especially our daughter, and she is right.”

“Kiss them for me.’

“I will do that. Walk me out?” He jerked his head at Callum.

As soon as they left the room, Lynn decided she needed a drink. Leaving the sofa, she forced the trembling of her limbs away before walking over to the cabinet. Pouring from the bottle Callum had left out, she cradled the glass between her hands before returning to stand in front of the fire, the chill permeating her bones.

Someone was after her. Someone was sensing her vicious letters and wanted to hurt her just because of some sick idea that she was interested in him or it could be a female. And she was scared. The reality was crashing down on her, and she realized she had not told Jason. She was going to have to say to him.

“What are you not saying?” Callum watched as his friend shrugged into his heavy jacket.

“She is moving in with you.”

“Yes. I am not letting her go back to her place. What is it?”

“These things are unpredictable.”

“How so?” Callum demanded. “It could be a cast member; we are checking that out. Someone jealous of her and her rise to stardom.”

“But you don’t think so.”

“No. It looks like an outside job. And I am worried that the bastard is escalating too rapidly.”

“She is scared, and so am I.”

“I know. We are going to try and work on this tirelessly. We are not going to leave anything to chance.”

“I have an excellent security department.”

“Which will impede my investigation. You can do your own thing, but I prefer to work this in-house.”

“I am going to keep her safe,” Callum vowed.

“We will. I will keep you posted.”

“Thanks.”

“You got it.”

When Callum went back into the living room, she was not there. Banking the fire, he collected her boots and headed upstairs to find her propped up against the pillows.

“Jason is mad.”

“Why?”

“I never told him. He is coming by the theater tomorrow.”

“You are going in.” He sat on the sofa to remove his boots.

“I have to. Rehearsal.”

“I am taking you.”

“You have to work, and I do not go in until ten.”

“I happen to own the damn company, which means I can set my hours.”

“And you have been away for a week. I heard you on the phone, Callum, and you have things to attend to important matters. I don’t need you babysitting me.”

“Tough. You are going to have to live with it.” He told her snappily.

“Why are you mad at me?”

“Do I look mad?” He was seething with rage. He had read most of the letters when he walked Wyatt out, and he could feel the anger surging through his gut. He wanted to find the bastard and ripped his throat out with his teeth.

“You do. I did not read the letters-”

“Sick stuff. You did not need to read any of it.” Surging to his feet, he dragged his fingers through his hair and had to admit that he felt more than a little responsible. The bastard had fixated on her as soon as he walked into her life. He, Callum, was the cause of all this.

“I apologize.” Moving forward, he climbed in next to her.

“If anything happens to you-”

“I will not go anywhere without someone shadowing me. I will endure the lack of privacy, but that’s fine.”

“Thanks.” Drawing her into him, he hugged her, releasing his breath slowly. “I didn’t mean to take my rage out on you.”

“I thought you were not mad.”

“Of course I was.” He kissed the top of her head. “Wyatt is the best.”

“I know.”

“Try and get some sleep; it’s been a long day.”

“I am not tired.”

“What are you doing?” He hissed.

“What does it feel like?”

“Lynn, oh hell.” Pushing her back, he climbed on top of her and into her.

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Alton felt the tremors and impotent rage coursing through his body. The whoring bitch! Picking up the magazines, he started slashing through them viciously. She was back and was still with him. His warnings had gone unheeded. She was still seeing that soulless prick. He had used his money to corrupt her, and she had allowed him.

“You are going to die. You are going to die.” He repeated it like a mantra, cutting through the photos as the tears ran unchecked down his face.

“Alton!”

He jerked to attention and realized that he had somehow left the door to the basement unlocked.

“What?”

“What are you doing down there?”

“Mind your own damn business.” He hastily put away the scissors and magazines and ran halfway up the steps when he heard her coming. “You are not allowed down here. I need my space.”

“This is my own house.” Mabel tried to peer around him to see what he was up to. He was her only son, but she had to admit he was more peculiar than she had ever



known. The boy - no, he was a man - was forty years old and did not have a special woman in his life. Not that any woman would want someone like him.

He was plain and fastidious, always cutting his food into tiny pieces and separating the vegetables from the meat. And there was something wrong with him. She could not put a finger on it, but it was there. She avoided him because he made her feel more than a little afraid.

"I pay my bills." He stood in her way and decided that if she pushed her way past him, he was going to shove her down the steps and break her fool's neck.

"What are you doing?"

"I am working. Now leave me alone."

"I am worried about you."

"Why?" He looked at her in surprise.

"You do not have any friends."

"I have friends at work."

"Why haven't you invited any of them over?"

"Why would I do that?"

"To behave like a normal person. You need a life."

"I have a life. Now go away and leave me alone. I have work to do." He waited while she hesitated, poised to send her flying if she did not leave. But wisely for her, she turned on her heels and walked back up.

He waited until she was through the doorway before he raced up and locked the door behind her, sliding in the bolt. He was not going to make that mistake again. It was time to get rid of her, of Lynn Peterson. The thought made his heart ache, but it had to be done.

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"You did not tell me."

"I thought it was harmless. Now I am surrounded by big husky men watching my every move."

“I called the detective in charge. Wyatt, and he gave me a brief description. Not to mention the fact that Jack, with his loose lips, had a lot to say. The guy sent you gifts?”

“We have not established if it is a male, but most likely it is.” She pushed away from the vanity and came to sit next to him. Rehearsal was over for the day, and she was supposed to stay out until the driver arrived. In the meantime, Jason was babysitting her. It pissed her off that she did not have any freedom.

“Darling, I am concerned.”

“So am I. And Callum is pissed. He calls every few minutes to check up on me. It’s enough to make me crazy.”

“Can you blame him?” Jason took her hands in his, a frown touching his brow. “This guy has been stalking you for the past six years; how could you ignore it?”

“At first, I was psyched. He would write these glowing reviews about my performances and say something like how I changed his life and how talented I am. I thought, ‘Well, Lynn, you have an honest-to-goodness fan right here. You have come up in the world.’”

“And then things changed when you started going out with Callum.”

“Wyatt believes that was what set him off. He said it’s not sexual for the guy; he had me on this pedestal, and now that I have proven to be just a woman with sexual needs, he is disappointed.”

“Christ! He sounds really sick.”

She shivered at that and felt herself going cold. “I am definitely scared. I used to encourage fans to come backstage after a performance, but not again. It’s affecting my performance. Each time I go on stage, I search the audience to see if I can spot him.

He could be anyone, and that’s what makes it so damn scary. It’s not like he walks around with a sign on his

chest saying: 'Hey! I am the sicko who is stalking Lynn and making her life a living hell.'

"Wouldn't that be handy?"

"Callum is blaming himself."

"Why?"

"Things started sliding when he came into my life."

"And if it were some other guy, it would be just as bad."

"That's what I told him. It does not seem to matter." She sighed wearily. "I pretend to sleep so I do not worry him more than he already is. But he knows."

"You moved in with him."

"He would not rest until I did. So, instead of having a hell of a fight, I decided to capitulate. It's not bad. He asked me to marry him."

"And?"

"I told him I want to wait."

"Are you in love with him?"

"Of course I am." She laughed shakily. "Things evolved so rapidly that it feels like a whirlwind. I want us to be certain."

"I have a feeling he will not wait very long."

"Oh, he already said that. I have until April."

"As long as you are happy."

"I am. Except for the stalker thing."

"Oh, of course." He smiled grimly.

"Enough about me. How are you?"

"Great." He shook his head at her penetrating look. "I really am. I am healing somewhat and concentrating on work."

Her phone rang just then. "It's Callum."

"Your ride must be ready."

Sliding the green icon, she answered the call. “Hi.”

“I have an emergency board meeting and will not be home until late.” His voice was terse, and she could just imagine the frown on his forehead. “I don’t want you alone at the loft.”

“How late will you be?”

“Possibly an hour or two. I am going to ask Derrick to stick around.”

“Your place is like a fortress.” She reminded him.

“I am not taking any chances.”

“All right. Try not to worry.”

“Until this sick bastard is locked up, that is going to be my constant condition. See you later.”

“You could always come back home with me.”

“Callum would have a fit. No.’ She shook her head.

“Derrick is one of those linebacker types, and he is armed. I will be fine.”

He rose and came towards her. “You are my only family, and I would be royally pissed to lose you.”

“You won’t.” She kissed him on the cheek.

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Alton had decided that it was time. He had seen the husky men moving around and surrounding her as she entered the theater. He had also noticed that bastard she was shacking up with driving her several mornings. And the plainclothes officer, who was another disgrace with a badge. Another dirty cop with money on his side.

He recognized the son of a bitch from his photos in the magazines. At least he was supposed to be a public servant, getting taxpayers’ money when he did not need it. He wished he had time to take him out, too. But that was not his mission.

His mission was to get rid of Lynn; he had given her every chance to redeem herself, and she had not done so. It was time to end it. He was very good with technology. His mother had accused him of not having friends, and she was right. Ever since he was a child, he had always been awkward around other people.

So, he used the time to hone his skills, and he was incredibly good at it. There was practically no system he could not override.

And even the town car the muscle was driving was not immune to his skills. He had fiddled around with the computer system, and very soon, when he deemed it necessary and convenient, he would shut it off and do what he had set out to do.

He had the needles, two of them, one for the bodyguard and another one for her. He would wait until they had turned off the main road before he made his move.

He would follow at a discreet distance so as not to be detected. He had a gun but would only use it if necessary. He had no intention of shooting her. An overdose of heroin would do the trick.

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“You don’t have to keep calling. I am about to get inside the car now, and Derrick is right here with me.”

“I am going into the meeting now and want to make sure you are okay. I should have asked Wyatt to send two officers over.”

“The pile-up on the highway has everyone busy. I will be fine.”

“I wish I could believe that,” He muttered. “Please text me as soon as you are inside.”

“I will.”

“Okay. I will see you later.”

“Thank you, Derrick.” She smiled at the silent man as he opened the door for her and closed it as soon as she got

in. She saw him sweeping the area before sliding into the driver's seat. Taking the script from her tote, she settled back and prepared to read.

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"Stay in the car." Derrick rapped out the order as he opened the door.

"What's wrong?"

"I think something is wrong with the battery." He swore softly as he stepped out and looked around. It was damn dark, a wooded area that led to the private road where the loft was. He did not think it was foul play, but he would not take any chances.

Easing out his weapon, he approached the car's hood as he popped the trunk. He was about to check to see if the terminal was loose when he felt the sting at the side of his neck.

Before he could do anything, his eyes rolled over, and he slid to the ground.

"Derrick?" Disobeying the order to stay inside the vehicle, Lynn opened the door and stepped out. "Is everything okay?"

"Hi, Lynn." The sound of the strange voice had her freezing in place. "I wouldn't do that if I were you." The sight of the gun pointed at her chest made her weak.

"Who are you?"

"We will get to that. But first I would like you to accompany me. My vehicle is right over there."

"I am not going anywhere with you." Still pointing the gun at her, he picked up the one Derrick had dropped.

"I am afraid you do not have a choice, my dear. Come on. I would hate to have to kill you right here, but I will."

"I just need to get my bag-"

"No-uh." he approached her, and the crazed look in his eyes had her sucking in her breath. "I am too smart for

that. I might now look at it, but I am. Now move!”

Jumping at the shrill sound of his voice, she scurried to obey. “You are going to drive; I will give you directions.” he tossed her the key and waited until she was behind the wheel before getting in. “If you try anything, I will not hesitate to pull the trigger. Now let’s go.”

“Why are you doing this?” Her hands fumbled on the wheel, and she wondered if she could escape by crashing the vehicle.

“I warned you to leave him, but you would not listen.” He sent her a scornful look. “You women always go for that type. Turn left and try not to draw attention to yourself. We would not want the state police to start chasing us, would we? Now, where was I?”

## Chapter 15

He could not concentrate on the meeting. The board had called an emergency meeting to deal with several important matters, and he could not focus. He kept looking at his phone to see if she had a text message. He was worried and could not think straight.

“Gentlemen, please excuse me.” Pushing from the table, he made his way out and went into his office to get some privacy before calling her number. His heart thudded inside his chest when he got her voicemail. “Hey, call me back. I know it’s just a few minutes, but I must hear you are all right.”

Hanging up, he tried Derrick’s number, which rang out. The fear spread inside his chest, and for a minute, he was paralyzed by it. Sinking into the chair, he dialed Wyatt’s number.

“Hey. I am sorry I could not talk earlier, but there is a hell of a pile-up on I-95. It’s a nightmare-”

“What about the officers assigned to Lynn?”

“They were pulled away because of this. All hands on deck.”

“And you never said anything.”

“What’s wrong?”

“I cannot get in touch with her, dammit. I called the driver, and he is not picking up.”

“I am at the precinct right now; let me go to the theater and find out what’s happening,” Wyatt suggested.

“I will meet you at the loft.” Hanging up from him, Callum grabbed his jacket and keys. Something was wrong; he could feel it in his gut - she was in danger, and he had promised to keep her safe.

Practically running for the elevator, he headed out and started praying earnestly.

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He spoke freely, never taking his eyes off her; he told her everything.

“I was your biggest fan. I loved you - not in a sexual way, of course,” he added hastily, a dreamy look on his plain face. He was sweating, the fine sheen of moisture beading his round forehead and upper lip. “I have too much respect for you. When I first saw you all those years ago, you gave me hope.

I was going through a particularly rough time. I loved my job and hated the people there. They were so tedious and ordinary, and I used to dream about killing them all. Eyes on the road!” He jabbed the gun into her side viciously, causing her to cry out.

The car swerved slightly, and she had to fight to control the wheel. “Now, look what you made me do.” Taking a deep breath, he seemed to steady himself.

“Where were we? Oh yes, I was telling you about the tiresome people at work. You saved their lives.” He grinned at her, eyes bright with madness. “I was walking home from work and saw the playbill.”

He shook his head. “You were seated on a chair and wearing this red and white gown, your hair was loose around your face, and you were smiling. I stood there and felt that you were smiling at me and that everything was all right with the world again. I bought a ticket and went in to see you, and I was enraptured.”

“You had this light around you that made me think of an angel. I loved you.” He waved the gun at her. “You kept yourself pure - there was one time you made the foolish mistake of getting involved with a cast member, but thankfully, it did not last long.

I was relieved that I did not have to kill him to get him out of your life.” His mouth turned down. “But you hooked up with this - this evil man, one who sold his soul to get rich. How could you?” he screamed suddenly. “I loved you, and you broke me into pieces.”

Bringing himself under control again, he took a deep breath. "That's why I have to kill you."

"You don't have to." She was determined not to allow the fear to cripple her. For what she was planning, she would need her wits about her. "He asked me to marry him, and I turned him down."

"You did?" His eyes gleamed. "Why don't I believe you? You went away with him. Where did you go?"

"It was a business trip, and he asked me to accompany him. That was when he proposed."

"And you turned him down." He shook his head. "men like Callum Hammond get the girl. You were mine. I loved you for six years, and he just swooped in with his expensive clothes and padded bank account, and that was that. Well- Oh, here we are. It's a little more than a shack. It belonged to my dad. We are turning off here. We-"

She waited for the opportunity, and as soon as he turned his head to look out the window. Pressing her foot on the gas, she increased the speed. Holding the wheel with one hand, she released his seat belt and slammed on the brake.

The car spun around at that speed, the wheels losing traction in the loose dirt. Someone screamed, and the explosion of the gunshot was heard in the car as it slid on the patch of ice and slammed into the trunk of the redwood tree.

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"What is it?"

"Bad news," Wyatt said tersely as he hunkered down to feel the man's pulse. "The car is on the road to your place, and the driver is down. Lynn is not here."

The silence that followed his words lengthened. "I am on my way."

“I am going to call it in.” Wyatt was about to when he heard dispatch coming through on his radio.

“What’s that?”

“We have a woman on the line saying she was in an accident on the road leading to Fallow Street. She said she has been shot, and her name is Lynn Peterson.”

“I am on my way.” Tugging out his phone, he was about to dial Callum when his car stopped.

“We have word on her.”

“Where is she?” He asked, jumping out of the vehicle.

“She is hurt, but she called nine-one-one.”

\*\*\*\*\*

The pain was searing, and she was fighting not to go under. Something was wrong with her arm, and she realized belatedly that she had been shot. Easing up carefully, her head swimming with the effort, she sidled around the car to see if he was still there. A scream rose inside her throat at the sight before her.

He was crumpled against the base of the trunk, his neck at an odd angle, his eyes staring, obviously dead. Clamping down on the nausea, she continued talking to the operator.

“He is dead. He is dead. Oh God, he is dead.” Sliding down onto the ground, she fainted.

“She is over here!” The uniforms had arrived a minute before they did. “The ambulance is on its way. She has a pulse, faint and thready, but there is one.”

“Secure the scene,” Wyatt ordered. “The guy is dead?”

“Yes, detective.”

“It’s no use telling you to stay back, is there?” Wyatt asked dryly as they rushed to where Lynn was. One of the officers had covered her with a blanket.

“Not a chance in hell.” They reached her at the same time.

“Don’t move her. The paramedics- Ah, here they are.” The ambulance screeched to a halt, and the EMTs jumped out.

“I think she has been shot; her left arm is bleeding,” Wyatt told them.

“Give us some room.”

“I am riding with her,” Callum told them firmly as they lifted her onto the gurney.

“Lacerations to her neck and face, and yes, this is a GSW to the left arm. It looks like a through and through. Her pulse is thready - we have to get her to the hospital right away; she has lost a considerable amount of blood.”

“Go on ahead,” Wyatt urged. “I will get there when I am through here.”

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Wyatt dragged weary fingers through his hair and accepted the cup of coffee Callum handed him.

“Any word?”

He shook his head. “I called Jason, and he is on his way here. Jack wanted to come, but I told him I would call as soon as we heard anything. I cannot stand his chatter right now.” Putting away the cup of coffee, he wandered over to the window. “Is the bastard dead?”

“As a doornail, or is it a doorpost.” Wyatt shook his head. “Your woman did a brave if reckless thing. He was taking her to a cabin in the woods. A literal cabin in the woods.”

“Who the hell was he?”

“Alton Cosgrove is a computer geek who lived in his mother’s basement. His entire space was huge and plastered with pictures of Lynn. He started slashing her photos a few months ago.”

“He was going to kill her.” Callum’s hands balled into fists.

“That was the plan, yes.” Wyatt took a sip of the insipid coffee before giving up on it. “I need to call Audra.”

“You should go on home,”

“No, not yet.” Turning his back, he placed the call, and Callum half listened as he spoke to his wife, his voice gentle. It was funny how falling in love turns grown men into babies. Right now, he could not even take an easy breath as he waited for news about the love of his life.

And she was - when he heard that she was missing, it had shaved several years off his life, and as soon as she was strong enough, he was going to get a minister and make them legal, no matter what she said.

“She wants to be kept in the loop. I-” They both turned when the door was pushed open.

“How is she?”

“Still out of it.” The doctor told them with a slight smile.

“She is a fighter. No internal damage, and the bullet went straight through. She lost a lot of blood, but we were able to do something about that. And the baby is all right.”

Callum went still at that as he stared at the man. “Baby?”

“Ms. Peterson is approximately six weeks pregnant. I take it that this is a surprise?”

“Yes.” He had to clear the lump in his throat. “Yes, it is.”

“Congratulations.” Wyatt slapped him on the back.

“I need to be with her.”

“Of course. She will probably sleep for the rest of the night-”

“I don’t care.” He turned to Wyatt. “Thanks for everything.”

“I will call you in the morning.”

\*\*\*\*\*

He had to touch her. She was lying against the pillows, her hair twisted into a knot on her head. Her lovely face had bruises, and the white bandage on her left arm starkly contrasted her caramel complexion.

Pulling up the chair, he sat there and carefully took her hand. "Hello, darling." His voice was husky, his body weak with relief. "You gave me quite a scare. I am tempted to tie you to my bed and never let you out of that bedroom." He linked his fingers with hers. "If he were not dead, I would want to do the job myself.

Please remind me to yell at you for pulling that dangerous stunt." He had to blink back the tears. "We are going to be parents, and considering the changes that will be taking place in our lives, we are going to have to make some adjustments, and I am not going to take any arguments from you."

Lifting her hand carefully, he kissed her knuckles. "You will call me a nag, but I can live with that."

"I almost lost you, and I cannot go through that again." He laughed softly. "I have never been this vulnerable before, and I want to say that it is not a feeling I appreciate.

Anyway, sweetheart, we will get hitched as soon as you are better. I will get the ring and don't want to hear a word from you. I love you so much, my sweet, so damn much."

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Her eyelids flickered open slowly. Something was anchoring her right hand to the bed, and she had a headache and aches all over her body. Turning, she felt the familiar jolt to see him sitting in the sleep chair, his hand holding hers.

His head was uncomfortable, and his suit jacket was tossed carelessly on the arm of the chair. He moved the minute she tightened her hand in his, his amazing eyes latching onto her face.

“It’s about time,” He whispered.

“Why are you on the chair?”

“I did not want to jostle you. How are you feeling?”

“Like I have been in a car wreck and was shot.”

“Both those things happened to you.”

Her eyes searched his face. “Aren’t you going to start yelling at me?”

“I am waiting until the bandage is off.” Scooting forward, he kissed her fingers and then kissed her lips. “If you ever scare me like that again, I am going to paddle your butt.”

“Noted.” Lifting her hand, she touched his cheek. “I was so damn scared.”

“I know.” He covered her hand with his. “The bastard is dead.”

“I killed him.” She shuddered out a breath.

“Before he could kill you. I do not want you to have any kind of remorse over that son of a bitch. He deserved worse.”

“He accused me of being impure. He said he would take me to the cabin and remove me.” She blinked back the tears. “Oh, Callum.”

“Shh, baby.” Leaving the chair, he came to sit on the edge of the bed. “We don’t want to upset you while you are in this condition.”

“What condition?”

A smile touched his face. “When were you going to tell me?”

“Tell you what?”

He simply stared at her. “You did not know?”

“Callum Anthony Hammond, I am about to blow a fuse. Tell you what?”

Shaking his head, he laughed softly. "That you are pregnant."

Her eyes widened as she stared at him. "What?"

"Six weeks pregnant, darling."

"Oh my God." Dragging her hand away, she pressed it to her stomach. "We are going to have a baby?"

His grin widened. "It seems that way, which means we are going to get hitched sooner than later." he cocked a brow at her. "And I dare you to disagree."

"I am pregnant," The tears started rolling down her cheeks. "I am going to have a baby."

"And a husband."

"God help me." She said with a shaky laugh.

"He will, darling." They both looked up as the doctor and two nurses entered the room.

"Ah, you are awake. I am Dr. Hylton, and these are nurses Dyer and Simpson. We just have to take your vital signs."

"I will be right outside, darling."

"There is a young man in the waiting room; he says you are his brother."

"I will go and assure him that you are all right. I will be right back."

He found Jason pacing in the waiting room.

"How is she?" He asked abruptly as soon as Callum stepped into the room.

"Fighting fit." Walking over to the table, he poured a glass of water and started to lift it to his lips but did not quite manage it. "Oh, good Christ!" He whispered shakily and lowered himself into the chair by the window.

"Oh, good Christ! I almost lost them. God Almighty. I almost-" Lifting his head, he stared at her brother, eyes



shimmering. “I apologize. It is only hitting me, and I could not very well break down in front of her.”

“She would not have minded.” Shaky himself, Jason sat down next to him. “It’s all over the internet. Is she awake?”

“Yes.” Callum passed a hand at the back of his neck wearily. “She is. The doctors are checking her out now.”

“Wait. You said them.”

“Pardon?”

“You said you almost lost them. What do you mean?”

“She is pregnant with my baby.” His smile was wide, and he could feel the tension dissipating. “Six weeks, and she did not realize it. I suppose with all that was going on, it’s expected.”

“My God, you work fast.”

“I wanted us to wait a while, but I am completely head over heels in love with your sister, and I intend to make her mine. We are getting married as soon as she is well enough.”

“I see.” Jason stared at him for a minute. “Is she amenable to this?”

“If I have to drag her to the altar, I will do just that.” Callum stared back at him. “I hope I have your blessing.”

“Would it matter?” Jason’s tone was dry.

“Not really, but she loves you, and it would help.”

“Then you have it. I need to see her.”

“I have some calls to make, so go on ahead.”

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“You are such a diva. You really would do anything to get attention, won’t you?”

“You know me so well.” Lynn patted the edge of the bed. “Sit.”

“You gave us a hell of a scare.” Taking her hand in his, he pressed it to his cheek. “And what’s this I hear about you having a bun in the oven?”

Her smile was wide. “You are going to be an uncle. The approximate date is early September. And it seems I am getting married.”

“Is that something you want?”

“I am going to be a mother, and it’s scary, but I am in love with the daddy.” Her eyes searched his face. “It happened so quickly, and then there was the incident with his ex that had me questioning the wisdom of getting involved with him.” Her hand squeezed his.

“I sat in that car and listened to that madman telling me how he thought I was pure and how he was planning to kill me, and I realized that I wanted this. I want Callum; I am in love with him; nothing is more important than being with him. I thought my career was all I wanted, but I was wrong. I love him, Jace, so much that it scares me.”

“And he loves you.” Lifting their joined hands, he kissed the back of hers. “I saw it when he came into the waiting room. He is quite shaken up about the entire thing. I saw the expression on his face and was humbled that a man like him did not care about showing such vulnerability. I am happy for you.”

“Will you give me away?”

“Do you have another brother I don’t know about?” He asked her teasingly.

“Only one. The best brother a girl could ever wish for.” She whispered.

“Then it’s settled.”

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“I want to get out of here.” She looked at him pleadingly. “I feel fine and as if I am taking advantage of my position as your baby mama.”

“Is that what you are?” He asked her mildly, looking up from the email he was responding to. He was working remotely as he refused to be away from her. It had been two days since the horrible incident, and she had had many visitors.

Wyatt took her statement and told them it was an open and closed case. Her table in the corner was loaded with cards, stuffed toys, and so many bouquets that she had had to have the nurse take some to the pediatric ward.

“Callum-”

“The doctors say you need another day. Your blood pressure is high, and they are monitoring the fetus.”

“I hate this inactivity.” She complained.

“What inactivity? Don’t think I have not seen the script Donaldson slipped inside the room when he visited. I have not said anything about it because I believe it will occupy your time.”

Her tapered eyebrows lifted. “Is this you taking over my life?”

“Absolutely.” Putting away his iPod, he rose and came to sit on the edge of her bed. His hand cupped her cheek, expression tender. “Someone has to.”

“So I guess I was not doing a very good job of it for the past thirty-odd years.”

“It’s a good thing I came along when I did.” He agreed with sham gravity.

“Bite me.” Bending his head, he did just that, on her full bottom lip, sending a jolt throughout her body. Her hands came around his neck, and she deepened the kiss, forcing him to do the same.

“Marry me, now,” he whispered against her lips. “I cannot stand another moment of being single.”

## Chapter 16

“That man of yours is like a bloody typhoon,” Jack complained. “He wants a wedding in a week and has people tramping all over my theater to make it happen.”

“Why are you complaining?” Lynn asked him mildly as she stared at her reflection in the mirror. Callum had come up with the brilliant idea of them getting married here. She had barely been out of the hospital before he hired a wedding planner to handle all the details.

“You are not to lift a finger.’ He had warned. The papers and internet were plastered with the complete details about her stalker and what had transpired, and now the wedding had taken precedence. There were speculations about why they were getting married so quickly, but the queries were not responded to.

So, on the last day of February, they were getting married right here, where she had performed so many times, and it felt just right. She still had nightmares about what had happened, but it helped with Callum being next to her whenever it did. She had met his sister, Julie, and the girl had finally warmed up to her.

“You are looking exquisite, my dear.” Jack clapped his hands in appreciation. “Your audience awaits.”

“Don’t you mean my guests?”

The seats are full, and they are waiting with bated breath to see what the bride looks like. That dress-“ he shook his head as words failed him. Several designers had approached her, but she had settled for Monique Romano, which had been a very good choice.

The ivory satin was beaded with hundreds of pearls on the Victorian bodice, and the lace covering the satin was a delicate champagne color. The skirt was narrow, highlighting her curves. Pearls were at her lobes and her left wrist. Her hair was piled on her head, with pearls threaded through various strands.

Her bouquet of petunias and white roses was on the dresser. Turning at the knock on the door, she smiled when Julie came in, looking lovely in emerald green.

“Your groom is getting impatient.”

“The bride wants to make an entrance.” Moving forward, Jack took her hand and helped her to her feet.

“Something blue and borrowed.” Julie walked over and pinned the delicate cameo brooch on her. “It belonged to our mother.”

“It’s lovely. Thank you.”

“You have made him so happy.” She said tearfully.

“He has done the same for me.” Lynn hugged the girl. “I am getting a sister.”

“Okay, break it up, you two, or I will start bawling my eyes out,” Jack ordered.

“Ah, just in time. Here she is, Jason.”

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Standing on the platform, Callum stopped himself from tugging at the cuff of his black tux as he waited for his bride. He had met her two months ago, and it surprised him that it had been such a short time, long enough for him to realize that she was it for him.

It also unnerved him to know that she had complete power over him. His emotions, his heart, and his soul were tied to her. He had gone through hell when that madman took her, and it had been the most extended few hours of his life.

During that time, he discovered that he would be a father. It overwhelmed him. He had always prided himself on being in complete control until he met her.

His breath was caught inside his throat as the music changed, and the spotlight was trained on the curtains, subtly and slowly inching open. Wyatt, his best man,

turned with him as the guests came obediently to their feet.

The shock sizzled through his body at the vision coming towards him and her holding a microphone. The music swelled to a crescendo, and her angelic voice belted out Luther Vandross' 'Here and Now.'

He was not the only one held spellbound, but the entire theater stood still as she sang the lyrics, her eyes on him only. She finished the song as she came to stand in front of him. Handing the microphone to Jack, she held out her hands to his.

"Hi. Thought I would blow your socks off."

Taking her hands, he gripped them, drawing her towards him, his eyes swirling with emotions. "You did that. You are the most intriguing woman I have ever had the pleasure of knowing."

"I hope to keep it that way. Shall we get hitched?"

With a soft laugh, he turned her towards the minister, who was waiting to get started.

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He had selected a warm climate for their honeymoon. She had never been to South America before, and the villa in Mexico was perfect and isolated.

Her new husband speaks Spanish, as was evidenced when he talked to his housekeeper, Maria, the cheerful woman with olive skin and long black hair wrapped neatly at the nape of her neck.

"You speak Spanish." She murmured when they were alone and standing on the patio, watching the swell of the waves in front of them. Moving towards her, he wrapped his hands around her waist, closing his eyes in utter contentment. He had repeated the vows that bind them together as one.

They had also exchanged rings; hers were the exquisite diamond, emerald square cut stones, and a plain gold

band that she had slid on his ring finger. He had hustled her out of that theater and into the car to take them to the private hangar where his pilot was waiting to whisk them off to Mexico.

“What else don’t I know about you?” She asked, turning her head to look at him. He kissed the tip of her nose, his eyes amused and indulgent. “I am multilingual. Languages come naturally to me - I like to get personally involved when doing business.”

“What other languages?”

He whispered something in fluent French and then Italian.

“What did you say?”

“Loosely translated, it means that you are my life and the heart of me.”

She turned then, emotions storming inside her. “As you are to me.” Her hands slid up his chest, where she found his heart beating unsteadily. “I love you; those vows we exchanged mean the world. I am completely committed to you.”

His hands framed her face. “I want to make love to you until the sun rises.”

“I would like that too.”

“Only like?” His eyebrows lifted in query.

“Love, adore. Are we alone?”

“Maria has returned to the village and will be back to prepare our meals. We won’t even know she is here. How about something to eat on the patio?” His hand drifted down to her stomach. “You have to think about the babe.”

“Which is far from being one yet. I cannot believe I am not nauseous.”

“The doctor said it could always happen later in the pregnancy.” Taking her hand, he led them to the table

spread with the abundant fruits grown in the country.  
“We could take a swim after we eat.”

“We could.” Plucking up a juicy orange cut fruit, she tasted it, her eyes widening as the taste burst all over her tongue. “This is mango. Oh my Lord, it is so good.”

Callum felt his body quickening at the look on her face and thought the swim would have to wait. Leaning across the table, he took her lips, the natural taste of her sweetened by the mango juice. He deepened the kiss, hand wrapping around her neck.

“You taste good enough to eat.” He whispered against her lips, his voice unsteady.

“What are you suggesting?” There was heat unfurling inside her stomach.

“That we leave everything until later. I want you now.”

“You had me on the plane.”

“That was an hour ago. Am I limited to the time I am allowed to be with my wife?”

“Repeat it.” She whispered achingly.

“Am I allowed-”

“Call me your wife.”

“My wife. Because you are.” He retook her lips, the passion spiraling out of control. Ending the kiss, he took a shaky breath and rose, bringing her up. “It has to be now.”

“Yes.” She skirted the table and let him lead her into the charmingly decorated bedroom with its board floor and chintz furnishing. The bed was a queen-sized one with a colorful quilt spread.

Turning her to face him, he touched her cheek, then her neck slowly. “How is the arm?”

“As good as new.”

“No twinges?”



“Only a little, and you have asked me that before.” She reminded him.

“I am your husband; that’s my job.” He unbuttoned her blouse slowly, his eyes holding hers. “And yes, I will use the term every time.”

“I don’t mind.” She shrugged out of the blouse. His eyes glittered as he ran his finger gently over the scar led by the bullet. It was still red and raised; he knew it pained her ever so often.

“I want to kill him for putting a mark on you.” Bending his head, he kissed it gently.

“It’s over.” She lifted her hand and brushed her fingers through the thick coffee-brown hair. “I am here.”

“Yes.” He lifted his head and continued undressing her. “And you are mine.”

“Ownership?” She asked him softly.

“Absolutely.” Guiding her to the bed, he bent to remove her boots and denim. “I will be right back.”

“If you are more than a minute, I will find you.” She called out.

Settling back against the pillows, she closed her eyes and breathed out slowly, one hand on her flat stomach. She was pregnant. Shaking her head, she pressed her palm against the skin as if she could feel the baby growing inside her. He came back in with a bowl.

“What’s that?”

“You will see.” He mysteriously told her, putting it away on the table across the bed. He undressed hurriedly, keeping his eyes on hers before picking up the bowl and coming towards the bed.

“You loved the taste of the mango.”

“I did.”

“I loved the taste of it on your tongue, and we did not get to finish eating.”

“Callum-”

“Darling, open your mouth.”

She did, and he slipped a slice of the ripe fruit in. “It’s so good. I-” His mouth swallowed up the rest. “Feed it to me,” he whispered huskily.

With her heart doing a slow roll and dive, she pushed what was left into his mouth. Instead of lifting his mouth from hers, he slipped his tongue in so they were both swallowing the juice from the fruit. Lynn felt as if her body was on fire.

“How is it?”

“The best I ever had.” She whispered huskily.

“Good. Perfect.” Taking another slice out, he rubbed it slowly over her nipple, watching her reaction. “And now?”

“Callum-” She could not continue; it was as if her entire body was floating above the bed.

“Hmm?” Plopping the fruit into his mouth, he bent to suck the juice off her nipple. The passion exploded, and her body arched frantically.

The pleasure was unbearable! Digging her fingers into his hair, she called out his name as he suckled hungrily. Reaching a hand between her thighs, he touched the core of her, rubbing the swollen flesh.

“I can’t.” She whispered achingly. “Oh God, it’s too much.”

“Come for me, darling.” His fingers slipped into the wet warmth of her, and she exploded, her body jerking in response. He waited until the trembling had stopped before taking out another slice of the mango.

Popping it into his mouth, he straddled her and slid down until he was rubbing the fruit all over her stomach and then licking and nibbling at the flesh. She was overwhelmed as sensation after sensation washed over her.

Nothing in her life had ever felt this good before. But he was not through with her yet. When he went further, a piece of the fruit was still in his mouth. Trickling the juice onto the tip of his tongue, he used it to coat the swollen flesh and then sucked it into his mouth. Her scream echoed around the room and sent the blood soaring inside his body.

When she came this time, he had to hold her still as she vibrated, her hands seeking to anchor her body. Before she had quite recovered, he was on top of her, sinking into her slowly. His hands framed her face, his heart jolting at the tears swimming in the dark brown depths. He stayed still, his thumbs massaging her moist cheeks.

“I love you, darling. More than I have the words to express how much. I cannot develop the appropriate term for what I feel for you.” He kissed her softly, his tongue darting into her mouth. She clung to him, the tears streaming down her cheeks.

He filled her up and more, his heavy erection pulsing inside her. She was wrapped around him like a tight fist, and he knew it would be all over as soon as he moved.

“I love you.” Her body was still vibrating, quivering from the heat pouring through her.

He moved then, her declaration of love bursting through his veins. He drove into her, and as much as he tried to slow it down, it was not happening. Burying his mouth on hers, he thrust into her, his body shuddering. The orgasm was vicious, grabbing him by the throat.

It took several minutes for him to recover enough to slide off her, his heart still hammering inside his chest, his skin coated with sweat. She curled into him, and he wrapped his arms around her, breathing in her scent.

“I am hungry.” She whispered.

He chuckled softly. “How about some of that cake and some champagne? One glass for you.”

“Hmm.” She inhaled his subtle cologne. “Sounds divine.”

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“The water is so blue and warm. Are you certain no one can see us?”

“There might be a reporter hiding in the trees waiting for a good photo of us cavorting like naked seals in that blue water.”

“You were the one who convinced me to go skinny dipping.” Dragging the towel around her, she tied it into a knot.

“You are such a prude, darling.” Laughing, he tugged at the towel and pushed her back against the cushions he had brought along with the picnic basket.

“I am being cautious.” She told him with dignity, lifting her chin.”

Rolling on top of her, he crushed his mouth to hers in a kiss that left her breathless.

“We are quite alone.” Slipping into her, he framed her face with his hands. “No one is going to appear suddenly.” He moved inside her slowly, in no hurry for them to go back inside.

“We are out in the open.” She protested weakly.

“I know. A fantasy of mine I just have to fulfill.” He watched her eyes widen, her lips parting.

“Good for you.

“Hmm.” He kissed her again as he increased the pace.

\*\*\*\*\*

“darling?” Callum had no idea what had woken him up, but he turned to see her side of the bed empty. “Lynn?” Swinging his legs off the bed, he started down the steps and grabbed his robe. “Lynn?”

A frown touched his brow as he searched the bathroom, and she was not there. She was eight and a half months pregnant, and he was watching her. And last night, when he arrived home, she looked a little peaked.

He headed downstairs and realized the lights were on in the kitchen.

“Hey.”

She was sitting around the counter with a cup in her hand. “I could not sleep.”

“What is it, darling?”

“Just-“ She shook her head. “I think the color of the nursery is wrong.”

“Really?” He came closer to stare at her face. “What is it?” He repeated.

“I don’t feel so hot.”

“Want to be specific?”

“On and off for the past couple of hours.”

A frown touched his brow. “Are you in pain?”

“No pain so much as - oh!” Putting the cup away, she pressed a hand to her belly and breathed.

“Are you in labor?” Callum felt panic gripping him.

“It’s every twenty minutes or so.”

“I am going to get dressed. Can you make it upstairs?”

“I-” She stood up and had to grip the counter’s edge as her back felt as if it had opened up. “No.” She closed her eyes briefly. “My go bag-”

“Is in the closet. I will be right back.” He raced out of the room and up the stairs, making quick work of dragging on his clothes and grabbing something from the closet for her. Running downstairs, he helped her with the loose dress and the soft shoes. “I called Dr. Thornbill, and she will meet us at the hospital. How are you?”

“I feel foolish. It just might be nothing. I am not even due yet.”

“We are not taking any chances.”

\*\*\*\*\*

“Breathe from your diaphragm, just like we were taught.”

“What’s taking so long?” She asked the doctor as she came back into the room. “We have been here for the past six hours and nothing,”

“That’s because you are not yet fully dilated.” Dr. Thornbill smiled gently as she went to the foot of the bed to do her examination. “Your vital signs are improving. Ah, let’s see what we have here.”

The couple waited anxiously for the result of the examination. “Excellent.” She beamed at them.

“What does that mean?” Lynn asked as she gripped Callum’s hands.

“It means you are fully dilated, and your baby is ready to appear.”

“Finally.” Taking a deep breath, she leaned against her husband and closed her eyes. She was tired but not in the least bit sleepy.

Reaching for the ice chips, Callum rubbed it over her lip and let her suck on it for a little bit. Using the towel, he dabbed at her sweat-moistened forehead before putting it away.

“All right, Lynn, you will only push when I tell you to.”

\*\*\*\*\*

“Aren’t you coming to bed?” Lynn stood beside her husband as he peered into the crib. “he is fast asleep.”

“I know.” Reaching down, he touched the tiny balled-up fist of his son. Alexander John was perfect, or so his parents thought. It was three days since his birth, and his mother had told her friends that he had grown several inches since the birth.

His sparse brown hair was lying flat on his small scalp; when he was awake, his eyes were a curious golden brown. He was healthy and perfect, and his father could not stop staring at him.

“Then we should try and get some sleep as well.” She whispered.

“Tired, my love?”

“A little bit.” Her hand came around his waist as she leaned into him.

Pulling the covers over him, Callum led his wife from the nursery and into their bedroom. Removing the blue silk robe, he helped her up the steps and into bed.

“It’s funny.” She murmured when he joined her.

“What is?”

“You spend your entire life pursuing a career and thinking it was your life’s best. And then you meet a man who refused to take no for an answer.”

“One who was determined to have you in his life.” Turning on his side, he captured her hand in his. “And in the process, he planted his seed inside you.”

“Something like that.”

“Any regrets, darling?”

“None.” She responded immediately. “I love you.”

“I adore you, my sweet.” Letting go of her hand, he cupped her cheek. “More than life itself. You have given me so much that I cannot imagine my life before I met you.”

“Dull, boring, useless-” She laughed as his mouth touched hers. The kiss was sweet, stirring their senses and firing their blood. Lifting his mouth from hers, he breathed deeply, fighting for control.

“All of those things. You have made my life complete, and I cannot imagine living without you.”

“Fortunately for you, that will never happen.” She touched his chin, tracing the determined shape of it. She could not believe she could be so happy. He was here for her, and looking at her son, the shape of his face, and

seeing the similarities to her husband's, she felt like she had won the lottery.

Settling back against the pillows, he exhaled her into his arms. Right here, he was home, and there was no place he would rather be than in the arms of the woman he adores.

The end... but wait:

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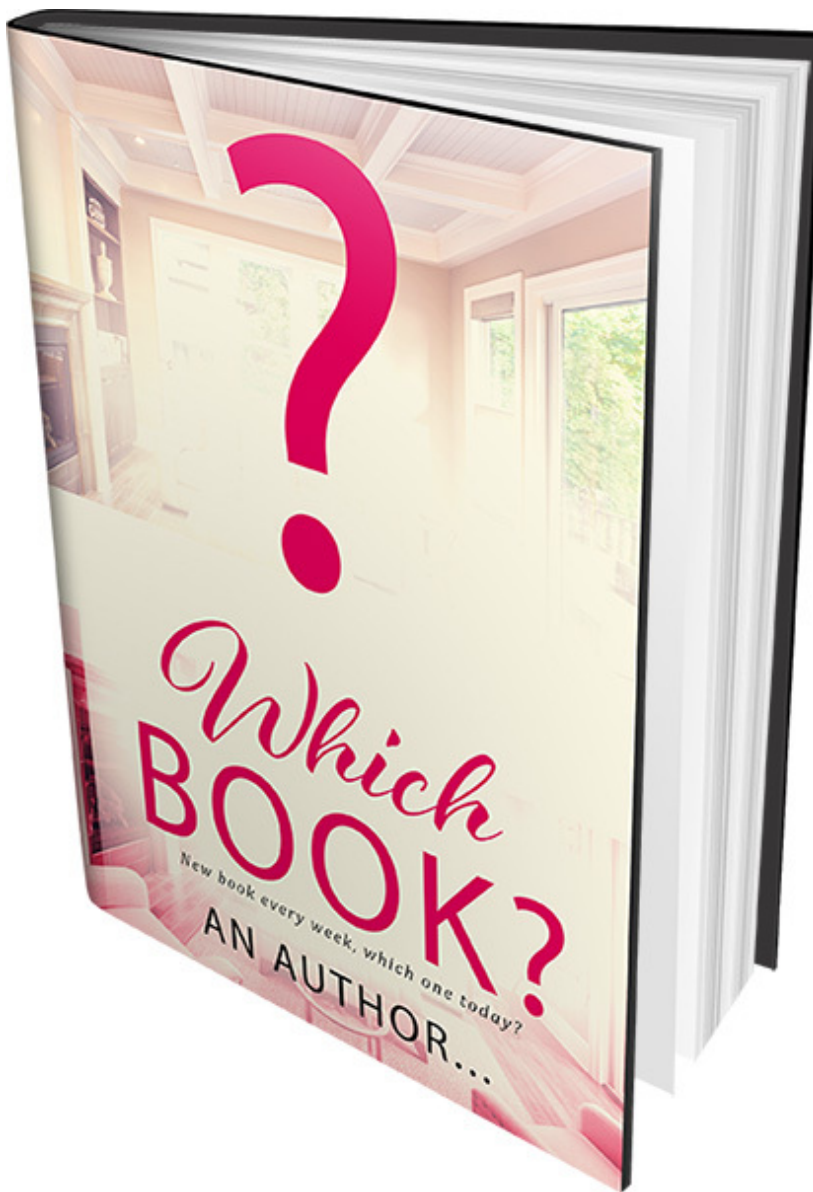
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**Description:**

A sexy BBW, older man, younger woman romance by Samantha Drake of BWWM Club.

When a mysterious older man named Gabriel saves her from an ex-boyfriend's advances at her 23rd birthday party, Destiny is enchanted to say the least.

Their connection is instant, leading to a night spent at Gabriel's apartment...

But by morning, Destiny vanishes, leaving Gabriel both smitten and perplexed by the plus size beauty.

Destiny's career takes an unexpected twist when she learns that her enigmatic new boss is Gabriel, the very man who captivated her heart.

And so they begin a relationship in secret!

But the age gap weighs heavily in Gabriel's mind, and he only seems to only push her away...

Can Gabriel overcome his fears and societal norms to embrace the love he feels for Destiny?

And will Destiny find the strength to trust again and build a future with a man so different yet so right for her?

Find out in this emotional yet sexy romance by Samantha Drake of BWWM Club.

Suitable for over 18s only due to sex scenes so hot, you'll need a fan to cool off!

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\*

Also available: [Deacon](#) by Katie Dowe:

## **Description:**



A sexy widower romance by Katie Dowe of BWWM Club.

African American editor Delores Pennant finds her professional world shaken when CEO widower Deacon Manchester decides to take over her publishing company.

Known for his ruthless business tactics and turbulent personal life, Deacon avoids serious relationships in favor of one-night stands.

When Deacon proposes a no-strings affair, Delores unexpectedly agrees, despite her doubts about blending business and pleasure.

Yet as their arrangement unfolds, Delores finds herself falling deeply for Deacon!

But Deacon is still haunted by his tragic past and doesn't want to open his heart again.

Now they both face a crucial decision about their future...

Can Delores and Deacon overcome their pasts to seize a hopeful future together?

Or will their relationship be nothing more than a casual fling?

Find out in this emotional yet sexy romance by Katie Dowe of BWWM Club.

Suitable for over 18s only due to sizzling hot sex scenes with a CEO billionaire!

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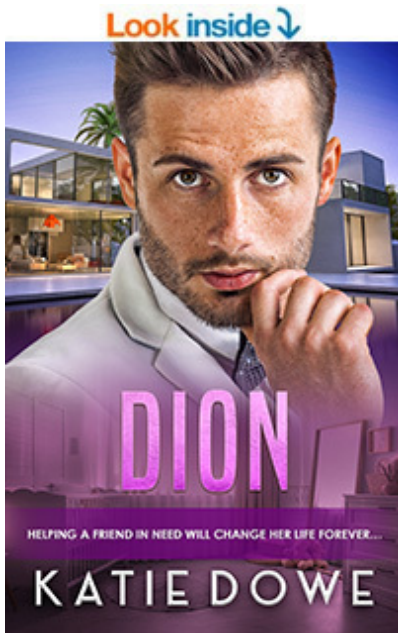


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Also available: [Dion](#) by Katie Dowe:



## Description:

A sexy surrogate romance by Katie Dowe of BWWM Club.

Talented fashion designer Odette Billings and multi-billionaire heir Dion Horton have been best friends since childhood.

When Dion asks Odette to be a surrogate mother to help him start anew from a bad break-up, she agrees, wanting only to support her friend.

But as the pregnancy progresses, her feelings for Dion begin to deepen into something much more than friendship.

Yet Dion is still haunted by his tumultuous past, and by an ex-girlfriend determined to get in his way!

Will Odette's growing love for Dion find its way to his guarded heart?

And now with the baby due any day, can their bond evolve into a love that withstands the uncertainties of a new beginning?

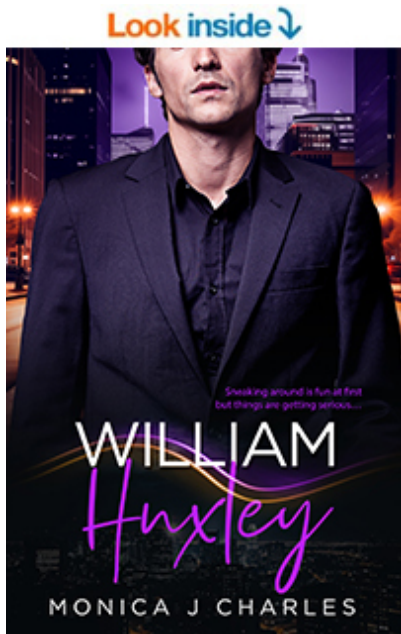
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Suitable for over 18s only due to sizzling hot sex scenes with an alpha billionaire!

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Also available: [William Huxley](#) by Monica J Charles:



## Description:

A sexy secret identity romance by Monica J Charles of BWWM Club.

Jada Snow, an accountant at the local court, has lived under the shadow of her controlling father for far too long.

That all changes when she meets William Huxley, a billionaire with a past linked to her father!

Seizing the opportunity to reinvent herself, Jada dives into a clandestine relationship with William, tasting freedom for the first time.

But when a confrontation brings everything to light, Jada is forced to choose between her father's approval and her love for William.

And now she must confront her father with a life-altering ultimatum!

Will Jada's bold decision pave the way for her own happiness with William?

And can she break free from her father's shadow to embrace a future she truly deserves?

Find out in this emotional yet sexy romance by Monica J Charles of BWWM Club.

Suitable for over 18s only due to sizzling hot sex scenes!

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