



Enemy

BILLIONAIRE'S

Fake Fiancé

OLIVIA PEARL

ENEMY BILLIONAIRE'S FAKE FIANCÉ

**AN ENEMIES TO LOVERS SUDDEN PREGNANCY
ROMANCE**

Olivia Pearl



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CHAPTER 1

SHEILA

“Does this dress say fuck me?”

I roll my eyes at my best friend’s question. Alexa Tyson is one of those lucky girls who doesn’t have to do much to look sexy. With her piercing baby blue eyes, strawberry blond hair, and alluring aura, she is a goddess who can get any man she wants.

In my case, I’ve managed to get my heart broken a great number of times. The last straw for me was when Jaden cheated on me with a girl he claimed was his best friend. I’ve sworn off men since then and currently, I want nothing to do with love. It’s just too complicated and emotional to deal with.

“You know you’d look sexy wearing even a potato sack, right?” I ask her in response, and she pouts.

“If you like it then that’s a huge red flag. No offense to you, Sheila, but I’m not wearing something you approve of. If it makes you happy, then it’ll probably make my grandma happy.

The only time I can listen to you is when I need makeup advice. You're the guru among us."

She's right. I've always had a penchant for beautifying and enhancing looks through makeup. I'd love nothing more than to have my own line of cosmetics someday.

I gasp and feign hurt. "I feel insulted, but I'm going to let it slide because nothing, not even you, is capable of putting a damper on my mood today."

Alexa sticks out her tongue at me and goes back to her closet to get something else to wear. She's been sourcing for the perfect outfit for both of us to wear for the last half hour. As much as I want to celebrate my new job, the club downtown – and getting dressed up for it – is not exactly my idea of fun. Alexa's definition of the perfect outfit is something that leaves little to the imagination, and call me a prude, but that's not my style. I prefer subtle but classy.

After a few minutes which feel like torturous hours of waiting for Alexa to surface from the closet, she finally comes out looking as exquisite as ever in a little lacy black dress, and in her hand is a wine-colored dress for me.

"I know this is chic so I'm not going to ask your opinion. Now, hurry up and put this on. It should suit you perfectly," she says, dumping the dress in my arms, and my jaw hangs so wide open that I have to remind myself to close my mouth when I take a proper look at it.

"The goal was to make me appear sexy, not like a hooker who hasn't had a single client in years."

My best friend only smirks in response and says, “Sheila Leah Cromwell, get ready to get laid.”



The club is booming with loud music when we arrive. The bouncer asks for our IDs and passes. Alexa shows them to him before we’re allowed to go in. It’s a fancy club for the affluent which leaves me wondering how Alexa got us passes, but I don’t ask her. She has a way of getting what she wants, and that’s one of the things I admire about her.

“Let’s go do some shots,” Alexa says, dragging me to the bar.

I don’t fail to notice the multiple pairs of eyes on me. Without being told, I know it has something to do with my dress. The dress Alexa picked out is a tight red mini-dress with a slit running up my thigh, and my cleavage is full on display. Despite Alexa’s best efforts to get me laid, I’m not so sure I want to sleep with a practical stranger for the sole purpose of sex.

Sex is something I’d rather do with someone I really like. At the same time, seeing as that hadn’t ended well for me in the past, I might as well compromise a tad bit.

“Six shots of tequila, please!” shouts Alexa, and the bartender winks at her before turning away to pour our drinks.

“Six? I’m only taking two!” I counter.

“Oh, Sheila, you’ve got to loosen up a bit. It’s just three drinks.”

“Fine,” I say. I’m in a club; I might as well act like it.

“To your new job,” Alexa says, and we clink our glasses before drinking. I wince at the bitter taste of my shot.

“Now, let’s get you a sexy ass man. How about that guy over there?” Alexa asks, tilting her head to her right, and I follow the action to see who she’s talking about. “He looks like he’d be great in bed. What do you think?”

“Nope. Not my type,” I reply. Frankly, I don’t think I’ll find anyone here, but she doesn’t have to know that. Alexa keeps pointing out different men in the club as we drink, and I continue to thwart her efforts by refusing all of them. She doesn’t give up. Thankfully, some guy comes and asks her for a dance, and finally, I’m left alone.

I look over to the dance floor and see bodies pressed against each other, covered in sweat. Just as I look away, I see a glass in front of me.

“I didn’t ask for another drink.”

“From the gentleman across the bar,” says the bartender.

When I turn around, I feel like I’ve been struck by a bolt of lightning as the bluest pair of eyes I’ve ever had the pleasure of seeing stare back at me. I’m immediately knocked out of breath, and I have to will myself to breathe. My lips part, and I watch his blue eyes darken as his simmering gaze lingers on them for a moment before burning a trail down my body.

Every fiber of my being comes alive.

His dark brown hair looks slightly disheveled, and his jawline is strong, hard, and defined just like marble. I have not a single doubt that the rest of him underneath his perfectly tailored suit is the same. He looks familiar, but I don't have the slightest hint where I've seen him before.

Before I can gather my thoughts, he's walking over to me with confident and purposeful strides, looking sexy as sin. He is the perfect definition of sex on wheels, and I wonder what about me must have gotten his attention.

"A beautiful lady such as yourself shouldn't be having drinks alone," he says in a low baritone, towering over me with his imposing height, and I almost orgasm on the spot. His voice is powerful and rough and has a slight undertone of dominance which does alien things to my body.

The craziest part is I want more, so I say, "No one here has caught my fancy."

I turn away from him and face the bar, playing with my glass and feigning indifference. He sits and raises a brow in amusement.

"Surely you didn't see me."

Arrogant is the first thought that comes to my mind.

Up close, the age gap between us is apparent. He should be in his late thirties, and I don't do older men. But his lips are so full and ripe for kissing. His nose is slender and rounded. His jawline looks even more prominent up close, and I have to resist the urge to kiss it.

“I did. But you were just as insignificant as the rest,” I lie, and he knows it.

His smirk remains fixated in place, and it irks and turns me on at the same time. How could one person have so much confidence in themselves?

“I’m Damon.”

“Okay, Damon,” I reply, and his eyes darken with lust. He must like the way his name sounds coming from my mouth.

Hell, I do, too.

I want nothing more than for him to bend me over the counter and take me from behind until I can’t walk anymore. I press my thighs together to suppress the aching in my core caused by my far-from-innocent thoughts and instantly chide myself for thinking that way about a total stranger. What happened to not going home with anyone?

Damon’s eyes follow the action and his fingers clench around his glass.

Imagine how many times in a row those long slender fingers can make you cum. The thought has me biting my lip until I taste blood and I turn a violent shade of red.

Bye-bye, panties.

They are probably doused beyond saving, and my heartbeat is increasing with each passing second.

This never happens to me. I’ve never felt this way about anyone before and it has me wondering what the hell is

happening to me.

“I’m Sheila,” I say, my voice laced with the need to be devoured.

“Beautiful name for a beautiful lady.” he compliments, and I blush despite my effort not to.

“So, is this how you charm the ladies?”

“Oh, believe me, darling, I don’t have to do much to charm the ladies,” he answers with such conviction that it infuriates me, but my treacherous body seems to like it. And a whole lot, might I add.

“Overconfidence killed the cat,” I say, and he smirks.

“I thought that was curiosity?”

“Not exactly. I believe it was overconfidence.”

Damon laughs and the sound does things to my already drenched core.

“So, are you here alone?” he asks.

“I’m here with a friend.”

“Where is she then?”

“Probably off with some guy.”

“Maybe we can make it so you’re off with some guy, too.”

It takes me a moment to fully comprehend what he means and my hormones are more than game. My whole body is trembling and I can’t think straight. All I want is to get under

him and on top of him. For him to have me screaming until my voice turns hoarse. But I don't want to give in easily.

“And what makes you think I'd go anywhere with you?”

“I never said anything about you leaving with me, darling. Except, of course, if you want to.”

Shit. He's got me. He knows I want him, and he's toying with me. Devilishly handsome bastard.

“Maybe we could make it that I'm off with some guy, too.”

It's just a one-night stand. People do it all the time. Nothing could possibly go wrong, right?

CHAPTER 2

DAMON

Sheila's nervous as we step out of the club. I can tell from the way she's fidgeting. She keeps fumbling with her hands and playing with her dark brown hair which leads me to the conclusion that either she's never had a one-night stand before or doesn't do this often.

I was at the club with some friends because I just needed to chill out after a really stressful day. I wasn't looking to go home with anyone tonight, seeing as I had turned down all the ladies doing their best to get my attention. But my resolve went out the window when I caught sight of her — a shapely, five-six, brown-haired beauty sitting at the bar and making no attempt to mingle.

She was so gorgeous, I was unable to look away. She was a flame in every way but literally. Her red dress hugged her flawless curves to perfection and her aura enthralled me in a way I couldn't explain.

There wasn't a single man at the club who wasn't staring at her, but she was completely oblivious. I didn't know why, but

I felt the need to go talk to her before someone else beat me to it.

When she received the drink from the bartender earlier and turned to look at me, I didn't miss the way those lush, tasty lips of hers parted just the tiniest bit and how her pupils dilated.

Seeing her now outside the club under perfect lighting, she looks a little younger than I originally thought. Probably in her mid twenties, if not her early twenties. But fuck me if I didn't still want her in my bed.

Just to be sure she's okay with this, I ask, "Does it bother you that I'm older?"

"No, it doesn't."

I place my hand on her lower back to pacify her nerves and make her comfortable as we wait for the driver to arrive.

Wrong move.

My pulse beats in excitement and blood rushes to my cock when I see the goosebumps rise on her arms. The excited bastard twitches, and I chide myself for acting like a teenager. I am a grown man who isn't in any way an amateur when it comes to women. Why is she making me feel these emotions?

"Is this yours?" she asks as the Porsche pulls up in front of us.

"One of many," I answer with a lopsided grin.

"Show off," she says, and I chuckle.

I can see the wheels turning in her head.

“What do you do?” she asks out of curiosity.

“I do many things, hun, but right now the only thing I’d like to do is you,” I say, staring her dead in the eyes, and she blushes like a rose. She’s too stunned by my words to notice that I’m holding the door for her.

Cute.

“After you,” I say, offering her one more chance to back out of this. I really hope she doesn’t but at the same time, I wouldn’t want her to do something she isn’t okay with.

Much to my satisfaction, she gets in and I follow suit. Hudson, my chauffeur, drives off. He already knows to take us to my penthouse, so I don’t say anything to him.

Halfway through the ride, Sheila is still anxious, so I lightly trace her soft hand with my fingers.

“I don’t like to waste my time, Damon, so I want to know if this will be worth my while or not,” she says.

The way she says my name makes me throw caution to the wind. Turning towards her, I slowly press my mouth to her throat and drag my palm up her enticing thigh, my fingers vanishing beneath her dress. The sweet whimpers coming out of her sinful mouth drum against my ears and have my blood boiling. I don’t care if Hudson catches onto what’s happening.

I watch her mouth drop open as I knead over her dripping panties. It’s all too much, and my dick strains painfully against my zipper. She bites her lip hard to keep the sounds from

making their way out, and fuck me, it's the hottest thing I've ever had the pleasure of seeing.

"Oh my god," she whimpers.

"I can be, darling. Now tell me, do you think this would be worth your while or not?" I ask in a rough voice laced with desire, but she's far too gone to reply, seeing as one of my fingers had made its way into her thong.

Swiveling through her slick pussy, I slide one finger over her clit, and her hips buck. I nearly curse in frustration when the car comes to a halt. I retreat and Sheila looks disheartened, too.

Glad to know I have the same effect on her.

"We're here," I announce before proceeding. "Unless, of course, you'd like us to continue what we've already started in the car," I say with a smirk on my lips, knowing full well the effect I have on her.

"I'm not the least bit desperate," she says, her voice barely a whisper, and I chuckle, loving the fact that she's letting me fight for it. I love a challenge. A sexy one at that.

"Suit yourself, love," I reply and step down to open the door for her.

The elevator ride was unadulterated torture. I couldn't stop thinking of the filthy things I could do to her with my mouth, my fingers, or my dick, which was unusual. I don't usually go for women in clubs, but there's something about her that I can't quite place.

The very idea of what was to come had me so hard and turned on I couldn't see straight. We were the only ones riding in the elevator and I wanted her so badly it hurt, but I also did not want to scare her away by jumping her like a horny teenager out of control.

The elevator finally comes to a stop, and we get off. I watch her eyes widen like saucers as she takes in the environment, and I don't blame her. It's a luxurious penthouse with a great view, and I only settle for the best.

"You never did say what you did for a living," she says as we step into the apartment, still relishing in the elegance of everything in sight.

"I'm a businessman, Sheila. I do different things, and right now, they aren't important," I reply, trying my best to ignore how her name melts like caramel on my tongue.

She nods in agreement even though I know my answer isn't satisfactory enough for her. "How old are you?"

"Forty-two. Is that a turn-off for you?" I enquire, desperately hoping she doesn't change her mind. When she said it was okay at the club, she had no idea what my specific age was.

"Not at all. I'm twenty-three."

So, she's nineteen years younger. There's something about her. Something captivating that I can't seem to place my finger on. She intrigues me, but this is just a one-night stand. Nothing more.

“Would you like a drink?” I ask, taking off my jacket, even though the only thing I want to do is fuck her senseless until she forgets how to walk.

A smile slowly makes an appearance on her blood-red lips. “I already had enough drinks at the club,” she says, sauntering towards me and shortening the distance between us in seductive strides.

She makes me a little uneasy, but I manage to keep it under wraps. When she’s within proximity, I place my hand on her lower back, lift her chin with my right hand, and trace her jawline with kisses. My lips gently caress hers and the feeling is unique.

The kiss starts slow and sensual but soon becomes hunger filled and lustful. I can taste the hint of tequila and the smell of her vanilla perfume mixed with it. Never had I assumed tasting tequila in a woman’s mouth would turn me on so much.

“Relax, Sheila,” I say, taking off my tie as I try to soothe her.

“It’s just that I’ve never done this before,” she finally confirms my suspicions.

“I know, darling, but there’s nothing to be scared of. We can stop if you want us to.”

“No. I want this. I want you.”

That’s all the validation I need to proceed. In a split second, we’re kissing each other like we’ve been starving for ages. She

rapidly helps me unbutton my shirt and yanks at my belt greedily as I pin her against the wall.

I undress her with my expert fingers and drop to my knees, using my lips to form a hot trail near her dripping pussy, all the while squeezing one of her breasts which fit perfectly in my large palm. She moans at the sensation, pushing her pussy against my mouth.

“Do you want me to fuck you with my mouth?” I ask with a mischievous glint in my eyes. But right now, Sheila doesn’t seem to be interested in playing games.

“Yes, please. Make me cum.”

Without warning, my mouth connects with her swollen pussy, and she cries out in pleasure. She clutches my hair as I continue tongue fucking her, my mouth sucking hard on her sensitive nub.

I plunge two fingers inside her glistening opening, and she screams, thighs trembling as her orgasm rocks through her. The sight is otherworldly, and it takes special grace for me not to cum right there too.

My grip on her doesn’t falter so she doesn’t lose her balance. When I’m certain she can stand on her own, I rise to my full length, towering over her smaller frame, and she claws at my shirt. I finally shrug it off, and she looks at me like dessert.

With the way she’s staring at me, I’m glad I put effort into keeping fit. Maintaining eye contact, I pull down my pants,

and her eyes widen at the size of my hard, protruding cock. It's cute.

"I'm clean," I say.

"I am, too, and I'm on the pill, but I'd prefer we use a condom."

I carry her bridal style to the bedroom and retrieve a condom from my bedside drawer. She rolls it on my cock, and I ask her one more time if she's okay with this. She agrees.

I position myself at her entrance and push into her and we both moan in unison. I knew she'd feel great, but I was nowhere prepared for this kind of pleasure.

"Are you okay?" I ask with great difficulty, and she curses.

"Fuck me already," she whines, her voice breathless.

I thrust into her, stretching her walls to accommodate my length. The feeling is surreal.

Soon, we're fucking with reckless abandon, the sound of our bodies slamming together, echoing within the four walls of his room, both of us working in sync to find the pleasure we so desperately crave.

"Oh, Damon," she moans, closing her eyes and throwing her head back. My cock twitches uncontrollably, but I fight my release. I want this to last.

Sheila hangs onto me, holding on for dear life as I continue to pump into her. Not long after, she screams and cums hard on my dick, her body shaking violently under mine.

“Sweet Lord,” she breathes, panting like she’s just run a marathon, but I’m far from done.

“I’m not done with you yet, love.”

And with that, I turn her around and gather her wrists behind her back, using my free hand to trail the slopes and swells of her body.

“When I saw you at the club earlier tonight, all I wanted to do was bend you over that counter and fuck you until you forgot your name,” I rasp, stroking her ass cheeks.

She pushes her ass against me, desperate for any form of friction.

“Do it.”

I slam into her in one swift motion and the impact forces her forward.

“You feel so fucking good,” I growl into her ear as her body bounces with my every thrust.

“Fuck! Right there...” she moans wantonly.

“I love your pussy. Fits my cock like a glove,” I groan, fucking her hard and fast.

“*Damon,*” she moans my name like a prayer. The sound should be considered illicit. Her whimpers only fuel my longing to satisfy her desires.

“You like this, huh? You like me fucking your pussy?”

“Yes. Oh fuck, yes!”

Before I know it, she screams and shatters around me, her whole body jiggling as the climax claims her. The way her pussy clamps around me has me finding my release as well.

I still and let out a feral groan as I spill long ribbons of semen into the condom. The feeling is intense and unlike anything I've ever experienced, and I take a moment to relish in how fucking great it feels as the waves of pleasure splash through my entire body. Sheila hugs me closer to herself, and I accommodate her.

“That was amazing,” she says, breathlessly.

“You were amazing,” I reply, claiming her lips and she smiles wearily.

Slowly removing my body from hers, I go to the bathroom to clean myself and discard the condom. After I'm done, I fall onto the bed and hold her close. Something I never do with my other casual hookups.

Hopefully, just like my other one-night stands, there will be no consequences.

CHAPTER 3

SHEILA

When I awake the next morning, everything that happened last night comes back to me in bits and pieces.

Last night was remarkable. It was honestly the best I'd had in a really long time. I take a peek at the clock on the bedside table and instantly bolt out of bed.

Fuck!

It's almost time for work, and I can't be late on my first day. Damon is still fast asleep, and I have no intention of waking him up. Gathering my clothes from the floor of his bedroom, I get dressed with the speed of light and flee his apartment without a second thought.

As much as I'd love to do this again, it was just a one-night stand, and it was fun while it lasted.



After getting to my apartment and taking a shower, I arrive at my new workplace just in the nick of time. And thoroughly fucked, might I add.

I smooth out the front of my blue pencil dress as I pass through the revolving doors and step into the building. The whole place is gigantic, neat, and classy.

Finnegan's Enterprise owns a lot of luxurious hotels all over the world, and I was lucky to even be considered for the executive assistant to the CEO role. I hadn't even bothered to do research on the man because I was too busy screaming under a stranger last night to care.

A crowd stride by as I head towards the receptionists, passing through the doors, gliding their IDs to let them through before dispersing out of sight.

I'm pretty sure I'm supposed to head to the twentieth floor, but I just want to be sure before I ascend the elevator.

"Hi, erm, excuse me. I'm starting a new job today, and I'm looking for floor twenty?" I say, asking the receptionist who's talking to someone on her headset.

"Just a second, please," she says to whoever is on the other side of the call before responding to me. "Take Elevator C," she answers, returning to the call.

I nod and thank her before turning on my feet and heading towards the elevators. A few people join me in the elevator, and before I know it, I'm on the twentieth floor.

I step out and stand awkwardly, wondering where to go or what to do next, seeing as the floor is quiet and there is not a single soul in sight. It's a visitors' area with black couches and a glass coffee table in front of it. On top of the coffee table is a bowl of mints and business magazines.

For a second, I contemplate if, by some mistake, I've gotten off on the wrong floor. Instant relief washes over me when I see a familiar face. It's Mrs. Anderson, the lady who interviewed me for the job. I walk up to her and introduce myself.

"Hi, I'm Sheila Cromwell. The new assistant."

"Oh, we've been expecting you, Miss Cromwell. You're right on time. Right this way, please."

I observe my surroundings as I follow her. The white walls are pristine, and it seems to me like my new boss is a neat freak. Nice.

"So, here's what you have to do. As Mr. Finnegan's executive assistant, you'll perform tasks such as keeping files, booking his meetings and flights, setting appointments, and managing his day-to-day operations. That's basically it. As for his preferences, you'll learn as time goes by," she says, stopping in front of a desk I assume is mine. "This is where you'll work from. Do you have any questions?"

"No, none for now."

She nods. "If you do have any questions in the future regarding your job, do not hesitate to ask. Although, the job's

pretty simple and judging by how excellent you were during the interview, I'm sure you'll do just fine. Mr. Finnegan is out attending a business meeting and will be back by noon."

"Thank you, Mrs. Anderson. I really appreciate your help."

"Any time," she replies, walking away and leaving me alone in the quiet office space.

I can't believe it. After several months of job hunting, I finally have a decent job with adequate pay in one of the most prestigious enterprises in New York. I do a little happy dance and drop my bag on my new desk before settling in my seat.

It feels so comfy that I heave a sigh of satisfaction and shut my eyes for just a millisecond to bask in the glory of it all. I hope my boss isn't some asshole who gives me a hard time because I want to give my best to this job and put in my all.

Talking of assholes, my mind immediately goes back to the sexy man from last night. He was a fine piece of specimen and, boy, did he know the right strings to pull. Just thinking about the sinful things he did to my body the night before causes a tingle in my vagina and my panties dampen.

Damn. Not again.

There was a certain confidence in the way he carried himself. Like he owned everything he looked at and didn't need to acknowledge it.

I can't be thinking of Damon right now, so I shove him to the back of my mind and concentrate on the task at hand. I

need to sort out the files on my desk, so my new boss doesn't think of me as incompetent even before I've begun.



I head down to the cafeteria when it's lunchtime and meet some of the other workers there. Since I don't know anyone, I help myself to some sandwiches and head to an empty table. I barely settle in when someone says, "Can I join you?"

I look up to find a blonde woman with the friendliest of smiles. She's petite and looks like she's around my age. Pretty, too.

"Uhm... sure."

"Thanks," she replies, taking her place on the other side of the table. "The chicken-swiss sandwich? Cool choice."

I smile bashfully, tucking a few loose strands of my brown hair behind my ear. "I didn't exactly know what to get. It's my first day."

"I figured. Love your dress," she compliments, and I blush. She's nice.

"Thank you."

"I'm Suzanne by the way, but you can call me Suzie."

"Sheila," I introduce, biting into my sandwich. I'm famished. Between fleeing Damon's apartment this morning and getting to work on time, breakfast had totally skipped my mind. "What department do you work in?"

“I’m in the finance department. Numbers and all,” she answers, chuckling a little. Math has never really been my thing. “What about you?”

“Oh, I erm... I’m Mr. Finnegan’s new assistant.”

Suzie has a surprised look on her face, and I wonder why. “Shut up.”

I laugh a little even though I’m confused. “What?”

“I’m sorry. It’s just, you get to look at that fine piece of ass every damn day. I mean, holy baby Jesus, the man looks like he’s a fallen angel or some sort of Greek god.”

No matter how hot he is, I bet he isn’t half as hot as Damon.

Stop it, Sheila. It was just a one-night stand.

I mentally scold myself for comparing a man I’ve never met before to Damon. But it’s kind of hard not to think about him given the fact that he gave me the most intense orgasms of my life.

Suzie lowers her voice as though she’s about to reveal a secret. “But as easy on the eyes as he is, he’s kind of hard to deal with,” she warns.

Great. Just what I need.

“He can’t be that bad, right?”

“His last assistant quit because she couldn’t put up with him anymore, but I’m sure you’ll do just fine. There’s absolutely nothing to worry about.”

Sure.

If this was Suzie's attempt to get me to calm down, then she was doing a really horrible job. We talked some more before lunchtime was over, and I was thankful I had made a new friend on my first day.

A few minutes after I return to my desk, the intercom rings, and I answer immediately. It's my boss requesting — scratch that — demanding that I go to his office.

I promptly jolt out of my seat, straighten the creases on my dress, and walk towards his office. Inhaling deeply and bracing myself for what's to come, I knock on the door, and he beckons on me to come in.

When I turn the doorknob and push open the door, I encounter the greatest shock of my life.

To my utter horror, sitting behind a monogamy desk in a perfectly tailored suit, looking like the whole fucking world belongs to him, is Damon.

He's putting on a pair of glasses and going through some documents on his desk.

What the actual fuck?

My heartbeat accelerates and I feel like I'm going to pass out any moment. This has to be a cruel prank.

I contemplate running out of the office, but before I can turn around and make a beeline for the door, Damon lifts his head, and our eyes connect.

Double-decker shit.

CHAPTER 4

DAMON

Nothing on earth could have prepared me for this moment. If someone had told me the stranger at the bar was going to be my new assistant, I would've laughed in their faces and called them clowns.

I woke up this morning to find that Sheila was gone. Last night had been amazing, and hell, I wanted more. I wanted nothing more than to feel the warmth she provided again, to feel her lips on mine. And here she was, standing right in front of me, looking just as I remember.

I probably have a terrified expression on my face, and it's freaking justified. Sheila looks like a fish out of water, and it's apparent she's as alarmed as I am.

Fan-fucking-tastic.

How the hell did this happen? This must be some sort of sick twisted game the universe is playing with me.

It's clear she didn't do any research on my company, even after getting a job. If I was less stunned, maybe I'd be annoyed

by that as an employer. As it is, I'm just horrified.

Still, it doesn't stop me from noticing how her dress hugs her curves tightly and the memory of me running my fingers around them last night comes to mind.

Focus!

Okay, this isn't time to dwell on the past but find a way to salvage the future and whatever shred of dignity I have left. But before I have the chance to say anything, Sheila raises her chin defiantly and squares her shoulders.

“Good afternoon, sir. You sent for me,” she says.

So, she's choosing to take this route? I can't decide if that's clever or stupid. There's determination in her insanely striking brown eyes. It reminds me of last night when I looked into them at the club for the first time.

Her firm, pouty lips remind me of the nasty things her mouth uttered last night as I fucked her senseless, and it sends signals to my cock, but I'm adept at the fine art of concealing emotions so I maintain my composure.

I still crave her.

“Sheila,” I utter with smoothness and hedonism, and holy fuck, the way she looks at me makes me lose every atom of resolve. I want to spread her on my desk so we could continue from where we left off last night.

Oh, holy fuck no. Get a grip, Damon. This is your new assistant we're talking about.

“It’s nice to see you again after our endeavor last night,” I grit out in hostility, and heat rises to her neck.

We both know the precise endeavor I’m referring to, and I can tell she’s thinking about it, too.

Her face betrays no emotion as she answers, “I’m sorry, but we’ve never met before. You must be mistaking me for someone else.”

Okay, I wasn’t expecting that. She might be willing to play silly games but I’m not up for it.

“Oh, really?” I ask, trying and failing to keep the venom from my tone.

“Yeah, you’ve got the wrong person.”

“Cut the crap. I know it’s you. What the fuck were you thinking?”

Her lips part in shock and my eyes follow the motion. I imagine making her sit on my desk and positioning my body in between her legs where it should be, my hands immediately taking hold of her thighs and parting them. My fingertips grazing her thighs as my hands travel all the way to her inner thighs and underneath her dress, disappearing to where I know it aches the most. Why does my body seem to have a mind of its own whenever this woman is concerned?

I imagine her skilled lips around my cock and shivers run down my spine.

Focus, Damon. Not now.

“I don’t know who you think you’re talking to, Mr. Finnegan, but this is really inappropriate.”

“Admit it, Sheila, it’s you. I wouldn’t miss your sensual and downright sexy voice anywhere, not to talk of your striking eyes and luscious lips that had me wanting more this morning.”

“It was just a one-night stand. And if I had known who you were last night, nothing would have happened between us,” she says, finally dropping the act.

“Are you sure about that? Are you sure all this isn’t a ploy to sell a story to the media?”

I know I sound like an asshole, but I don’t care. I don’t care if she’s my assistant because right now, standing before me and looking like a delicious snack, I want to fuck her into oblivion, and that upsets me even more. She’s my worker. I shouldn’t be having such thoughts about her.

“You don’t get to talk to me like that. It was a genuine mistake.”

“I beg to differ.”

She looks like she’s ready to ask me to fuck off, but thinks better of it. “I didn’t do my research, and that was my mistake. But that doesn’t mean that you should give me hell for it.”

“Oh, trust me, Sheila, there are many things I’d like to give to you. and hell is nowhere near that list.”

“I know I work for you now, Mr. Finnegan, but that doesn’t mean I’d tolerate any form of disrespect. We had a one-night

stand, and it was good. Just consensual sex between two adults who knew what they were doing. If by some sick twist of fate we happen to work together after that, you're going to treat me the same way you treat your other employees, with the respect I deserve."

I twirl in my seat and observe her after she's done rendering her speech. For some reason, I'm turned on by the fact that she's standing up to me. I love a woman who knows what she wants and doesn't let anyone walk all over her. And God help me if I didn't want to see more of it.

"Feisty. I like it. That's cute and all, Sheila, but I'm the boss. I make the rules, and you abide by them, not the other way round."

"If you make the rules then surely you must know that it's inappropriate to antagonize your employees in this manner."

"Pray tell, Miss Cromwell, what's the adequate way to interact with an employee who left a lasting impression in my bed and on my mind last night?"

"For someone so mature, you sure act like a toddler."

I smirk. I know I should stop inciting her, but I can't. She's so adorable it's hard to stop.

"A toddler who fucked you last night and gave you three orgasms. What a sexy toddler I am, Miss Cromwell."

"If that's all, Mr. Finnegan, I'd very much like to return to my desk now," she says, ignoring my dirty comment.

I lean forward to pick up a bunch of files on my desk, and I don't miss the way her eyes dwell on how my muscles flex deliciously beneath my shirt. The same muscles that dominated her last night.

"Here's what I called you in here for," I say, handing them over to her. "Sort, organize, and make digital copies. Have them over to me before the end of the day."

The files are huge, and I wonder how she's going to get the job done before closure. I expect her to comment on it, but she doesn't.

"Do you have any objections?" I ask to see if she'll take the bait.

"Not at all," she replies.

"You're dismissed."

I'm torn as I watch her exit my office, the sway of her hips doing things to my senses. She's a walking, breathing temptation. One I'm more than willing to fall into.

So help me, God.

CHAPTER 5

SHEILA

Still shaken by my discovery at work today, I'm thoroughly drained by the time I get home.

I had been sent on a madman's mission. Grabbing coffee throughout the day, answering calls unendingly, and going through the various tasks Damon had so gracefully assigned to me.

I'm dog-tired when I wobble into my apartment, grateful that I have made it back in one piece.

The aroma of mac and cheese hits my nostrils and I immediately know Alexa's around. Thank goodness I gave her a key. I don't know how I would've been able to prepare something to eat this night or wait after ordering takeout. It had totally skipped my mind to grab dinner on my way home.

Alexa must hear me come in because within a few seconds, she surfaces in the living room, her hair tied up in a messy bun.

"Hey," she says with a small smile.

I groan as I collapse on the couch like a deck of cards and kick off my heels. My ankles are killing me, and I make a mental note to make a reservation at the spa. That's if my job spares me the time.

"That bad, huh?" Alexa asks, and I release an unladylike snort.

"You don't even know the half of it."

"How was your first day?"

"Can I please have a plate of whatever it is you're making while I tell you the shitty tale that is my life right now?"

"Mac and cheese coming right up," Alexa announces, disappearing to the kitchen.

"Thanks," I utter and dig into my food like a starved horse once she hands it to me.

"Woah, easy, tiger," Alexa says but I don't care.

"Today has got to be the worse day of my life. Literally."

Her face scrunches in confusion and I clarify.

"So, my boss wasn't around when I got to work, and the first three to four hours were great. I even made a friend at lunch. So, I get back to my desk and he summons me to his office—" I pause for dramatic effect.

"*And?*" Alexa urges.

"Turns out my new boss is the hot stranger I left the club with last night."

Alexa's face is comical. If this wasn't about me, I would've taken a picture just for the fun of it to spite her later.

"No fucking way. You're messing with me," she finally says.

"I wish I was." I stuff my mouth with another fraction of my food.

"Holy shit! How did this happen? Didn't you research the company or something? Surely a picture of him must have been on their page."

"No, I didn't. Story of my miserable life."

"Did he recognize you? Please tell me he didn't," she cringes.

"He most certainly did. I tried to act like I didn't know him, but it was no use. He knew who I was and made me feel like crap."

"No offense to you, Sheila, but I don't want to be you right now. I mean, what the hell? It's not every day you have a one-night stand and get to your new job just to realize that the hot stranger is your new boss. Straight out of a telenovela."

"Tell me about it."

"How hot is he though on a scale of one to ten?" Alexa asks, smirking, and I can't believe my best friend is choosing to overlook my crisis just to find out how hot a man is.

"Alexa!"

“What? He must have been a sexy ass man for you to go home with him. So, stop being such a prude and spill the beans.”

“Try a hundred,” I reply, and Alexa smiles so wide it must hurt.

“And the sex?”

“He made me cum three times,” I reply with a sly smile.

“*Damn.* Well, as good as that sounds, you know you can’t have anything to do with him right? You have to concentrate on your job and make sure things don’t get more complicated than they already are,” Alexa advises, and I’m about to contemplate her words when she bursts out laughing.

Okay, I’m confused. “What?”

“You should know me better by now. If I was the one stuck with a boss like that, I’d fuck him six ways to Sunday. Have fun, baby girl,” she says, and I roll my eyes.

Leave it to Alexa to say something so silly.



“Why am I yet to receive my morning coffee, Miss Cromwell?” Damon asks when I answer the phone the next morning at work, and he doesn’t sound too happy.

Shoot. Due to the many assignments I’ve been smothered with, I totally forgot, and now he’s going to give me hell for it. I instantly bolt out of my seat, and it’s only when I’m at the cafe I realize I didn’t ask for his preference.

I decide to go with my gut and get strong black coffee with cream and two sugars and hope he likes it.

I knock on his door, and he asks me to come in.

I forget how to breathe once I set my eyes on him. He's not wearing his suit jacket this time, and his sleeves are rolled up to his elbows. There's nothing sexier than a man with his forearms full on display.

Aside from the little creases on his forehead, nothing about this man says he's nineteen years older than I am. I did a little research on him last night and found that he has a child and an ex-wife who's a supermodel. Aside that, there's nothing else about him on the internet which leads me to the conclusion that he's a private person.

His fingers lightly brush against mine as I hand him the coffee, and my heart skips a bit. I don't understand why my body reacts this way to him. I lose control anytime I'm near him, and it's beginning to annoy me.

"I expected you a lot earlier."

"I'm s--sorry but the cafe was busy." I mentally scold myself for stuttering like a toddler learning to speak. "It won't happen again."

"It had better not," he answers, taking a sip from the cup. "This isn't how I take my coffee, but I'm going to excuse you because this was your first time. You'll learn very quickly that I do not condone incompetence, Miss Cromwell."

Why does this side of him turn me on so much? Wicked images of me splayed on his desk flash in my mind once again, and I have to remind myself of my resolve to stay the fuck away from him.

“You look nice. What’s the occasion?” he inquires, peering up at me through thick, long lashes.

I can think of another part of him that’s thick and long.

Suddenly, the temperature of the room increases by a hundred degrees.

“There’s no occasion,” I simply state, smoothing down the lilac dress I’d chosen this morning. Maybe Damon was on my mind when I picked out the dress, but I would never admit that out loud.

“Did you wear that dress to seduce me, Sheila?” he asks in a hoarse voice, and fuck me, I’ll never get used to how cosmic my name sounds coming from those luscious lips of his. It sends signals to my clit.

In the blink of an eye, he’s out of his chair and taking calculated steps towards me like a predator stalking its prey.

I stay glued to the spot. My palms turn sweaty, and I can feel my heart thumping wildly in my ribcage. I won’t be surprised if he can actually hear it.

“No, I didn’t,” I respond and mentally pat myself on the back at how calm my voice sounds.

“Then why does it feel like you did?”

“Maybe you’re just a pervert.” My voice drops an octave. His being so close is clouding my judgment.

“Oh, really?”

We gaze at each other as if in a trance and the feeling is electric. He’s so tall, I have to crane my neck to get a good look at him. A few seconds pass, and he doesn’t do or say anything, but it doesn’t refute the reality that I want him to touch me once again. I want to feel the way I felt that night at his penthouse.

I don’t care if he has an ex-wife who’s a supermodel or if he is my boss. Right now, he’s just Damon Finnegan, the man I find irresistibly spectacular.

His fingers trace my hips, all the way to my lips, and they part on their own accord. His hooded gaze flickers to them and then back to my eyes as if seeking permission which I happily grant.

“Fuck it,” I say, crashing my lips against his. They are just as soft as I remember. I feel his bulge against my stomach and moan softly into his mouth, slipping my fingers into his hair. I go closer, holding onto him and molding my body in his embrace. Damon attacks my neck with kisses and kneads my breasts through my dress. The sensation is so much that I bite my lip to stop myself from screaming his name.

I hear him chuckle, low, sensual. I feel it against my throat.

“You can scream all you want. The walls are soundproof, and no one will hear you. Fuck, you’re wet, aren’t you?”

“You made me wet just as I’ve made you hard,” I reply, unashamedly palming his erection through his pants.

Damon mutters a few profanities under his breath.

“You have a filthy mouth.”

“I could say the same about you,” I reply, and Damon lifts my dress and places me on his desk, revealing my lacy black panties.

“I’ve been thinking about this juicy pussy of yours since that night,” he says, pushing my underwear to the side and dragging his index finger right in between my sopping folds.

I can feel my wetness oozing down my inner thighs.

“Which would you prefer, love? For me to spread your pussy with my fingers and fuck you senseless with them, or for my tongue to clean up your sopping pussy, suck on your clit, and have my fingers fuck you?”

As if to prove a point, he slides a finger into me, and my hips buck and jolt off the table.

“Oh my god, Damon. Both. I want both.”

I’m trembling so bad that I have to clasp his forearms so I don’t fall off his desk.

Damon gives me exactly what I ask for. He sucks, bites, fingers, and tongue fucks my pussy like it’s a precious feast. He curves the two fingers inside me, hitting this spot that makes me see stars and cry out from pleasure.

Watching him between my legs is so filthy and eliciting, it makes me shudder as I reach my climax and moan loudly, my fingers threading through his hair. The orgasm is exquisite, mind-blowing, and Damon doesn't stop until he licks every single drop of my juices.

He takes my dress off, and I unzip his fly and pull out his hard dick from his pants.

"Let me return the favor, Mr. Finnegan," I say and go on my knees, but Damon halts me in my tracks before I can put his dick in my mouth.

"Your breasts are beautiful. I've imagined fucking you here too many times to pass up on seeing my cock sliding in between your tits."

I've never thought much of my breasts or my body in general, but hearing Damon compliment it makes me feel some kind of way.

"Why don't you?" I counter back, taking off my bra and holding both my breasts as an invitation. I sink to my knees.

Damon doesn't waste time in pushing his massive cock in between, and the sight pleases me to no end. Seeing him driving his cock in between my mounds is a sight I'll never forget. His groaning and moaning and cursing from pleasure are illicit sounds that'll never be erased from my memory.

He begins to breathe heavily, and his pace picks up. "Ahh... fuck," he curses one last time as he reaches climax, warm liquid coating my chest.

It's only when I come down from my high, I realize what I've done, and regret washes over me.

CHAPTER 6

DAMON

After what happened yesterday, Sheila had fled my office. And she was already gone before I could get dressed and go after her. I had wanted to apologize.

I knew it was inappropriate, but I couldn't stop myself from ravishing her when I saw how fucking enchanting she looked in that dress. The woman was literally put on this earth to torture me because I didn't understand why I was doing the things I was doing.

Only one person has ever made me feel half this way, and that was a long time ago.

"I'm so screwed," I sigh before muttering to myself.

"What's screwed?" my five-year-old daughter, Belle, asks and my head snaps in her direction in horror. I'm currently in our home where we all lived as a family before Eleanor, my ex-wife, fucked it up.

When the hell did Belle sneak up on me that I didn't notice?

Shit.

“Hey, honey. It’s a bad word, so don’t ever say it, okay? I was about to leave for work, and I didn’t want to wake you up. How’re you, princess?” I ask, stooping to her level, desperately hoping she forgets what I just said.

Belle is an extremely smart kid. A little bit too smart for her age. She’s a miniature version of me with her dark brown hair and azure eyes. The only good thing that came out of I and Eleanor’s marriage.

“I’m fine, Daddy. Are you going to work?” she asks in that sweet manner of hers.

“Yes, baby. I’ll be back before your bedtime, okay?” I say, and she nods.

I peck my daughter on the forehead before exiting the house and leaving her in the care of her nanny. I love Belle to the core of my existence which is why it bothers me every time the issue of getting another wife comes up.

I don’t need someone who’s after my money. I need a mother for Belle, and so far, no viable candidates have been found. The women I know who would be great for my daughter aren’t interested in me. The rest who are seem to only be after my money.

Except her. Sheila.

She knows who I am, yet she doesn’t seem keen on wanting to have anything to do with me which is a breath of fresh air — which is why I want her.

I arrive at work and ride the elevator to my office. Once I step out, I catch a glimpse of Sheila going under her desk which leaves me pondering if she's trying to avoid me after what transpired yesterday.

This woman never ceases to astound me.

If she's trying to hide, then below her desk isn't exactly a solid spot. I find it entertaining and it's hard to keep the amusement out of my voice when I ask, "Why are you under your desk?"

"Uhm... I thought I dropped a pen. Oh! Look, it's right here," she says, rising from under the table and picking her pen from the case on top of it, but I don't buy it.

"You sure you weren't just trying to avoid me?" I ask with my signature smirk in place.

She scoffs. "Why would I be hiding from you? It's not like you're Jack the Ripper."

"Do you value your job, Miss Cromwell?" I ask, all forms of humor wiped from my face, and this catches her off guard.

Good. I don't want her getting too comfortable that she forgets who's in charge here. Just because we've had sex doesn't mean I'm not her boss anymore.

"Yes, sir."

"Then you'd do well to remember that I am your boss and keep your snide remarks to yourself."

I'm aware of the fact that I'm acting hot and cold like the grade-A asshole I am. But this woman affects me so much it scares me shitless. Maybe acting this way towards her would help downplay this eccentric connection I feel.

Sheila looks hurt, though, and it feels like a punch to my gut.

"Have I made myself clear?" I ask, digging the hole deeper for myself.

"Crystal," she says through gritted teeth.

She must hate me so much right now.

"Good. Now, get ready. I have a meeting with potential investors," I say, and she looks at me in confusion. "What? Weren't you aware?"

"I was, but I didn't know that I'd be coming with you."

"Well, now you do," I say and stride into my office, feeling like shit.

At this rate, she'd hand in her resignation even before I can say Jack.

Later, we go to the restaurant where we're supposed to meet up with the investors. We're ten minutes early and I decide that we'll order drinks before they arrive.

As we look at the menus, I notice Sheila subtly staring at me. She's probably wondering when I'm going to bring up what took place yesterday. So far, I've been acting like it never happened. I'm an even bigger coward than I imagined.

From the corner of my eye, I see her peering at me from underneath her lashes as I go through the menu. When I lift my head, she immediately looks away but it's too late.

“Is there a problem, Miss Cromwell?”

“Uh... It's nothing,” she responds.

“Speak now or forever hold your peace.”

She sighs. “About what happened yesterday... it can't happen again...” she starts to say but gets interrupted, and I've never been more delighted to see Ivan Pierson and his business partner, Josh Sandalls.

“Mr. Finnegan.”

Ivan acknowledges me. He's blond and around my age, whereas Josh, whose black hair is gelled to the back, is probably in his late twenties.

“Gentlemen,” I address them, rising to shake their hands.

“I'm sorry if we kept you waiting,” Ivan says, but his partner is too busy gaping at Sheila to participate in the discussion.

“We haven't been here long,” I reply curtly, trying hard not to dwell on how his eyes sweep her cleavage.

“And who's the lady?” Josh asks, bestowing her with a charming smile.

She fucking smiles and it upsets me to no end. “I'm She...” she starts to say but I instantly interrupt. There's no way in

heaven or hell I'm letting some fucking ken doll steal Sheila from me.

"She's Sheila Cromwell, my new executive assistant," I answer in an extremely stern tone like something crawled up my ass and died.

"Nice to meet you, Sheila. I'm Josh Sandalls, and this is my partner, Ivan Pierson," he introduces and stretches out his hand for a handshake.

She offers him her hand, and his grip lingers a little longer than necessary. I clench my fist to stop myself from hauling him out of the restaurant and punching his stupid face. Josh only lets go when I clear my throat.

The meeting goes smoothly, and Sheila takes down notes, although there's unmistakable friction between me and Josh.

"We look forward to doing business with you, Mr. Finnegan," Ivan says once the meeting is over.

"Likewise, Mr. Pierson," I reply, and we shake hands. I purposely avoid shaking hands with Josh. Not worth it.

"Now that we'll be doing business with the Finnegan's Enterprise, I hope to you see around," Josh has the guts to say to Sheila, and she smiles in response.

"What the hell was that?" I boom the moment we're alone again.

She blinks. "I don't understand."

“You were flirting with Josh Sandalls instead of taking notes and paying attention during the meeting,” I say, hating how jealous and immature I sound.

“I wasn’t flirting with Mr. Sandalls. He was nice so I was being polite,” she says in an attempt to defend herself, but I’m too pissed to listen.

“You were not hired to indulge our male clients. You were hired to run my affairs so do your damn job,” I say and storm out of the restaurant.

And the award for the world’s biggest motherfucking loser goes to Damon Finnegan.

CHAPTER 7

SHEILA

So far, so good. I had managed to survive my first month of work. Ever since that day at the restaurant, I have avoided Damon like the plague. He seemed to get off on picking on me and toying with my emotions, but I showed him that I wasn't the slightest bit interested in playing his childish games by avoiding situations and discussions that didn't have to do with work.

That didn't stop him from being an asshole, though. It appeared to be one of his God's given talents. I couldn't go to human resources because it'd be awkward trying to explain to them that I didn't do research on their company and mistakenly had sex with my boss and then did it again even after I knew who he was. That would make me look like a complete dunce, and I wanted to salvage what little dignity I had left.

Damon was still acting up, but I had gotten a little used to his silly behavior. Also, nothing else has happened since our moment that day at his office which I'm grateful for.

It is around four in the morning when my phone rings, disrupting my sleep. I ignore it, obviously. Whoever is calling ought to know that this is an ungodly hour and that human beings such as myself who work for hours on end actually need rest.

The phone stops ringing and I finally find some equanimity. But my happiness is short-lived when it begins to buzz again.

Begrudgingly, I grab my phone from the bedside table to see who it is. It's Damon. At four in the morning? What could be so important?

"Hello?" I answer, trying my best not to sound muzzy.

"Sheila, I'm having Hudson pick you up very soon. I seem to be having some difficulty with the files you sent in yesterday. See you soon," he concludes and hangs up without waiting for my opinion.

It wasn't in my job description to go to work this early, but there was also no refusing my boss.

As anticipated, when I get downstairs, there's an SUV waiting.

"Miss Cromwell," Hudson greets as he opens the door for me.

"Thank you," I answer, climbing into the back.

When I arrive at his office, Damon is seated on the couch this time, not his chair, eyes studying the laptop resting on his lap. I unabashedly work my eyes across the little fraction of

his chest peeking out, seeing as the first three buttons have been undone.

His eyes meet mine. “Sheila, you’re here. Good,” he says, rising and placing the laptop on the side. His muscles flex deliciously, and the fitted shirt does nothing to hide how hard and defined his abs are.

Could he be any more attractive?

I know I am undressing him with my eyes, and that it is dangerous. Especially when we are completely alone at this hour.

“Yeah,” I reply as he walks towards me.

“Come,” he says, his hand skidding to my back midway as he steers me to heed. There it goes again, electricity skimming down my spine. I do my best to ignore the sparks dispelling across my back as he leads me to the couch. “Would you like to have coffee? I can ask Hudson to bring you a latte.”

I don’t know what aggravates me more. How he’s been acting like an asshole the past month, or the fact that he’s acting sweet and all gentlemanly now. I’m honestly getting fed up with his shenanigans.

“I’m fine,” I answer curtly.

“I do apologize for calling you here at such an ungodly hour, but the connotation of this data is really vital,” he explains, choosing to sit inches away from me and the smell of his addictive cologne hits my nose.

God, he smells so delicious.

His leg brushes against mine, and my heartbeat picks up. Immediately, I distract myself by taking a look at the screen to see what he's on about.

It takes me a moment to detect the issue not just because it requires scrutiny, but because he's so close to me that I can hardly think straight.

"I see what the problem is," I announce once I find it.

"Great," he replies in a husky tone, and it takes great effort for me to concentrate on the screen and not the sex god beside me.

"Let's see," he says and leans over to look.

My breath hitches. Our shoulders aren't just caressing each other, they are mashed together. It takes everything in me not to disregard what I'm here for and hump him right there and then.

"Er... this particular shipment wasn't supposed to go to the hotel in Los Angeles. Maybe it was just an oversight."

"My previous assistant wasn't exactly apt for the job. There were several mistakes done. Maybe you could look at these other files, too, and see what else she got mixed up."

We work for over three hours, and it's apparent he's impressed with what I've done so far. I observe that he's stressed out.

"Didn't you go home?" I ask, unable to stop myself.

“No. This had to be done. Sorry I brought you out at this hour.”

“No one at home expecting you?”

“It’s just my daughter and I. The nanny’s with her.”

We’ve never spoken about our personal lives before. My heart picks up speed, and I try to blame it on anything other than excitement. “How old is your daughter?”

“I’d rather not discuss my personal life,” he says quickly. I feel my cheeks heat up. “I just like to keep her separate from... it’s better that way. For her.”

“Oh.” I swallow. “Right.”

There’s a moment, lingering, where we stare at each other. He looks at me, and I feel like there’s something else he wants to say – something more. He doesn’t, though, and I swallow back my disappointment when he clears his throat.

“Anyway, thank you,” he says. “You can return to your desk now.”

“Can I just rush home and change? The clothes I’m wearing aren’t exactly work-appropriate.”

I’m wearing a sweater and sweatpants. I didn’t know we’d be working till seven.

“No, you can’t. You were coming to the office. You should’ve known better,” he says dismissively, and I gawk at him like he’s grown two heads.

“I didn’t exactly plan to get called into work at four in the morning now, did I?”

“Are you talking back at me, Miss Cromwell?” he says in an eerily calm tone, and I know he’s pissed. Good.

“So, it’s Sheila when you want something, but Miss Cromwell when you want to exert your superiority over me.”

“I’d mind my language if I were you.”

The nerve of him. “What are you going to do? Fire me? I’m sick and tired of you acting like an asshole all the damn time. I’m not some puppet who’s here to do your bidding. I’m human, so treat me like one. It’s no wonder your previous assistant quit.”

It’s after the words leave my mouth, I realize my mistake. No matter what, he’s my boss and I should accord him the respect he deserves. But then, I deserve some respect too. Without waiting for a response from him, I flee his office and head to my desk.

I really hope this doesn’t get me fired.



Damon doesn’t call me to his office or step out the entire morning. I’m scared shitless I spoke to him in that manner, and I’ve been considering going to apologize.

I go down and have lunch with Suzie who comments on my choice of clothes. I tell her everything, and she sympathizes with me.

When I'm back at my desk, I pick up the files I'm supposed to submit to Damon and contemplate how to approach him. I can't keep putting this off. He's my boss, and one way or another, I'm going to have to face him soon.

So, I give myself a little pep talk as I pick up the files and head to his office. When I arrive, the door is ajar, and he has a visitor. I know I should walk away but something about the visitor keeps me glued to my spot.

He looks influential and younger than Damon, but the resemblance between the two is uncanny. Same dark brown hair and blue eyes.

I don't know who he is, but judging from the way Damon's brows are drawn together in a frown, it's evident he isn't too happy with their meeting.

"So, what, Dominic? You're Mom's mouthpiece now?" Damon asks, and the man whose name I've come to know is Dominic shakes his head.

"You're getting it all wrong. I'm only trying to help. Mom's hell-bent on you doing her bidding, but think about what I've just told you."

This is a family conversation. I should walk away, but curiosity gets the best of me.

"I can't do what you're asking me," Damon counters.

"Unless there's someone you actually like, which I know there isn't, then I don't see another way out of this. It's the

only way to get her off your case, brother,” Dominic finishes, rising from his seat.

He’s about to turn in my direction when I knock and pretend like I just got there and haven’t been listening all along. He barely acknowledges me as he steps out which I’m grateful for.

Damon still has a frown etched on his face when I make my way in and before I can apologize for my behavior earlier, he speaks up.

“I have a proposal for you, Sheila.”

He’s using my name so this must be sensitive.

“What is it?” I ask immediately.

Damon looks like he’s being tormented which is new. I’ve never seen him forlorn like this before. Whatever his brother told him mustn’t have been good.

For several long seconds, he doesn’t speak, but stares at me, unmoving. Like he’s having an internal battle.

“Here’s the proposal,” he pauses a beat before continuing, “I’m offering you a million dollars to be my fake wife for a year,” he says, and I laugh at the joke.

Who knew Damon Finnegan had such a good sense of humor? Surely, he can’t be serious.

I stop laughing when I see his expression hasn’t changed.

“Oh my God, you’re not kidding,” I say with a horrified look.

“I’m afraid not.”

Holy fuckity fuck.

CHAPTER 8

DAMON

I don't know what exactly it is that possesses me to ask Sheila to be my fake wife, but the look on her face right now tells me I must have made a terrible mistake.

My mother has been on my neck since my divorce with Eleanor, and she always uses Belle as an excuse to coerce me to get back together with her. But I'd rather sell my soul to the devil and gladly be his advocate than tie myself down to her once again.

Not after what she did.

The memory leaves a bitter taste in my mouth each time I remember it. Everything that went down afterwards was vicious, and the media fed off the story like a pack of hungry wolves given the fact that we were the power couple of New York.

Or so I thought.

I paid handsomely to wipe every shred of evidence from the media because I didn't want my affairs under public scrutiny.

There's no way I'm going back to that.

As much as I hate to admit it, Dominic is right, and no matter how I choose to see it, he is just looking out for me. He's the only one who understands because he was there for me when I hit rock bottom. I love my mother, and I always do whatever she wants, and she knows it. But now, she's using it to her advantage.

Well, I won't be the all-complying son this time.

For a moment, Sheila does nothing but stare at me, possibly waiting for me to laugh and comment on how ludicrous her face looks right now. But I don't.

I'm dead serious.

If I'm going to fake a marriage, I might as well do it right. I'm obviously attracted to her, but it's clear she has no feelings for me. I mean, I wouldn't have feelings for me if I were in her shoes. Not with the way I treat her like crap because I can't behave like the grown-ass man I am. I know I'm not exactly the easiest person to deal with, but I care about my ego too much to apologize.

She just showed up out of nowhere and brought chaos to my world. And I hate that she did that. After Eleanor, I resolved never to let my emotions cloud my judgment so it's difficult to let someone else in. I let Sheila affect me, thinking I'd never see her again.

I know in my head that it's not her fault. Still, seeing her sets me on edge, and the anger is the only part of that I can

control.

“No. Abso-freaking-lutely not,” she says, utterly petrified.

“Why not?” I ask and she looks at me unbelievably.

“Are you seriously asking me that? Well, for starters, you’re my boss,” she replies, exasperated.

“And?” I ask, acting like this is normal even though I know she’s making a solid point.

Sheila looks lost for a moment, staring at me like I’ve grown not two heads but three, before gathering herself.

“And it’s just so wrong. I’m sorry, I can’t.”

I sigh, rising from my seat before running my free hand down my face in irritation. “Look, Sheila, I wouldn’t be asking you to do this if it wasn’t really important. I can’t give you the specifics, but just know that this is purely transactional. It would seem real to the outside world, but just the two of us would know the actual truth.”

Being my wife would mean her staying in my house and, dare I say, sharing my bed. And Lord knows I want nothing more than to have her there once more.

Stop, Damon. It’s supposed to be a facade.

When she doesn’t reply right away, I speak up. “A million dollars is a lot of money and could solve whatever financial problems you might have. You don’t have to reply right away. Give it some thought and let me know what you think.”

I'm right, and she knows it. A million dollars is a whole fucking lot, and she could use it to fund whatever dreams she might have.

She sighs, looking torn. "This is just... I don't know... weird? I mean, we've had sex, and things could get complicated. Lines may blur."

"They won't unless we let them," I answer immediately like the fucking hypocrite I am.

The despondency is unmistakable in my tone, and I'm not making any effort to suppress it. I can see the wheels in her head turning. She's perhaps wondering why a man in my position needs to fake a marriage when several women would fall over themselves just to get my attention.

"Let's not forget the fact that I'm younger, by a lot, and that this might cause a bluster in the media," she finally shares her concerns.

I know she's nineteen years younger, but age is just a number. I've never really taken it to be anything serious.

"We'd try our best to keep it under wraps. And I see nothing wrong with being with someone younger. Unless, of course, you have a problem with it," I say and hold my breath.

"I don't. You know what? I can't do this. I'd rather have you as my boss than my... *husband*," she says the last word with great difficulty like it's forbidden, cringing afterwards.

"Sheila, this is a great deal. You can think about it and make a decision later."

“Obviously, it’s a great deal to you because you’re so entitled that you feel everything can be solved with money. There’s something called peace of mind. Ever heard of it? Just because you have the money to throw around doesn’t mean I have to automatically sacrifice my peace of mind to become your pawn.”

She’s upset. Shit. I didn’t foresee our conversation going this way. Hell, I didn’t envision it going any way at all seeing as it was a spur-of-the-moment thing. But it was never my intention to irk her. I have to salvage this.

“I’m sorry it came off that way, but... just... could you reconsider your stance? Please?”

Sheila looks like she’s about to tell me to fuck off and stick my money where the sun doesn’t shine, but thinks better of it and clamps her mouth shut.

“I’m not interested in your offer,” she says before dropping the blue file she’s holding on my desk. “This is the file you’ll be needing for your eight o’clock reservation at Cadence. Mr. Green’s secretary called to say he’d be free by then.”

So, she’s choosing to dismiss everything I’ve just said? Fan-fucking-tastic. This has me putting my guard back up faster than the speed of sound. I should have known better than to show the vulnerable side of me.

I sit and go through the file. “Why is the reservation at eight? Couldn’t you have moved it to a more convenient time?” I say in a harsh tone.

“Mr. Green’s schedule is really tight, and I’ve been trying to make an appointment for weeks. This was the only opportunity, and I had to grab it.”

“Are you kidding? Mr. Green needs me, and I can’t believe you’ve made it seem the other way around by begging to schedule an appointment. Are you purposely preferring to be incompetent or are you just plain stupid?”

Sheila’s face portrays a look of pure hurt. This is a low blow even for me, and I know it. I’m so upset I let my anger get the best of me. What happened to not letting my emotions cloud my judgment?

“I’m neither incompetent nor stupid. And with all due respect, Mr. Finnegan, I don’t relish you speaking to me in that manner.”

“Then you’d do well to do your job and not ruin whatever stakes I have.”

“I had no choice. The secretary said...”

“The secretary said horseshit!” I say, raising my voice and she flinches. “Couldn’t you plant your fucking feet on the ground? How do you think I built all of this huh? I didn’t get to where I am today by letting people dictate stuff for me. Mr. Green’s business is failing, and everyone knows it. I’m only doing him a fucking favor by giving him the time of day, and his secretary decided to play a game of chess with you which you lost.”

Sheila swallows hard, her eyes shining with hurt. “I’m sorry.”

“In this line of business, there is no room for mistakes. If you’re not cut out for it, you should hand in your resignation.”

“It won’t happen again.”

“You’re dismissed,” I say, unable to look her in the eye. I don’t want to see the level of hurt in her sad eyes. This was something trivial. It wasn’t supposed to rile me up the way it did, but I overreacted because she rejected me.

I’m a sore loser. Sue me.

As she walks towards the door, I open my mouth to apologize but close it.

The damage has already been done.

CHAPTER 9

SHEILA

I leave Damon's office feeling like a loser.

I know I made a mistake, but that didn't warrant him flaring up the way he did. I can't believe I was even considering doing the jackass a favor by faking a marriage with him. After the stunt he just pulled at his office, I'd rather eat grass.

But the monetary aspect of the contract is quite catchy, though. I could do a lot with a million dollars. It'd be more than enough to open my own line of cosmetics, seeing as it's the only thing I'm interested in besides my career. Plus, I'd only be married to him for only a year. It's not forever.

The proposal bugs my mind all day. Damon is incredibly famous and being his fake wife might not mean true intimacy, but it would put me in the spotlight. Something I despise greatly. Plus, his ex-wife is not someone I want to deal with. And let's not forget the fact that he has a daughter.

There isn't much to do at the office today, so I get off work early and decide to meet Alexa at our favorite spot. It's a cafe that serves the best doughnuts and bagels in the whole of New York.

She's already seated in a booth when I arrive, and I'm not surprised. Even though she works as an accountant at a law firm, her job is less demanding than mine.

"Hey." I peck her on the cheek before taking my place across the table.

"Erm... why are you dressed like that?" she asks with an arched brow.

"My boss called me up at four this morning to come to work and didn't let me go back home to change."

The waitress comes to take our orders. I order a frosted doughnut with a mocha latte, and Alexa orders a blueberry doughnut and a cappuccino.

"What an asshole. That sucks," Alexa says when the waitress leaves.

I heave a sigh. "Yeah. Tell me all about your day. How was work?" I ask her, desperate to change the subject. I don't want to dwell on what happened earlier or talk about the fact that my boss thinks I'm a failure.

Alexa rolls her eyes. "Bret is still on my case. I had to sneak out of the office today to avoid seeing him."

Bret is a lawyer at the firm Alexa worked with. He is cute, smart, and funny, but Alexa doesn't want him. According to

her, he is too mediocre for her taste.

“Oh, give the poor guy a chance. What has it been? Two months? Just one date then you can decide if you want to be with him or not.”

“Yeah, yeah,” she replies with apathy. “Tell me how your day went.”

“Promise you won’t scream,” I warn, and she stares at me with suspicion.

“Okay?”

Here goes nothing. “My boss offered me a million dollars to be his fake wife for a year.”

Alexa snorts. “Now, Sheila, there is no way that happened. You really do have a wild imagination.”

The waitress returns with our orders, and I take a sip of my coffee. This place never disappoints.

“I’m as serious as a heart attack.”

She halts in her tracks, taken aback. “Wait a minute. I don’t understand. What brought that up in the first place?”

“His brother sort of visited with some kind of news which unsettled him. I’m not quite sure, myself.”

Alexa is quiet for a moment, and I can feel the wheels in her head turning. “Did you accept the deal?”

“Of course not.”

“Why?”

“What do you mean *why*? He’s my boss. Plus, we’ve had sex. Things might get messy,” I say, taking a generous bite of my doughnut and savoring its delicious taste.

“Girl, listen. A million dollars is a ton of money. You could do a lot with it, and if you’re smart enough with your investments, it’ll set you up for life. What do you have to lose? Absolutely nothing. But you stand to gain a grand lifestyle and luxurious vacations. The man is a billionaire, for fucks sake.”

“Alexa, his ex-wife is a supermodel, and he has a daughter,” I whine, trying to make her see things from my standpoint.

“Your point?” she asks, like what I’m saying doesn’t make any sense.

“He treats me with disrespect. Just a few moments after he asked me to fake-marry him, he lashed out at me because I made a very minor mistake.”

Alexa rolls her eyes. “Honey, no boss is going to be happy over you jinxing something. Come on, it’s their business.”

“I know, but you weren’t there. It was as if he was punishing me for refusing him. I swear, I’ve never seen a more entitled man in my whole fucking life. What a jerk.”

“Sheila...”

“Just leave it alone, okay? I already said no.”

My best friend raises her hands in surrender. “If that’s what you want, fine by me. But I know if I were to be the one who was offered this type of contract, I’d be sipping margaritas on a beach in the Maldives by this time next week.”

Yeah, no shit.

When I get home later that evening, I undress and get in the shower. I rest my head against the cold marble tiles and let the warm water cascade down my body, soothing my aching muscles and relaxing my nerves. This month has no doubt been the most eventful month of my entire life, and I need a break.

After showering, I put on my nightie and go to lie down when I unexpectedly start to feel nauseous. Bile rises in the back of my throat, and I immediately rush to the toilet where I eventually throw up the doughnut I just had.

I turn on the faucet and rinse my mouth with water, all the while holding my hair back. All of a sudden, I feel sick and weak. It's only when I return to my bed that a realization hits me like a bucket of cold water.

I missed my period the previous month.

I'd been so busy at work that I didn't even realize it earlier. I will myself not to panic but it's kind of hard not to. Breathing suddenly becomes an arduous task and I instantly begin to sweat. The only person I've had sex with in the past year is Damon, and we used protection. Plus, I'm on birth control. There's no way this could mean what I think it does.

The harsh reality that I might be pregnant has me energized and running out of my apartment to the department store downstairs. I dash in like a crazed lady, and the girl at the counter looks at me weirdly, but I don't give two shits what

anyone thinks of me at this moment. I just need validation that I'm not pregnant.

It takes me a while to find the pregnancy test strips and when I do, I pick ten of them. Sometimes, these things aren't accurate, and I want to be a hundred percent certain of the result.

After paying at the counter, I rush to my apartment and urinate on all ten of the sticks. I place them on the tank cover of the toilet and wait for the longest three minutes of my existence.

Waiting for the result is torture. I try to distract myself, but my mind keeps going to Damon and how he's going to take all of this if the result turns out to be positive. I don't want to have a baby with a man like him. I'm hyperventilating so much that I'm scared I might have a heart attack any second.

I can't have a baby right now. It doesn't fit into any of my plans. I envisioned marriage coming before kids so this can't happen.

I almost pass out when I look at the strips.

Staring me in the face are two colored lines on all of them.

I'm irrevocably officially royally fucked.

CHAPTER 10

DAMON

I get to work the next day looking and feeling exhausted.

Belle had a nightmare last night and couldn't sleep so I had to sit by her bedside and hold her hand while reading her stories the entire night. I love my daughter and I'm not complaining. But I was so drained yesterday and needed to get as much rest as I could in preparation for today. Turns out I got none.

Bummer.

She didn't want the nanny by her side. She made it clear that she needed me, so I was there for my daughter. No questions asked. If only her pathetic excuse for a mother was around.

For a split second last night, I actually considered what my mom has been saying all along. If Belle had a mother figure around, I wouldn't have had to stay up all night with her all night and come to work looking like a zombie.

But Eleanor was the least palatable option, and I didn't want her in my house again. If only Sheila had agreed to take my deal.

I probably look like shit with bags and dark circles under my eyes, but for Belle, I'd do anything. Like now, she has decided to tag along and I let her because she's still skittish from her nightmare.

As I step into the reception, I see Sheila seated at her desk. *God*, she looks spectacular just like the goddess she is. She's in a burgundy dress today which does nothing to hide the fact that she has an awe-inspiring body underneath.

Who am I kidding? The woman could wear a fucking potato sack and still look as stunning as ever. Her brows are drawn together in concentration, and she has a serious look on her face as she stares at the screen with undivided scrutiny.

The light patter of mine and Belle's footsteps draws her attention as we get closer and she looks up from the screen, momentarily disarming me with the intensity of her gaze. Her coffee-brown eyes are too enthralling to be deemed ordinary. I swear this woman was put on this planet to torment me.

My mind immediately goes back to yesterday when she turned me down and how I reacted after that. I know I should apologize for hurting her feelings and acting like a prick, but my ego is bigger than fucking Mississippi to acknowledge and address the elephant in the room. So, I do the next best thing. Pass like air.

“Good morning, sir,” Sheila greets, and I mutter what sounds like a reply under my breath, not failing to notice how her eyes keep darting to Belle whom I’m holding by the hand.

I’m not in the mood today. She probably notices that I’m grumpier than usual but says nothing which I’m grateful for.

Once inside my office, I shut the door and go to relax on my seat while Belle heads to the couch and starts jumping on it.

Fuck no.

“Please, baby, can you just sit still? I have a book here that you can read,” I say, bringing out a copy of *The Baby Tree* and she hops towards me in delight.

“Thank you, Daddy,” she says, taking it from me.

“Now, be a good girl and be quiet so Daddy can concentrate, okay?” I politely ask and she nods.

I’m about to begin my job for the day when my phone rings. I peer at my screen to see it’s my mom calling.

Oh Lord, not today.

I know exactly what she wants, and I don’t think I’m in the right state of mind to deal with her right now, but I answer anyway because I won’t hear the end of it if I don’t.

“Hello, Mother.”

“At least you answered. For a second, I thought it was going to go straight to voicemail,” she says, and I pinch my brows in frustration. This woman never ceases to amaze me considering

the fact that I never miss her calls no matter how occupied I am.

“I never miss your calls, Mom.”

“No, you don’t. But you also don’t seem to want to take my advice.”

I breathe harshly through my nose. “I’ve told you a thousand times, Mom, I’d rather chop my own head off.” I lower my voice so my daughter doesn’t hear the last bit

“Well, you better get ready to put it back on because my granddaughter and Eleanor will need a man with his damn head on.”

While my mom is still talking, Sheila comes in holding a cup of coffee.

Ah, caffeine.

Maybe I’ll feel less cranky after taking it, so I decide to discontinue the discussion with my mom.

“Mom, can I call you back?”

“Damon Finnegan, is this the way to treat your mother? We’re still having a conversation,” she says.

“I’ll call you, okay? Bye.” I hang up immediately. I’ll deal with her later.

Obtaining the cup from Sheila and taking a small sip, I observe her with keen interest. Something’s off about her. She’s acting edgy and won’t meet my gaze and that’s how I know something is wrong. The Sheila I know is confident and

doesn't let whatever I do or say get to her which is one quality of hers I admire.

I'm aware that I can be a real pain in the ass, and it's not every day you find someone who can keep you on your toes.

"Is she your daughter?" she asks.

"Yeah," I reply, sneaking a glance at Belle who's engrossed in reading the book I just gave her.

"She's adorable."

"Thanks."

"Is everything okay?" she asks, and I'm taken aback by her question. I should be the one asking but like the self-absorbed asshole I am, I keep my mouth shut.

"Yeah, it is."

"Are you certain? It's just... you don't seem like it."

Sheila is full of surprises. I can't believe she's showing concern after yesterday.

"I'm okay. Just a little stressed is all."

"Well, there's nothing wrong with taking a little break."

"Erm... in case you haven't noticed, I sort of have a business to run."

She smiles a little. "A business that won't crumble to dust if you take an hour off. I checked your schedule for the morning and there was just one meeting with a client which I rescheduled." She pauses for an instant as if contemplating what she wants to say next before continuing. "There's this

place that serves the best treats in town. If it's okay with you, we could go grab a bite. Your daughter can come with us if you like. They have games for children."

My whole body jolts in delight, but I know it's a bad idea. I already feel so much for this woman. I don't want to complicate things further by reading the wrong signals. She's only being nice. That's all. I open my mouth to protest but she beats me to it.

"It's just for an hour so you could get a breather. An hour won't hurt anyone."

Except that it will. But I will myself to relax. I could really use a fucking break.

"Belle, come say hi."

Belle drops her book and walks towards us, staring at Sheila with curious eyes. "Who's this, Daddy?"

"Her name is Sheila. Sheila, this is Belle."

"You have a pretty name," Belle says, mispronouncing the r in pretty, and Sheila's smile is so wide her cheeks must hurt. She's fucking adorable.

"Thank you. And you must be Belle," Sheila says, stooping to her level.

"Just like the princess." She says the word like *pwincess*.

"A princess name for a princess. You have a pretty name, too, Belle," she compliments, and Belle beams.

Seeing them like this together makes me wish Sheila would just take me up on my proposal already. She's pretty good with Belle.

Against my better judgment, in response to her offer to take us out, I find myself asking, "Where is this place that serves the best treats?"



Sheila takes us to a game-centric restaurant about ten minutes away from the office. It's just four people minding their own business, and I'm grateful for the lack of a crowd.

Sheila opts for a booth, and I gladly comply.

"So, what would you recommend I try?" I ask, picking up the menu.

"Most certainly the frosted doughnut. It's to die for," she says, a small smile playing on her lips. Fuck me if I don't want those lips around my cock. The bastard stirs in excitement.

Great.

How am I supposed to concentrate on anything if she looks like that? She's a walking turn-on.

"I'm more of a smokey bacon type of guy."

"Weird choice," she says just as the waiter comes to our booth.

"Ready to order yet?" the young man inquires, staring longingly at an ignorant Sheila. The motherfucker's gaze goes to her breasts, and it takes special grace for me not to punch

him in the face for staring in that manner. She's not just some object of sexual fascination. She's more than that.

"I'd like the frosted doughnut and a latte," I say, and his head snaps in my direction like he's just discovered Sheila's not alone. I give him my signature death glare and he immediately looks away, mortified at being caught. Pussy.

"I'm not hungry, Daddy. Can I go play some games?" Belle asks, giving me her best puppy dog eyes.

"Fine." I only agree because from where we're seated, I have a perfect view of the gaming area, so I can keep an eye on her. She hops out of her seat and heads towards the machines.

"I'd like the same, please but with decaf," Sheila says, beaming up at the waiter, and I curse mentally. The asshole might get the wrong idea.

He scurries away from our booth like a coward after taking our orders.

"Want to talk about what's bothering you?" Sheila asks, bringing me out of my reverie, and I clear my throat.

"Not really." I already talked about it with her yesterday, and it turned out to be an epic disaster.

"Talking might help. You're crabbiest than usual."

"Crabby?" I ask, raising a brow, my voice laced with amusement.

“That’s just a mild way to put it. Does this have to do with yesterday?”

I sigh heavily. I don’t know why but something about the way she’s gazing at me has me opening up like she’s a therapist or something. I want to tell her everything. Bare my soul to her.

“There’s a lot of pressure on me to get back with my ex-wife.”

Sheila looks confused. “From whom?”

“My mom. For good reason, of course. I have a daughter, and she’s just five years old. I mean, I try my best, but a girl needs her mother, and because of the divorce, my daughter doesn’t get to see her mother often.”

“Oh. I’m so sorry about that. It must be really difficult for you both. Is that why you wanted to fake a marriage with me?”

“Yeah,” I respond. “I love Belle and to me, she’s the most important thing in the world. It kills me to know I’ve separated her from her mother all because of the divorce. But Eleanor isn’t interested and—the point is, I wish things were different so she could experience what having a mother as a constant in the life of a child feels like.”

She must think I’m pathetic. “But it’s all good. I’ve got it.”

The silence that follows is insufferable, and, as if on cue, the waiter returns with our order. I never thought I’d be happy to see him.

I take a bite of my doughnut and savor the taste. I'm about to comment on how marvelous it tastes, when Sheila says, "I'll do it."

I almost choke on the doughnut. I must have a stunned expression on my face because she adds, "I'll be your fake wife for a year to keep your mother off your back and help you raise your daughter."

Now, I most certainly didn't see that coming.

CHAPTER 11

SHEILA

There were many scenarios in my head right from when I was a little girl of what my wedding would entail.

I always saw myself riding into the sunset with prince charming in my princess gown. I always thought I'd marry someone I was in love with, someone who completed me and made me feel like the most important person on earth.

Damon Finnegan wasn't any of those things. Yet here I was, standing in the courtroom with him in the presence of his brother and Alexa, signing away my freedom of being a single woman in New York.

When I told Alexa about my decision yesterday, I thought she would be thrilled but rather, she appeared worried and asked what triggered my change of heart. Alexa is the only person I can trust even with my life, so I told her about the pregnancy.

To say she was shocked would be an understatement. I, myself, am still in shock up until this point. I still can't fathom

how it all happened because I'm on birth control and we used a condom. I recall that part vividly so I can't say what exactly went wrong.

Alexa had been supportive. I had been on the verge of a nervous breakdown when I broke the news to her, and she kept a cool head and willed me to stay calm. She had asked me what I wanted, and, frankly, I hadn't known what to say.

But I was certain of one thing. I didn't want to get an abortion. It wasn't maternal instinct or any of that shit. I just didn't want to get rid of a part of me. Alexa had warned me to think it through before taking a stance, but my mind was already made up. If I didn't want to get rid of the baby, then there was no point in stalling.

When he spoke with so much love for his daughter, I thought I should reconsider my decision and help him out. He seemed genuinely distressed, and when I imagined my child growing up without me, it hurt.

Damon's offer is pretty good, and I plan to tell him about the baby as time goes on. Not now. I need time to process things first. Besides, what's to say he'll want it? If he doesn't want it, I'll take care of the baby with the money I'll get from the deal. Plus, I was able to renegotiate the deal to include an additional one million dollars for myself and start-up funds for my cosmetic company.

Seems pretty fair.

"Sheila," my friend calls my name, and I snap out of my depressing thoughts to see all four pairs of eyes watching me.

I'm a little lost on what's going on. I'd been so caught up in my own head to notice that it was my turn to respond to whatever the judge was asking.

Everything was just a formality. Damon was rich enough to pull the strings, so he obtained a marriage license within the twinkle of an eye, and there was no waiting period or any of that bullshit. Money indeed opens all doors.

“Do you take this man to be your husband, to live together in matrimony, to love him, to honor him, to comfort him, and to keep him in sickness and in health, forsaking all others, for as long as you both shall live?” the judge repeats and I blink.

I get a little emotional that my life is heading in all the wrong directions, but I manage to keep my emotions in check. I'm getting married to a man I don't love and who is the biggest jerk on the planet, plus the fact that I'm carrying his child which he isn't aware of.

Fuck my life.

Damon is staring at me like a hawk, eagerly waiting for me to reply to the judge's question. I'm pretty sure he's silently hoping I don't change my mind. Even if I want to, I won't.

Hopefully, this charade will bring us close to an extent where I can freely tell him about the baby before my belly starts to show.

“I do,” I finally reply, and my voice comes out small not as determined as I would have liked. I see Damon release a breath of relief.

Even in my dismal state, I don't fail to notice how awfully handsome he looks in his black tuxedo. The fine lines embedded in his forehead as a result of aging, the only thing accentuating the broad age gap between us.

Against my wishes, Damon had gotten me a dress for the wedding. Not your typical white dress, but an elegant blue one which makes my eyes pop. And when I saw how pretty it was, I couldn't resist wearing it.

I'm to be his wife. I might as well look the part.

The ceremony goes by in a blur, and even though I'm physically present, I'm mentally absent. The diamond ring Damon puts on my finger is massive and looks like it must have cost a fortune. He didn't have to.

“By virtue of the authority vested in me under the laws of the State of New York, I now pronounce you husband and wife.”

That sentence seals my fate.

It is done.



After the ceremony, my lawyer is present to make sure everything is still according to the initial plan. I have already signed the necessary documents for the contract yesterday after he went through them, seeing as Damon hadn't wanted to waste time. He didn't voice it, but I knew he was scared I'd change my mind.

I was to follow Damon home because all my stuff had already been moved that same yesterday to his place.

The man meant business.

Alexa made sure I was okay and saw me get into the car before leaving. She had wanted to come along, but I protested. It wasn't a real marriage, so there was nothing to fret about. I knew why she was worried, but I'm a big girl, and I can handle it. At least, I'd like to think so.

The ride to Damon's house is quiet. He seems to know I'm not in the mood to talk and doesn't push it. He's probably walking on eggshells around me because the contract states that I can leave any time I want and still get my money. My lawyer made sure to give me the upper hand and seeing as he was desperate, he accepted without putting up much of a fight.

As we drive through the two large metal gates of Damon's mansion, my eyes nearly pop out of their sockets. I stare in awe, focusing on the extensive and superb house. The frill and resplendence of it all are nothing like I've ever seen before. I can't believe I'm going to be living here.

Hudson comes to a stop, and Damon holds the door for me. I can't help but be beguiled by everything in sight. The lawns are neatly trimmed, and the luxuriousness of the surroundings makes me feel like I've walked straight into a Hollywood movie. Damon does have good taste.

"This way, please," he says, and I follow him inside.

The interior is just as impressive as the outside.

“Welcome to my home, Sheila. I hope you like it?”

“It’s beautiful,” I reply breathlessly. There aren’t any words to describe it.

“I’m glad you like it. I’ll give you a tour of the house later, but let me show you to our bedroom first. It’s upstairs.”

What the hell does he mean by *our* bedroom? There’s no way I’m sharing a bed with an Adonis when our marriage is fake. He’s a walking temptation, one I don’t plan on falling into.

“I’m sorry, our bedroom? I had no idea we’d be sharing the same room.”

“Of course, we are. We have to make this seem real, so no one detects that something’s off.”

“No one is going to come to your house to see if we’re actually sleeping in the same bed so I’m afraid I don’t see your point.”

“Scared you might not be able to keep your hands to yourself?” He bestows me with a pant-dropping smile and my face flames.

How do you practice abstinence when you share a house with your fake husband who is a sex god? I mentally put it as top of my list of things to google later.

I have to hand it to him, he’s a master at manipulation, but I’m not falling into his trap.

“I’m only doing this because I don’t want to tempt you.”

“Consider me temptation-loving then. I’m open to all forms of temptation, Sheila. Are you?”

I choose to ignore him.

“Can you show me to my room, please?”

“If you insist.”

The room Damon takes me to doesn’t disappoint, just like every other part of the mansion. I have barely had the time to take it in when a little girl wearing a pink dress runs in screaming for her dad.

Her hair is braided into pigtails adorned with scrunchies matching the color of her dress. It’s Belle, Damon’s daughter. My hand instinctively goes to my stomach, and I wonder if this is how I and Damon’s baby will look. The realization has me feeling some kind of way, and I struggle to breathe.

Damon is oblivious to my plight because he has picked up his little girl and is doing a twirl of her in the air. The sight of him with his daughter is a jab to my gut, and I wonder if I’m making a mistake keeping the truth from him.

After he drops her, she stares at me with recognition in her eyes, and I don’t know why, but I feel nervous.

“Sheila!” She trots towards me and hugs my waist, and I gently pat her back.

“How’re you, princess?” I ask with an uncertain smile on my lips and she beams.

“I’m fine, thank you. You?”

“I’m alright.”

“Baby,” Damon says, gently pulling Belle to himself. “Sheila will be staying with us from now on. We got married,” he breaks the news in a soft tone, and I hold my breath.

“Does that make her my new mommy?” Belle asks innocently.

Damon pauses. Then the pause continues. I wait, but he seems frozen. I realize for the first time how difficult this will be for Belle when I leave.

I look at Damon, hoping to see what he wants to say. Then, trusting my gut, I give Belle a wide smile.

“It... does.”

Damon breathes out a sigh of relief. He smiles.

Maybe Belle is too little to understand the weight this news carries because she doesn’t seem to mind as much as I thought she would.

“That’s so cool. Would you like to see my toys? I have a whole collection of Disney princesses.” She directs her question at me.

“Erm...”

“Sweetheart, Sheila has had a long day. How about you show it to her later?” Damon asks, and her face falls.

I don’t like that it has so I say, “Where are they? I’d love to see them.”

Belle's face immediately lights up like a bulb, and she snatches my hand and pulls me out of the room. I look back for a split second and see the grateful smile on Damon's lips.

This isn't a bad start at all.

CHAPTER 12

DAMON

Seeing Sheila with Belle has to be the highlight of my entire week.

I was a little worried that my daughter won't want Sheila sharing our home, but she seems to be warming up to her. Just one day with Sheila, and the munchkin is acting like they've known each other for ages. In fact, with the way things are going, I won't be surprised if Belle actually decides she prefers Sheila to her mother who only ever comes to visit whenever she pleases.

I have a feeling it's because Belle lacks motherly love that she's clinging so tightly to Sheila. The certainty makes me hate Eleanor even more.

Right now, Belle's asleep, and Sheila's in her room. I had told her to take the day off and asked Mrs. Anderson, the human resources manager, to cover for her for today so she didn't go to the office.

Eventually, I'll have to tell my family about Sheila but for now, it's best to keep it under the blanket. Mom will be pissed if she catches wind of what I've done which is exactly why I didn't inform her to begin with.

She wouldn't approve of Sheila, and I know it. But I don't care. It's my life and no one will give me instructions on how to live it. If Sheila is someday going to meet my mom, then we might as well get to know each other so we can sell our story perfectly. Knowing my mom, she'd sniff our lie thousands of miles away.

I get up from my bed and head for her room. It's the one after mine. I knock, and she asks me to come in. She's in small shorts which put her sexy legs on display, and I'm instantly reminded of when I had them wrapped around me that night we had sex.

What I'd give to feel her heat around me once again. To have her cling to me like I'm everything she desires. Sheila makes me long for the strangest things which leaves me wondering how someone could hold so much power without even realizing it.

"How're you liking it here so far?"

"Still trying to get used to it," she says, and I nod. "Belle's delightful. You have an adorable daughter."

I smile a little. "Yeah, thanks."

"She looks just like you."

The smile stretches fully on my lips this time. "She does."

Sheila offers me a gentle smile. One that has me wishing I had met her before Eleanor.

“So, I was thinking that we should get to know each other better so as to sell this flawlessly.”

“Okay. What do you want to know?”

“No, not like this. Let’s go out to dinner. It’s our wedding night, after all. Even though it’s not a real marriage per se, it wouldn’t hurt to share a glass of champagne over a nice meal.”

“No,” she instantly refuses.

“Why?”

“I’d rather not go anywhere with you.”

Ouch. That hurt.

“The deal was to be your wife on paper and in front of the world, not in private, too. There’s absolutely no need to take me out to dinner.”

She isn’t making this easy on me at all. “Consider it a thank you then for taking me up on my offer.”

Sheila stalls for a moment before finally accepting.

We go to one of the best restaurants in the city. She looks nothing short of extraordinary in the dress she’s in. I had it delivered the moment she agreed to come with me.

A woman like Sheila deserves the best of the best, and we’re going shopping once she feels comfortable so I can give her the luxurious life she deserves. I know this is purely

transactional, but I feel this unquenchable desire to do things for and with her.

We settle at our table and go over our menus as a waitress comes to take our orders. She's blonde and around Sheila's age. Her smile is seductive as she asks what I'd like to order, completely ignoring Sheila.

What is it with these young servers trying to hit on you even when it's clear you're with someone? The generation behind me needs help.

She's pretty, and if it were a couple of months ago, I would've gladly taken her home. But now, Sheila's in the picture, and heaven knows every other woman pales in comparison to her.

Out of the corner of my eye, I see Sheila fuming. She keeps shooting daggers with her eyes at the oblivious blonde, and I resist the insurmountable urge to smile.

Her being jealous must mean something right?

“Why don't you ask my lovely wife what she wants? Ladies first.”

The blonde's smile rapidly vanishes like a ghost. Sheila looks at me like she hadn't expected that. We both place our orders, and the waitress leaves our table, but not before sending me a wink.

Okay.

I turn to face Sheila and see that she still looks mad.

“Why are you upset?”

“It’s nothing.”

“It can’t be nothing. You’re frowning.”

“Of course, I’m frowning. It doesn’t look good if you’re my husband, but you’re still making passes at other women. It’s an insult to me. At least do it when I’m not with you.”

What the fuck?

“What?”

“The waitress. You were just flirting with her,” she fumes, and I can’t help but smirk.

“Sheila Leah Cromwell, are you jealous?” I ask, leaning back in my seat and she snorts. It’s cute.

“Oh, please, you’re nothing special. All I’m saying is it doesn’t look good.”

“Whatever you say, Mrs. Finnegan.”

Sheila brushes off the topic and diverts to why we’re here. I tell her about my small family which consists of my brother and mother and about my first marriage. It’s kind of difficult to tell seeing as Eleanor cheated on me and was a negligent mother. It’s not something I like to share with people, but the whole world already knows, so fuck it.

Sheila sympathizes with me, but I don’t dwell on it and ask her about herself.

I learn that she lost her parents at a tender age and had to put herself through college. Sheila is a superwoman, and the

more I learn, the more I admire her. She's fun, and I love that we did this.

I call for the bill once we're done and ready to leave, and the waitress comes with it.

"I hope you enjoyed your dinner?" she asks me, and I sneak a look at Sheila whose signature glare has returned.

"We most certainly did. And I'll be sure to write a review on your page about the services you rendered to us tonight," Sheila says sweetly with a smile as fake as our marriage, her eyes flicking to the name tag on the waitress's uniform before she adds, "Meghan."

Meghan's face pales in horror, and she flees our table.

I laugh hard until my lungs start to hurt like crazy. It's amazing how a little woman like Sheila managed to pull that off. She sure is something. I chuckle the whole drive home.

"That wasn't funny." Sheila punches me in the shoulder as we arrive at the mansion and step out of the car.

"It was," I answer and turn to look at her. My laughter must have been contagious because she's smiling now. Under the moonlight, she looks mythological. Her smooth skin is gleaming.

She looks like a muse.

A fantasy.

Glorious.

Captivating.

Someone I shouldn't want. A unique torture made to haunt me.

"It was kind of hot seeing you like that," I say.

My breathing has become labored, and I can see her chest rising and falling with every breath she takes, her perfect breasts taunting me. I think of all the things I could do to them tonight if she lets me, and my cock hardens.

"You're an asshole," she whispers, her eyes waxed with desire.

"I know," I respond in a daze.

"I hate you."

"I know."

"I prefer good men."

"I agree. You should raise your standards."

"If I did, you wouldn't stand a chance."

Her lips look so kissable, so fuckable it's fucking hard to concentrate on anything she's saying.

Sheila breaks our eye lock and goes into the house, and I follow her like a man on a mission. I seize her hand and turn her around to face me. It's apparent she wants this. Her lips are parted, and her cheeks are flush with her breaths coming out in pants. Her eyes which mirror mine are dark with passion.

Unable to control my desires, I use my lips to trail a path down her neck, and she tilts her head to the side, giving me undeniable access. She releases a breathy moan.

“Sheila, quiet, Bel...” I start to say but her lips swallow the rest of my words.

It’s as if she’s possessed as her arms wrap around my neck. The kiss is intense. Her pretty mouth is fast and needy against my own, and I groan into her mouth when one of her hands lightly brushes against my dick. It strains painfully against my pants, begging to be free.

I lift Sheila and take her up the stairs to my bedroom where I place her on the bed. We battle to undress each other. My thick, hard cock stands proud when Sheila unzips my fly.

She gives me a sly smile as she changes our positions. I lie back on the bed and watch her go on her knees and swirl her tongue around the tip of my cock.

Her mouth is eager as she pays careful attention to my swollen pink tip while her hand works on my length. I grip her hair and drive my length further into her mouth. My grunts of pleasure encourage her to keep going, and her mouth is fucking heavenly.

“Good. That’s it, sweetheart.”

She licks my balls, and I lose my mind. “That feels so good, baby. Keep doing that... just like that... fuck...”

The sight is so erotic, I have to stop her before I cum. I need to be inside her, so I pull out of her mouth and reach for my bedside table to withdraw a condom, and she puts it on me.

It gets me harder than steel to think we’re doing this again. It’s fucking happening after a month of wanting and yearning

for her heat.

She sits on my thighs, and I position myself at her entrance. I go crazy watching my dick disappear into her warm pussy, and we moan in unison the moment she sinks down on me.

I'm fucking home, and I want to remain like this forever.

"Can you take the lead?" she asks and my hands resting on her waist immediately go to her ass. I sit against the pillows, bringing our bodies closer, and begin to thrust into her, deep and slow.

I kiss her harder, increasing my speed, and she moans loudly, the sound of our bodies slapping together.

"Damon..." she moans, and I love when she calls my name during our sex. It drives me wild.

"You like that, baby?" I grunt into her ear, but her tempo only increases, her nails digging into my back.

That's all the response I need, so I fuck her harder, pumping into her wet pussy until beads of sweat start to form on my forehead and her screams echo in the room. Thank God my room is soundproof just like my office, so I let her scream.

"Fuck, Sheila. You feel so good," I rasp.

I thrust into her and watch her come apart as our gazes bore into each other. As she comes undone, I grab one breast and take it in my mouth, sucking it hard.

Hearing her moan as she comes fuels my desire. I go rough, gripping her hips and slamming into her as she gasps her way

through the aftershocks of her release. Her pussy is so slick, so damn wet and I'm coming before I know it.

I feel so wrecked. Drained. Yet, I haven't felt this good since our first night together.

"You okay?" I ask her as we fall back on the bed.

"Yeah," she murmurs.

I discard the condom and clean her up, and we cuddle. She buries her face in my chest and wraps her arm around me.

Consequences be damned.

CHAPTER 13

SHEILA

I wake up the next morning and reach for Damon but find that he's gone.

I look at the clock and see that it's a little past nine. Last night had been significant. The feeling was different. Maybe it's because I'm pregnant, but I don't know. I felt closer to Damon than I've ever been.

As I drifted off after sex, I could feel his fingers running through my hair and threading it in slow caresses. The motion did things to my insides. It was nice and felt intimate, but I didn't want to get used to it since all of it was a charade anyway. I'd just keep enjoying the good sex.

I guess it was one of the perks of being married to a gorgeous sex god.

I get out of bed and put on his shirt discarded on the floor from last night. I immediately remember there's a child in the vicinity, so I go to my room first and put on a robe before heading downstairs to find Damon.

I follow the aroma of pancakes which leads me directly to the kitchen where I find him. The sight of his naked, ripped back is enough to make me horny again, but I upheld some constraint. I wasn't going to pounce on him like a vixen.

I sit at the island and watch him. Despite the fact that I had just had him last night, it felt like I hadn't at all. I still want him. He turns around to look at me.

"You can take a picture, love. I'm pretty sure it'll last longer," he teases with a cocky smile.

"Do you have a camera? I don't."

He chuckles. "Good morning. Did you sleep well last night? I know I did," he finishes, giving me a slow once over, and I turn crimson.

"Sure. Where's Belle?" I ask, changing the direction of our conversation.

"She's already left for school with the nanny," he says, coming to stand in front of me.

He places his hands on the island behind me and uses them to hold his weight. His sensual azure eyes watch me, and I'm disarmed. It feels like he's staring into my soul. It scares me, but at the same time, I can't seem to find the will to look away.

"Are you okay?" he asks, and I know it's because of last night. Such a gentleman.

"I am," I answer, blushing like a teenager who's just discovered sex for the first time. I can't believe I'm fucking blushing after everything we've done together. I've had the

man's cock in my mouth, in between my breasts, and inside of me. Yet, I still fucking blush.

Only he can make me feel this way.

“Did you enjoy yourself last night or was I too rough?” he asks in a soothing tone, rubbing circles on my cheek, and I turn beetroot red.

I can't believe this man. Does he have no filter? Jeez.

This isn't how this is supposed to go. It's just sex so he shouldn't be worried about me.

“I did,” I reply. “And you were just the right amount of hard.”

His eyes darken.

“So, you like it hard and fast, eh?” he asks with a seductive look, and I want nothing more than to be fucked on this counter.

He's so close. I can smell his musky scent mixed with his cologne.

“Can we have breakfast now? Thought you were making pancakes?”

“I was, but I'd rather have you first.”

He lifts me from the stool and places me on the island, his hand disappearing under my robe and tracing my thigh. It sends shivers down my spine. I'd never get tired of the way he makes me feel.

I don't even protest this time because I can't fight my attraction to him anymore. I've decided to enjoy the sex as an added bonus to the money.

Damon's lips attack my neck, and he sucks, bites, and nibbles my skin, no doubt leaving hickeys.

"Damon... that's going to bruise," I make a feeble attempt at protesting. I'm enjoying the sensation, and I don't want him to stop. I love the way he worships my body like a temple.

"Let it," he groans.

I take off my robe, and Damon's mouth descends on my breasts. His admiration for them is clear. I whimper as he suckles and bites one, his large palm kneading the other.

None of the men I've ever been with took such good care of my body. I guess this is what being with an older man feels like.

"Tell me what you want, love," he grunts, and it's so sexy. Everything about him is.

"You said you wanted to have me first before breakfast. I want you to go down on me and fuck me with your expert tongue," I say with a confidence I didn't know I possessed.

Maybe it's the fact that I was too dickmatized to think straight. My behavior has suddenly shifted from rational to batshit crazy because I've been hit with some good dick.

In the blink of an eye, Damon is down on his knees and trailing kisses up my thigh as he places my right leg on his shoulder.

“Try not to scream; I tend to over-please women,” he warns with a wicked glint in his eyes.

Arrogant bastard.

“You’re just being a narcissistic prick.”

“One you fucked last night.”

“That was poor lack of judgment on my part.”

Liar.

“And now?”

“I’m only being generous by offering you... *fuck!*” The words die on my lips as Damon runs his tongue along the length of my sensitive clit.

I hiss and thrust my hips forward in reflex.

Bad move.

My vulva rubs itself against his mouth, and I shudder in pure unadulterated pleasure.

“You were saying?” He smirks, gripping my ass and pumping his tongue into my core like a sprinter. He hums and the vibration has me whimpering and pulling harshly at his hair.

The pace at which his tongue is moving in and out of me has me crying out and writhing under him like a crazed woman.

“Shit... Damon. Oh, fuck!”

He adds two fingers to his tongue, and I almost jump off the counter.

“Oh, my god. Fuck, fuck, fuck,” I scream. This should be considered illicit. Damon shouldn't be allowed to walk around free with a tongue and fingers like that.

He is indeed skilled at the fine art of pleasuring women.

I'm close, so I rock my hips, fucking his mouth. My orgasm hits me like a ton of bricks, and I cum so hard, shaking violently, but he pins me in place.

“I need to be inside you,” Damon rasps.

We both realize that we don't have a condom down here, and if it were just me, I'd gladly oblige to being fucked without one because the deed has already been done. I'm already pregnant. But Damon doesn't know, and he's being careful.

I feel guilty, but keep my mouth shut.

He's gone for a second to get a condom, and once he's back, I pull down his pants, and his hard, pink-tipped cock springs free. He's massive. It's still a wonder how he manages to fit in me.

I put the condom on him, and he pulls my ass to the edge of the counter, placing my legs on his shoulders and making me lie flat on the counter. He teases me with his tip until I resort to begging.

He pushes into my pussy, and I swear I see stars in my vision. This angle is terrific. His dick goes all the way in, his

balls slapping against my ass cheeks as he fucks me with slow strokes.

“I love your body, hun. So fucking gorgeous,” he says with a devotion that shocks me to my core. I look away. It’s all too much. I’m too exposed. Too vulnerable.

“Look at me,” he urges. And when I do, he drives into me, holding my gaze.

There’s nothing rough about it. No dirty talk. Just me and Damon. Just us.

And our baby.

He uses his free hand to cup my cheek, his thumb caressing my skin as he kisses me, and my eyes flutter shut. I absorb the warmth of his touch and the way it makes me feel cherished.

We come over the edge together, and I feel like I’m on cloud nine.

As we have breakfast later, I can’t help but wonder if I maybe overestimated my ability to do this.

CHAPTER 14

DAMON

These past couple of days of being fake-married to Sheila has been nothing but blissful.

We've christened almost every part of the house with our sexual endeavors. Sheila is abso-fucking-lutely phenomenal, and I can't seem to get enough of her.

She's good with Belle, too, and they've taken an instant liking to each other. When Belle got back from school yesterday, the first person she looked for was Sheila. And it made my heart swell with joy to see that Sheila was a natural at taking care of my daughter. She didn't complain or act cold towards her which I'm grateful for.

I'm in an extra good mood today when I get to work. Sheila left before me because she had to sort some things out after missing work for two days because of the wedding.

As I step into the building, I smile faintly at every employee who greets me, and I notice them giving me weird looks but I'm too excited to dwell on it. They're presumably wondering

what's got me in such a favorable mood, and I can completely understand the reason for the ogles because I'm usually grumbly and difficult.

There are murmurs when I get into the general reception, but they die down and the workers scramble away once they notice my presence. I ride the elevator to my office floor where I see Sheila seated at her desk.

She must hear the chime of the elevator because she instantly looks up at me. Her face is solely professional.

“Good morning, sir,” she greets, and images of me dominating her in bed last night flash in my mind. She's peering up at me with innocuous eyes, and God knows I want to taint her in all ways possible.

I never thought I'd feel this way about anyone, much less someone younger. But she has me wrapped around her finger and she doesn't even know it. I look at her hand and see she isn't wearing her ring. I guess she's not ready to go public yet.

Fine by me.

I don't want my affairs under public scrutiny anyway. I only did this for Belle and my mom.

“Good morning, Miss Cromwell. How're you this morning?”

“Awesome. Mrs. Anderson is in your office waiting.”

My brows draw together in confusion. “But she doesn't have an appointment. Is something wrong?” I ask.

“I don’t know for certain. She wouldn’t say, but she seemed a little bit on the edge. Sounded serious.”

I nod. “Prepare a report of all the shippings to LA from last month and have them to be before noon.”

“Alright,” she retorts, looking back at her screen.

“Sheila?” I call and she stares at me once again.

“Thank you,” I say, and she understands what it is I’m expressing gratitude for.

She simply nods in reply and goes back to work.

I don’t know why but I’m dissatisfied with her reaction. I don’t know what I was expecting but it certainly wasn’t a cold shoulder after everything we’ve done together. To Sheila, I’ll only always be an asshole with no regard for people’s emotions who treats her with disrespect. I don’t know when that started to bother me.

Swallowing hard and accepting my fate, I stride into my office to see Mrs. Anderson seated on the couch.

“Good morning, Mr. Finnegan,” she greets, rising. I notice she’s holding a magazine.

“Good morning. Is anything the matter?” I enquire.

“I’m afraid some disturbing piece of information has come to light, and I wanted to make sure you’re aware of everything that’s happening.”

Okay, now I’m worried.

“What information?”

Mrs. Anderson sighs and hands me the magazine in her hand. I quickly retrieve it from her, and my blood runs cold when I see what's on the cover page of the magazine.

“What the hell?”

It's a picture of Shelia and I at the restaurant with a pesky inscription.

Shocking! 42-year-old New York's most eligible bachelor seen cruising around town with his 23-year-old new secretary after his divorce.

What the actual fuck?

“It gets worse. Your ex-wife gave an interview to People Magazine this morning,” she says, handing me her phone to watch the interview.

Eleanor, whom I haven't seen in six months, is just as graceful and eloquent as I remember with her striking eyes as blue as deep waves of the ocean, and virtuous but deceitful looks. I haven't heard from her for months, and now this.

She looks heartbroken as she talks about our divorce and plays the target, but I know it's all an act. Eleanor has always been one hell of an actress and I've always thought she'd excel in the field if she ever decided to switch careers.

“As for the girl in the photos, well what can I say? She looks so young, and I want to believe that Damon knows what he's doing. Because it would really hurt me if this is just some gold digger preying on his emotions,” she finishes and wipes a fake crocodile tear for effect.

I can't say I'm surprised by her antics. I expected nothing less. For Eleanor, it's always been a play of power, not minding who gets hurt. If she thinks this scandal gives her the upper hand, then she's highly mistaken.

How did pictures of I and Sheila get to the tabloids in the first place? *I guess you can't be too careful these days.*

My first thought is Sheila. I don't think she knows yet. How am I supposed to break it to her? The poor girl was only doing me a favor, and I ruined it by forcing her out to dinner despite her protests.

I should have been more careful.

"Where the hell did you get this?" I ask angrily, grinding my molars.

"I got to work this morning and saw the other workers gathering around a desk. I got closer and discovered they were all looking at it. It's probably in every magazine stall in New York as we speak. Then, I went online and saw the interview."

"Shit!" I curse loudly, running my hand down my face.

"Is it true about you and Sheila, or is the media trying to create drama where there is none?" Mrs. Anderson asks.

"The fuck does it matter?" I lash out even though I know she's only showing genuine concern.

"I need to know so I can salvage this. We can't have the tabloids painting you in a shady light. It's bad for your image and business."

I know she's right, but I'm not thinking straight. I'm pissed, and I don't give two shits about my image. The only person I care about right now is Sheila, so I exit my office, leaving Mrs. Anderson behind.

Sheila isn't at the reception, and I call her cell, but it goes straight to voicemail. I panic and immediately rush home where thankfully I find her.

"Sheila..." I start to say as I approach her, but she interrupts me halfway.

"This is all your fault. I hadn't wanted to go out that night," she snaps angrily.

"Relax, Sheila. I'm going to fix this," I try to pacify her.

"How? When I got to work this morning, I received odd looks from the other employees, but I didn't think much of it until Suzie showed up with the magazine. I knew I had to leave immediately. And when I did, people from the press followed and filmed me. People on the street were even taking pictures. I didn't sign up for this. This wasn't part of our agreement."

"I know, but please calm down. I'll do everything in my power to make all of it go away."

Sheila scoffs. "Yeah, right. Your ex-wife already called me a gold digger in front of the whole fucking world. Tell me, what are you going to do? The age gap between us doesn't exactly help my case."

I know I shouldn't be, but I'm hurt.

“I thought you didn’t have a problem with the age difference?”

“Well, I didn’t know my pictures will be splattered on the front page of *Us Weekly* magazine now, did I?”

“I’m sorry, but I didn’t plan this either. What the hell do you want me to say?” I flare. I’ve always known I have a fiery temper.

“You better fix this like you’ve promised, or you bet your ass we’re done,” she says, leaving me in the living room.

CHAPTER 15

SHEILA

I imagine the horror when I found myself on the front cover of a magazine.

I couldn't even log into any of my social media accounts because there were tons of messages in my DMs from a whole lot of people I didn't even know, asking if it was true that I and Damon were together.

Eleanor's fanbase was simply raining insults on me, and their judgmental comments were enough to throw even the happiest of souls into severe depression. All she had to do was shed a few tears on camera, and her fans were more than game to devour me whole.

I didn't even know the woman, yet she was wreaking havoc on my already miserable existence. I guess that's what I get for playing house with her ex-husband.

I didn't deserve to be treated this way. I had known that being with Damon meant being in the public eye, but I hadn't expected things to escalate this soon.

That night, after tucking Belle in, I examine myself in front of the mirror. Everything about me looks normal. There's no evidence that I'm expecting a baby. I rub my tummy as I contemplate how less complicated my life would be right now without it. After what happened today, I could've easily walked away but I stayed because babies are freaking expensive to take care of, and I need the money from the contract if Damon doesn't want anything to do with us.

Laying on my bed, I tuck myself under the duvet and close my eyes. I'm exhausted, and I hope sleep comes soon.



Alexa calls me first thing the next morning, apologizing profusely for not reaching out sooner. I apologize too for not calling and she asks if it's okay for us to meet up for breakfast, and I agree. I'll just have to wear sunglasses and a large hat to disguise myself and avoid being followed again.

I shower and put on a pair of blue jeans and an off-shoulder dark green floral top. I apply a little makeup and let my hair down before going downstairs. Damon is seated at the dining table having breakfast, and I wish he wasn't. He's the last person I want to have a conversation with right now.

"Heading somewhere?" he asks when I attempt to walk past him without so much as a word, and I reluctantly come to a pause.

"Going to see Alexa," I reply stiffly, making it evident that I would rather be anywhere else but here.

“Well, then, you should have breakfast first.”

“I’m not hungry,” I lie, and Damon doesn’t push it.

He looks stressed like he’s aged a few more years between yesterday and today.

“We’re going to Minnesota tomorrow to spend the weekend with my mom.”

Oh.

“Why so soon?” I ask. I’m not ready.

“She called late last night and didn’t sound too happy when I told her you were my wife. She asked that I bring you over so she could get to know you better.”

“I see,” I comment, pursing my lips in a thin line.

“This was the essence of the marriage in the first place so pack your bags. We leave tomorrow morning.”

Great. Just what I need.

Damon doesn’t say anything further, so I turn on my heels and head out. “Take the driver with you,” I hear him say.

Hudson drops me off at the diner where I and Alexa are meeting. It’s not our typical spot because people who also frequent there might easily recognize me even with the disguise.

I spot Alexa in a hidden booth at the corner of the diner and make my way to her.

“Oh, honey,” she exclaims once she sets her eyes on me and engulfs me in a big hug. “Are you okay?” she asks, pulling

away as we take our seats.

“Sincerely, I don’t know.”

“You shouldn’t have gone out to the restaurant if you still wanted to keep things on a low.”

“It was Damon’s idea to eat out,” I say.

“How’re you holding up?” she asks, and I know she’s not just referring to yesterday.

“I’m doing okay, I guess. Alexa, I don’t think I’m cut out for this kind of shit. I mean, don’t you think that maybe I overrated my ability to do this with Damon?”

“No one said it was going to be easy.”

“His first wife is ferocious. She’s literally out for my blood.”

“If they are divorced already, why in God’s name is she still after him? Didn’t you say she cheated on him with another man?”

“She did. That’s what Damon said.”

We stop talking as the waitress comes to take our orders and only resume our conversation after she leaves.

“Then you need to put that bitch in her place. She might be a porcelain doll with a large fanbase but show her you’re not going down without a fight.”

“I don’t know...” I’m not as strong as my best friend. She’s always been the tougher one between the two of us.

“Look at me, Sheila, you can do this.”

“You really think so?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, I’m going to Minnesota tomorrow for the weekend. Damon’s mother has requested to see me.”

“That was fast.”

“My point *exactly*,” I answer, throwing my hands up in the air. “I know for a fact that the woman won’t like me.”

Alexa rolls her eyes. “When will you stop selling yourself short?”

“You don’t understand. This woman fought so hard to get her son back together with Eleanor that he resolved to fake a marriage.”

“I understand your fears, but don’t give up just yet.”

Our order arrives, and I waste no time diving in. Because of what transpired yesterday, I didn’t have dinner before going to bed. I just didn’t have the appetite.

“Still haven’t told him about the baby, I see.”

Alexa wasn’t in support of me keeping Damon in the dark. She had wanted me to tell him the moment I said I wasn’t having an abortion, but I had declined.

“I don’t know if he’ll want it or not.”

She sighs. “That’s the thing. You won’t know for sure unless you actually tell him.”

“And if I do and he doesn’t want it? What then? I know what I’m doing,” I say even though it’s clear from all

indications that I'm as lost as any needle in a stack of hay.

“Do you really? It's a pregnancy, Sheila. There's no hiding it for long. Sooner or later, you'll start to show.”

The reality scares the living daylight out of me.

“I want to ask you something. I know it's not my place but I'm just worried about you.”

I have a feeling I won't like what she's about to ask but I nod. “Go on.”

She stalls for a moment, watching me intently before finally speaking up. “Are you having sex with Damon?”

I don't answer. Instead, I avoid her eyes. Suddenly, the burrito in front of me becomes interesting.

“I'm not,” I answer after a long silence.

“Bullshit,” Alexa deadpans. “I can't believe you're doing this to yourself.”

“It's just sex,” I make a weak attempt at upholding my actions.

Alexa looks at me like I've grown a second head. “It's never just sex. You're pregnant with the man's child, you live in the same house, and you're fake-married.”

How do I tell her that Damon has this leverage over me when it comes to my attraction to him? I can't seem to stay away from him. Maybe it's the fact that no man has ever made me feel the way he makes me feel when we have sex.

Whatever the reason, I don't want to stop feeling this way.

CHAPTER 16

DAMON

“**A**t this rate, we’re not going to make it in time for dinner!” I yell when Sheila still hasn’t come down after thirty minutes of I and Belle waiting in the living room.

“Is Sheila not coming anymore?” Belle asks, and I pat her hair lovingly.

“She’s coming, baby. She just needs to gather her things, okay?”

Belle nods. “I like Sheila a lot. She’s really friendly,” she says, and I beam at her.

“I’m glad you do.”

“Is she going to be staying with us forever?” she asks, staring at me with wide, curious eyes, and I don’t know how to break it to my daughter that Sheila is only here for a year, so I give her a vague reply.

“Just enjoy the fact that she’s here right now, alright?”

“Okay, Daddy.”

I stare at my wristwatch and see that we're forty minutes behind schedule. I wonder what's taking Sheila so long. I'm about to go up to her room to find out what the problem is when she comes down with her luggage. I instantly take it from her.

"What took so long?"

"I'm sorry I kept you both waiting. I was just trying to pack."

This is something she should've done earlier. I informed her about the trip yesterday. Instead of prolonging the matter, I say nothing.

Belle indulges Sheila in a conversation all through the ride to the airport. She's describing what our family house in Minnesota looks like, and I try but fail to hide my smile when she ends up describing something completely different.

Sheila must catch onto it because she smiles too. "Really?" she says over-enthusiastically with large eyes.

"Yes. Gwandma makes sure I eat all the chocolate cake I want," Belle announces proudly.

"Your grandma sounds wonderful," Sheila says but I notice the slight nervous undertone in her voice.

So, this is it. She's anxious about meeting my mother. No surprise there.

"Gwandma's going to love you," Belle says, and Sheila beams at her, grateful for the moral support the little girl is unknowingly offering.

“Thank you.”

We arrive at the airport and get into the cabin. Sheila gawks openly at it. Not to sound like an egoistic asshole, but I only ever go for the finest quality.

There’s an entirely hoarded mini bar with shiny tumblers, a small fridge packed with all kinds of chocolate-glazed fruits, a big TV on the wall, ample cream seats, and even a washroom in the back complete with a functioning shower.

“This is really nice,” Sheila compliments, and I’m glad she’s pleased. I want to keep pleasing this woman.

“Thanks.”

We settle in and the jet takes off. Belle is playing with one of her toys, and I sneak a look at Sheila who still has her brows knitted in a subtle frown.

“Are you okay?” I ask, keeping my voice low so Belle doesn’t hear us. She’s too preoccupied with her game to care, anyway.

“Yeah, I’m fine.”

“You’re not.”

Sheila turns to look at me fully and a smirk stretches on her full lips. “Is the big bad Damon Finnegan worried about me?” she pokes fun at me, and I instantly adjust on my seat, getting uncomfortable.

I’m not really conversant with showing emotions.

“Just showing concern,” I say, and Sheila huffs a laugh.

“So *you are* worried about me then?” she taunts with a shit-eating grin on her face. She’s enjoying this a little bit too much. So what if I’m worried about her? It’s not some sort of violation, is it?

“You know it’s adorable that you’re worried about me, right? You’re cute.”

“I’m not cute,” I counter, horrified at being regarded as cute. Shoot me, but don’t call me cute.

Sheila laughs out this time. The sight of her this way is breathtakingly beautiful. Her wavy brown hair bounces around her shoulders, and I fight the urge to reach out and run my fingers through the curls.

“It won’t make you any less of a man if I call you cute.”

“Punch me in the face before you call me cute,” I say and she rolls her eyes in amusement.

“Whatever you say, macho man.”

I like that she’s loosened up after what happened. I don’t like it when we have a misunderstanding. But what can I say? I seem to have a knack for irritating her.

“You know you shouldn’t worry about meeting my mom, right?” I say, growing serious.

“I know that this was the whole reason for the marriage, but I can’t help but feel uneasy. What if she doesn’t like me?”

I know she won’t, but I don’t say it out loud. She looks scared. Fuck being called cute.

“Sheila, you’re a wonderful human being. You’re strong, kind, and beautiful. It doesn’t matter what anyone thinks about you. I want you to know that you’re perfect just the way you are. But I also want you to brace up. My mother wasn’t exactly pleased on learning about our marriage. So we won’t be on the receiving end of her good graces.”

Sheila’s eyes shine with an indescribable emotion, and my breath hitches.

Fuck!

Maybe I’ve said too much. I don’t regret saying what I just did, but I’m certain I’ve scared her. She’s looking at me partly in surprise and something else I can’t quite place.

“I shouldn’t have...” I rush to take back my words like the fucking coward I am.

“I’m glad you did. Thank you for saying that. I kind of needed the talk. With everything happening lately, I needed to hear someone say that to me.”

My heart sinks. I put her in this mess. It’s all my fault.

“My PR team is on it as we speak. They’re working on the best strategy for you to come out of this unscarred,” I say, instinctively reaching out and taking her hand in mine. The spark that courses through me is something I’m not prepared for but I downplay the effect by keeping my face neutral.

“We’ll get through this together.”

“What about Eleanor?” she asks, and I sigh.

“Don’t worry about Eleanor. I’ll take care of her.”

“How?”

“Just trust me, okay?”

Sheila nods but she’s back to being moody.

“You know you have a radiant smile, right?” I ask, and Sheila doesn’t disappoint. She graces me with the gentlest of smiles and it makes my heart swell with pride to know I put it there.

“You’re trying everything in your power to lift my spirits, aren’t you?” she asks, giving me a seductive once over and my cock stirs in my pants.

Down, boy.

“Is it working?”

“It most certainly is.” She smirks.

I adjust in my seat, trying to hide my boner. “Just relax and enjoy the flight.”

She smiles knowingly. “Will do.”

CHAPTER 17

SHEILA

It takes about three hours before we land in Minnesota. Damon was sweet during the flight and managed to tune down my anxiety a notch. Although I still feel a little on edge, I think I'm all pumped to meet his mother.

When we arrive at the airport, there's a car waiting to take us to his family home. The chauffeur standing by the car has the whole agent vibe working for him with his black suit and black specks.

"Welcome Mr. Finnegan. It's good to have you back in Minnesota. How was your flight?" he asks.

"All good, Jones. Meet my wife, Sheila," Damon introduces, playing the part of a caring husband by pulling me closer to himself. The action is so sentimental, I would have believed it myself if I didn't know better.

"Pleasure to meet you, ma'am," Jones greets politely.

"Pleasure's all mine," I utter in response, smiling a tad.

We get into the car and begin our journey. As much as the prospect of seeing Damon's mother terrifies me, I want to see the house he grew up in. Underneath his tough exterior, I know Damon is a kind soul who just finds it difficult to express exactly what he feels. Or at least, I'd like to think so.

The car comes to a stop in front of two large black metal gates and they open smoothly. As we drive through, I notice the surveillance cameras surrounding the area. The farther we go into the estate, the more I come to realize just how loaded the Finnegans are.

The magnificent landscape is something I've only ever seen in movies and read of in novels. I look out the window, gawking at the trees as we drive by. Then I close my eyes, basking in the tranquility nature provides.

We stop in front of the main mansion and Jones opens the door for Belle and I. Belle dashes inside once her feet touch the ground. The splashing sounds coming from the massive angel-sculptured fountain in front of the mansion draws my attention. I look around and observe the nicely groomed grass and the several rows of red roses beautifying the entrance.

It's really enchanting. I could get used to seeing this for the few days we're here. Before I know it, I'm lost in a vacant daze that leads to wool-gathering.

"My mother is expecting us," Damon says, and I snap out of my deluded thoughts. "Are you ready?" he inquires, looking down at me, his brows drawn in concern.

It's not like I can change my mind now and go back on my word, so I take a deep breath and lift my chin in determination.

"As ready as I'll ever be," I respond, and we hit the ground running.

Damon places his hand on my lower back, leaving electricity gliding up my spine and dissipating to my extremities. I try my best not to dwell on how good he makes me feel. This isn't the time or place.

The most stupendous views greet my vision as we step into the living room. It's imperial and antique but sleek in a contemporary kind of way. Portraits of Damon's family tree starting from his ancestors to the youngest Finnegan adorn the concrete brick walls, and they are a lot of them, I must say.

There's a grand piano in the far left corner of the room which makes me wonder if Damon plays. His fingers are skilled after all; I wouldn't be surprised if he does.

"Took lessons as a child," he says when he notices me staring.

"Not surprised. You have proficient fingers," I say, smirking.

Damon's brows shoot up and I can imagine the nasty thoughts running through his head. This man must be a fallen angel or something. He's too beautiful to be deemed normal.

"Really? Pray tell what you mean."

He bestows me with that devilish smile of his and my heartbeat goes haywire.

Two can play.

Lowering my voice to almost a whisper and peering up at him with ‘fuck me’ eyes, I say, “I love the way your fingers fuck me hard and fast, deliciously curving and hitting that spot that makes stars blossom in my vision and my toes curl in delight. No one quite fucks like you do.”

Instant boner.

Damon looks like he’s about to bite the bullet when someone clears their throat. My face flames even though I know it’s impossible for whoever it is to have heard me with how low my tone was.

When I turn around, I see an average-height woman probably in her late sixties clad in a gray knee-length skirt and button-down yellow floral shirt. Her hair is tied up in a sleep shiny bun and her azure eyes remind me of Damon’s. They have the same brown hair and diamond-shaped faces.

“There’s the most beautiful woman in the world,” Damon exclaims, going over and engulfing her in a hug, and she smiles lovingly.

“How’s my boy doing?” she asks, her voice velvety.

“Good as always. And my pretty mother?”

“Don’t worry about me. I’m fine,” she says with a quick wave of her hand.

“Have you seen Belle around? She ran in just as soon as we arrived.”

“Oh, don’t worry. Belle’s in my room. I had lots of sweets stocked away. How was your flight?”

“It was fine.”

I stand there awkwardly, waiting for an introduction.

“Mom, this is Sheila, my wife,” Damon introduces, coming over and hugging me to his side. I’m grateful for the support. “Sheila, meet my mother, Debra Finnegan.”

“Pleasure to meet you,” I say with my best smile, stretching forth my hand for a shake but Debra looks at it like a dead fly.

She regards me with clear disdain. “Can’t exactly say the same about you.”

“Mother,” Damon says in a warning tone.

“Well, forgive me for not warming up to someone you got married to in secret,” she defends, but I know that’s not it. Her contempt stems from somewhere deeper than just Damon keeping her in the dark.

She believes I’m not good enough for him.

“She’s young. Too young to be your wife, my boy.”

The age difference between us is not precisely imperceptible.

“Can we please not do this, Mom? Sheila’s my wife, and I’d like you to accord her the respect she deserves.”

All through the conversation, I stand awkwardly, wishing I had the power to vanish into thin air. I don’t say a word or

move even the tiniest inch. In fact, I might as well have blended in with the furniture.

Damon's mother doesn't say anything else in response. She just glares at me with a look that says this is far from over.

"Dinner is cooking. Why don't you go up to your room and take a shower? I'll have Patricia call you once it's ready."

"Thanks, Mom."

We're about to ascend the stairs when she speaks again.

"And oh, Damon, I invited Eleanor over for the weekend."

My head snaps in her direction in utter horror.

What the absolute fuck?

Eleanor and myself in the same house for two whole days? That can't be good. The triumphant look on Debra's face tells me she's deliberately done this to spite me.

Damon looks pissed. "How could you invite her over?"

"What? She's still Belle's mother so that makes her family."

"I and Eleanor didn't exactly have a smooth divorce. And don't try to play ignorant, Mom. You know specifically what I mean."

"I can't exactly ask her to go back now, can I?"

Just as the words leave Debra's lips, Eleanor saunters in with poise. She's wearing an immaculate white suit which without a doubt cost the whole of my wardrobe. Her strawberry blond hair cascades down her shoulders in bouncy coils and she possesses this aura that makes you stop and stare

until you catch yourself drooling. The cameras didn't do her justice. She looks better in person with her pristine skin and doll-like features.

I can see why Damon must have fallen in love with her in the past. She's stunning beyond words and I'm intimidated in an instant. Other than our interest in Damon, we have nothing else in common.

"Surprised to see me?" she asks Damon whose jaw hardens like marble.

"Just displeased."

Completely ignoring him, she eyes me up and down like I'm nothing. "You brought your flavor of the month to our family home, I see."

I can feel the fury radiating off Damon as he answers. "Firstly, it's not *our* family home. It's mine. And secondly, her name is Sheila, and she's my wife," Damon corrects, drawing me possessively to himself.

He's acting like a loving and caring husband, and I swear, his performance is so Oscar-worthy, he'd give Brad Pitt a run for his money.

Meanwhile, Eleanor's jaw drops to the floor on hearing the news. The terrified expression on her face is priceless.

As anticipated, she clearly didn't see it coming.

CHAPTER 18

DAMON

I can't believe mom went as far as inviting Eleanor to join us for the weekend. This weekend was scheduled for her to meet Sheila so they could get to know each other.

But now I see that she clearly had other plans in store.

I'm pissed beyond measure as Sheila and I go up to our room. Mom had no right to do what she did without asking me first. Maybe this is my punishment for getting married without informing her. I know my mom and I know how she thinks. She's probably hoping for me and Eleanor to get back together after spending time here together.

If they think I'd fall for another one of their decoys, then they've got another thing coming.

Mom is too dazzled by Eleanor's goody-two-shoes act to see past her angelic appearance, but I know better. A leopard doesn't change its spots no matter the circumstance. And as for Eleanor, we haven't spoken in months. But the second she

catches whim of Sheila being in my life, she's back to stake a claim on me.

Clown.

I finish taking a shower and step out of the bathroom to see an already-clad Sheila sitting in front of the dresser and applying her makeup. I don't like that everyone's giving her a hard time, and I feel an overwhelming need to comfort her.

She turns around and I notice her gaze doing a quick sweep of me, lingering a little longer on my abs and the trail of hair disappearing underneath the white towel hanging low on my hips.

My gym membership is finally coming in handy.

Smirking, I decide to taunt her. "I could take off the towel if you want."

"Well then, why don't you?" she asks with a coy smile, and I chuckle, shaking my head slightly. This woman is indeed full of surprises. With her, there is simply no dull moment.

After everything that transpired downstairs, I expected her to be in a foul mood, but she's acting like it never happened. I don't know how but I feel like something has shifted between me and Sheila. We're more comfortable with each other than we were a week ago, and I fucking love it this way. I couldn't have asked for anything better.

"Whatever the wife wants," I tease her further, and she snickers.

“And while you’re at it, could you please put on a show to make it worth my while?” she requests like the temptress she is.

“Why don’t you take it off me yourself?” I ask in a husky voice, narrowing the distance between us.

Fuck, I’m hard. She doesn’t have to do anything to turn me on. Everything about her is downright titillating.

What I’d give to have her lips around my cock right now.

“Sorry, love. Your whole family is expecting us downstairs,” she pouts mockingly.

“Fuck them,” I say without a second thought. “We could just pretend like we forgot to go down. No one’s going to get upset over us missing dinner.”

“Except that your mother will,” she says, and I know she’s right.

“Damn.”

Sheila laughs in amusement and shoos me away. “Go get dressed.”

I put on my clothes begrudgingly, and we both go downstairs for dinner. Everyone is already seated at the table, and I see that Dominic has also arrived, and is talking animatedly with my daughter. A smile immediately graces my lips. I’m glad he’s here.

“Hey, man, how was your trip?” I greet, hugging him.

“It was good. Just a little bit jet lagged is all. Hey Sheila, how’re you?” He nods politely at Sheila who is glued to my side. Anyone in her shoes would do the same if my mom was after them like a hungry lioness ready to pounce on its prey.

“I’m fine, thank you. You?” she asks.

“I’m good.”

“I take it you knew all about this madness then?” Mom asks Dominic.

“I was at the wedding,” he states in a tone which suggests that he’s not ready to fight with her.

“And you couldn’t think to inform me or stop your brother? I expected more from you.”

“Damon is not a child, Mother. He’s a grown-ass man in control of his own damn life.”

“Language!” Mom exclaims, and I resist the temptation to roll my eyes.

Eleanor is seated beside her, and Belle is with her mother.

I draw out a seat on the other end of the table, far away from Mom and Eleanor for Sheila, and I take my place beside her. Belle immediately hops out of her seat and goes to sit with Sheila, and Eleanor is mad with rage but conceals it.

“Belle, honey, why don’t you come sit with Mommy?” she asks in a patronizing tone, a smile as fake as her personality plastered on her face.

Belle shakes her head. “I want to sit with Sheila.”

Can't really blame my daughter for choosing Sheila over her mother. The reason is glaringly obvious. If looks could kill, Sheila would be six feet under with the way Eleanor is shooting lasers at her with her eyes.

Not wanting to stir up any drama in front of Belle, Eleanor behaves.

"Let's dig in, shall we?" Mom says, and we all take servings of the feast in front of us.

"So, Sheila, tell me, what do you do?" Mom asks halfway through the meal.

"Sheila is a..." I start to say.

"Let the girl speak for herself," Mom interrupts me, and I clamp my mouth shut. Sheila and I hadn't thought of a befitting response to this question. It hadn't even crossed our minds.

I'm not embarrassed by her status, not in the slightest. I just don't want her to feel uncomfortable.

"I work as an assistant," she responds.

"Oh, dear. Eleanor, honey, didn't you just sign that big contract with Hermes?"

"Yes, I did. They only go for the very best which I happen to be." She beams brightly at Mom.

Oh, please.

"What college did you attend?" she directs the question to Sheila once again.

“Guttman. It was a community college.”

Eleanor scoffs loudly. “I went to Oxford.”

What’s with the comparison for crying out loud?

“I paid my tuition myself. I had to work different jobs to get myself through school, and I still graduated with a great degree. Did you even have to lift a finger?” Sheila asks, and I smirk.

Eleanor looks taken aback by Sheila’s question. She wasn’t expecting her to talk back. Like me, she comes from old money.

“My parents provided everything I needed.”

“I didn’t have parents to do the same for me, so I worked, and I am very proud of where I am today. It’s all a manifestation of my hard work,” she states.

My heart surges with pride for this woman.

“Could you please pass me the salad?” Dominic asks, and I comply.

“Impressive,” Mom remarks dryly. “How old are you?”

Sheila looks at me briefly, and I hold her hand encouragingly under the table. My mom is vicious when she wants to be, and I know what’s coming can’t be good.

“Twenty-three.”

“Doesn’t it bother you that you’re nineteen years younger than my son?”

I'm irritated beyond words. This has got to stop, and I'm putting an end to it now. "It doesn't bother me, and neither does it bother Sheila. We're happy so I don't think it should bother anyone else."

"If you had a daughter at nineteen, she'd be her age."

"But I didn't, Mom. Now, if you're done making my wife uncomfortable, I'd like us to continue eating in peace."

"I'm just showing concern. You're influential, and any woman would be thrilled to have you."

There she goes, dubbing Sheila a gold digger.

"With all due respect, ma'am, I'm not with your son for his money. I'm with him because he's sweet and kind and gentle and loving. He is unlike any man I have ever met," Sheila begins, and my heart does a somersault. "He is a good husband and an even better father. I couldn't have asked for a better partner than him."

If I thought I was a good actor, then it was because I hadn't seen Sheila in action. She's speaking so effortlessly, it's hard to tell that it's merely a script.

Her words shake me to my very core. Is that how she sees me or is it just an act to sell our story?

Our eyes connect and I see unmistakable admiration shining in her brown eyes for me. I instantly feel the need to take her where no one will find us. Where no one would question our motives even though this is supposed to be a charade. Where it

will be just the two of us making love all day and enjoying each other's camaraderie.

I want to keep her all to myself and away from all the madness.

All through the remaining part of dinner, Eleanor does not utter a word but eats in defeat, and my mom diverts her attention to Dominic.

Good riddance.

To say the least, I'm so fucking proud of my Sheila.

CHAPTER 19

SHEILA

Despite my many protests last night against having sex because we're in his family home, Damon and I still have the most mind-blowing sex of our time together.

He gave me four orgasms so *hello*, I'm so not complaining right now. After our sex marathon, we finally fell asleep with me on top of him, our limbs intertwined together.

I guess what incited our passionate lovemaking last night was my little speech at dinner. I was shocked by my own revelation, too, but I was speaking from the heart. Everything I poured out was true. Damon is a catch, and I'm lucky to have him. Even if this is just a contract, I'm elated I get to experience all I am right now with him.

When I wake up the next morning, he's still lying beneath me, and his eyes are shut. I take the opportunity to admire this gorgeous man who has me speaking effortlessly from the heart.

Like this, he looks peaceful in his sleep with eyelashes that should be considered too long for a male. His jawline is very well-defined, his lips are full and pink, and little furrows line his forehead, reminding me of his age.

I want to stay this way forever, but it's unfortunately cut short when he stirs awake. He struggles to adjust to the luminous light for a moment before he finally squints at me through hooded eyes.

Is it just me or are his eyes bluer than usual?

"Good morning," he lets out, his voice husky, and my pussy clenches in delight.

I'm officially hopeless when it comes to this man.

"Morning," I mumble, and he runs his fingers through my hair, caressing it. My eyes flutter shut on their own accord.

"Did you have a good sleep last night?"

"I did, but it was short seeing as you had me bent over in every position possible."

Wow, I'm bold now. Okay.

Damon chuckles, and the tremors cause my toes to curl in pleasure. It's criminal to look this tantalizing in the morning. I feel the poke of his hardened cock against my thigh and smile knowingly.

"Well, someone's awake."

"Can't help myself when you look like that," he replies, his hands disappearing under the sheets to cup a feel of my naked

ass cheeks, and I giggle.

I freaking giggle! I wasn't one to giggle before, but I guess Damon makes me do things I have never done.

"Fuck, I'm going to be late for my meeting," he exclaims when he sneaks a glance at the clock on the bedside table.

"What meeting?" I frown in confusion. I'm not aware of any meetings.

"Just some potential clients who happen to be in Minnesota. It was a last-minute thing, and it's nothing serious."

Oh.

"Hit the shower, then. You don't want to be late, Mr. Finnegan," I say, trailing my fingers down his chest, but he catches them before they go any lower, and I smile.

"Fucking tease," he says grumpily, and I laugh, rolling off him so he can get out of bed.

Damon showers and gets dressed while I lay on the bed watching and enjoying this view of him. He is wearing a black suit which does nothing to hide his built body, and he looks sexy as sin. No one pulls off this look better than he does.

"Here, let me help." I offer to knot his tie and he sits on the bed.

I get off the bed, letting the sheets slip off, the morning light illuminating my naked body. Damon grips my waist, and his hands settle on my ass as I do the tie, my perky tits on display.

He's horny, and so am I, but he's also running late for a meeting.

"Fuck, you're gorgeous," he rasps with lucid adulation, and my heart does a cartwheel.

"And you look sexy in a suit. I have a thing for hot older men in suits."

"Really?"

I lick my lips seductively and his passion-filled eyes follow the motion.

Mission accomplished.

"I want to suck you off this way."

Damon doesn't resist. "By all means, proceed."

He's already rock hard as I unbutton and unzip his fly, pulling out his dick and palming it. I let my tongue swirl around his swollen pink tip before gently sucking, and he mutters profanities under his breath.

His breathing is harsh.

"Fuck, honey. Just like that," he appreciates, pulling my hair away from my face, and I go deeper until he hits the back of my throat.

I continue my sweet torture, bobbing my head up and down consistently until his hips buck. It gives me some leverage to know I'm the one making this powerful man feel this way, making him lose control.

He suddenly takes charge and holds my head in place, fucking my mouth with reckless abandon.

“Oh, Sheila,” he grunts, and it’s so sexy. I will never get tired of hearing it. He cums hard, spilling ribbons of cum in my mouth, and I make sure to swallow every bit of his liquid goodness.

“That was amazing,” he praises.

I smirk triumphantly and wipe my mouth with the back of my palm, swaying my hips as I saunter towards the bathroom. I know he’s watching.

“Have a good day.” I turn around and wink before shutting the door behind me.



Since Damon is not around, I decide to take a tour of the estate, and Belle tags along. Thank goodness I haven’t run into Eleanor after dinner yesterday. She didn’t come down for breakfast this morning because according to Debra, she was getting her beauty sleep.

Well, whatever. It saved me the stress of having to put up with her shenanigans again. Debra, as usual, still found ways to disparage me, but I was grateful that Dominic engaged me in conversations so his mother didn’t have much room to do as she pleased.

After the tour, which I must say was worth every second, Belle takes off to play at the tree house, and I decide to get

some juice from the kitchen. On my way, I run into one of the maids who says Debra is looking for me.

Damon isn't home which makes me wonder what exactly it is she wants with me, but I comply anyway, following the maid. We arrive at what appears to be the drawing-room, where I see Debra sipping tea from a teacup.

And she isn't alone. Eleanor is seated across from her, and their conversation comes to a halt when they take notice of my presence.

Whatever this is, I know they're simply up to no good.

"Come join us, Sheila. Have a seat. You can take wine, tea, or juice. Whatever you want," Debra says, and I go over to them, taking my place on one of the empty seats.

I pour myself a glass of juice even though I know I would be needing wine to go through with this conversation. But I'm pregnant so I guess juice it is.

"How are you liking it here so far?" Debra asks and I feel like this is a trick question. What precisely is she expecting me to say in response to that when they've been nothing but awful since the instant I arrived?

I opt for a tepid reply. "It's been quite interesting."

She hums.

"So how did you and Damon meet?" It's Eleanor who asks this time.

"At a party."

“Oh, please cut the crap. I know you only set your sights on Damon because of his money. There’s no way you love him. I’m the only one who ever truly loved Damon.”

The nerve of this woman.

“If you loved him so much, why did you cheat on him then?” I ask, hitting the nail on the head, and she flinches like she’s been burnt by hot coal.

“That wasn’t one of my smartest decisions, I admit. But that doesn’t in any way suggest that I don’t love him. He is the love of my life, the father of my child. There’s a bond between two people who bring children to the world, but I don’t expect you to understand.”

Her words are like a punch to my gut, and I feel the air get knocked out of my lungs.

“There’s no use crying over spilled milk. You had him, and you lost him. And that isn’t any fault of mine.”

Even though our marriage is fake, there’s no way I’m letting her or any other woman have Damon.

He’s mine.

“You’re way below Damon’s class. I’m on his level, so back off.”

Debra sets down her cup loudly, and we both snap our heads in her direction. “I know you’re only with my son for his money, so name your price,” she says, and I do a double take.

“What?” I ask in shock.

I feel insulted. Is she seriously trying to pay me off?

Eleanor rolls her eyes. “Oh, please. We both know your type. You’re the kind of girl who’s looking for a man to cater to all your needs and take you on luxurious vacations so you don’t have to work a day in your life. Why don’t you drop the act already and name your fucking price?” she says, venom seeping from her every word.

I know I should have foreseen that this would happen, but I’m stunned beyond words. I can’t believe Debra would stoop so low.

“No matter what you do, the fact remains that I am married to Damon. I am sorry to say, but the sooner you both accept this truth, the better for everyone.”

I get up from my seat and leave for the room I share with Damon. The moment I shut the door behind me, I sink to the floor. What I did back there wasn’t acting. I was merely expressing how I felt which is something I’ve been doing more of recent.

Fake marriage or not, I want him.

I want Damon, and the realization scares me to my core.

“Fuck, I’m in trouble,” I mumble to myself.

CHAPTER 20

DAMON

The next is our last day in Minnesota, and I decide to take Sheila around Minneapolis.

The city has beautiful sights, and we bask in each other's company as we explore them together. We have a lot of fun. I've never considered myself a joyful tourist as I would rather relish absorbing the place quietly. But with Sheila, I find myself doing things I wouldn't normally do. I laugh a little louder and enjoy it a little bit more. We even take pictures together.

Sheila makes me feel good about life, and I'm glad she's here with me. I kiss her hair as we stroll in the park later that evening. She blushes and gives me a look to which I shrug.

"What?" I ask incredulously.

"No one is here. There's no need to act for now."

"And back at our room, was anyone watching then?" I tease, and she smiles.

"You're an asshole."

“Sue me.”

I wrap my arms around her from behind and press my lips to her hair once again, and she giggles. The sound is fucking beautiful, and I don't think ever want to stop hearing it.

Overcome with the need to appreciate her, I say, “Thank you.”

“What for?” she asks, arching a brow.

“For agreeing to do this with me. I don't think I would have had the resilience to go up against Eleanor and my mother this time.”

“It's no big deal. It's just a contract, right?” she asks, and the harsh reality that this is just an act slaps me hard in the face. If it's fake, why do I feel all these peculiar emotions?

Even though it's a contract between us, I'm still grateful she agreed to it.

“Right. Just a contract,” I reply, nodding stiffly. “I haven't been with anyone else though since we got married,” I confess.

Sheila is stunned for a moment by my declaration. “Me neither,” she eventually says, and I don't know why but it makes me downright ecstatic to know it's only been me since we got married.

We walk in silence for a while.

“Do you think Eleanor loves you?” Sheila unexpectedly asks out of nowhere, and I wonder where this is coming from.

“Maybe in the past, she did. But after she cheated on me, it was kind of hard to say if she ever did at all in the first place.”

“And now?” she pushes. “Do you think her zeal to get back together with you is born out of real passion?”

I sigh. “Eleanor just needs someone as powerful.”

“But you’re not the only powerful man in the world.”

Okay, I don’t know why she suddenly wants to talk about my ex-wife, but I feel the need to set things straight.

Staring her dead in the eye, I say, “Eleanor and I are done forever. There’s nothing else between us, and it’ll continue to stay that way. I loved her, and she hurt me without stopping to think about how it’d affect our family. We had a daughter for fucks sake, yet she was always only ever concerned about her next photoshoot. Whatever we have is all in the past. It’s history now.”

You’re my future, I want to add, but decide against it. Coming off too strong might scare her, and the last thing I need is Sheila running away from me.

“I’m sorry she cheated on you. No one deserves to be heartbroken in such a cruel manner. Especially not someone like you.”

“Not someone like me? I’ve been nothing but an absolute jerk to you ever since you walked into my life, and you think I didn’t deserve to be treated like that? Who are you?” I ask in awe.

“I agree, you have your flaws, but like I said on the flight, you’re adorable.”

Ugh! She didn’t.

“There’s nothing adorable about me. I’m all male,” I say, and she rolls her eyes, but I don’t miss the small smile tugging at her lips.

“That’s the most sexist thing I have ever heard.”

I want to kiss her plump pink lips, but I’m scared of being rejected so I force myself to tear my gaze away from them. I’m instantly hard thinking of how I fucked her mouth last night, and, God help me, I want more.

Sheila is addictive in the most delicious of ways, and I don’t know how I’m supposed to let her go once all of this is over. Staring at her right now under the stars, I realize I don’t ever want this to end.

When we get home later that night, I’m consumed with the need to have her again. The more I have her, the more I yearn for her.

Once we make it to our room, her lips claim mine in a breathtaking kiss. How can I conceivably stay away and keep my hands to myself when she kisses me with such astounding desire that it makes my heart thump?

As I undress her, I trail a path with kisses down her spine. She lies on the bed, and I take my sweet time worshipping her body like a temple. I gently kiss her forehead, her eyelids, the

tip of her nose, and her cheeks, and claim her tempting lips in a slow and delicate kiss.

I then move down to her neck and collarbone, peppering them with kisses and she gasps when I bite a little on her skin. This is me branding her. Leaving a mark. When I get to her smooth round breasts, I feel her breathing pick up.

“Fucking gorgeous,” I murmur in admiration.

They are extraordinary.

A sight for sore eyes.

I leave open-mouthed kisses around them before my mouth circles a nipple, and she arcs her back in pleasure, releasing a shaky breath. I tease her left breast while my left palm kneads the other, giving it equal attention.

I’m not in a rush tonight. I feel like paying unique interest to her body, and with the soft sighs and moans coming out of her sensual lips, I know I’m doing it right, and she’s enjoying herself.

My fingers slowly descend to where I know she needs me the most and circle her sleek folds. Her hips buck, but I pin her in place, continuing my assault on her left breast.

“Damon...” she whimpers, my name on her lips, and it fucking drives me nuts.

“I know, love. Tell me how much you like what I’m doing to you. Tell me, baby,” I say huskily.

“I... I love it so much I don’t want you to stop,” she moans.

Thank goodness.

“I never planned on it.”

I pump my two fingers into her, slow at first. And then I increase the tempo, going hard and fast, just the way she likes it, all the while suckling her breast, and throaty moans escape past her mouth.

Not long after, her muscles spasm deliciously, and she cums on my fingers.

“Good girl,” I praise, sucking her release off my fingers and she watches me with an ineffable affection. Something so fierce, it scares and draws me in at the same time.

I get off her and quickly discard my clothes. She watches me the whole time.

“Turn around,” I command, and she obeys instantly. I push a pillow under her deftly and adjust her hips to an angle perfect for what I have in mind.

I lie on her back and use my elbows to support myself, so I don't crush her slender frame under my weight. Positioning my cock at her dripping entrance, I thrust into her in one swift motion, and she groans.

“Oh.”

I sink in and out of her in precise, long, sluggish movements, kissing her neck.

“Everything about you is beautiful, Sheila. Your body is so beautiful. So fucking beautiful,” I grunt, still retaining my

pace.

She whimpers on hearing my words and clenches her walls around me. I immediately increase my tempo, unable to stifle the want this woman fuels in me.

I pull out and instantly feel the loss. Turning her around so we face each other, I thrust back in and resume my previous pace. Her face is flushed, and her lips are slightly parted as I continue to pump into her warm pussy.

“I like when you’re under me this way. It makes me feel that you’re mine,” I say unable to help myself.

“Damon,” she cries out, her orgasm washing over her and triggering mine.

I hold her hard against me, thrusting into her once, twice, thrice, and it’s enough to push me over the edge. It’s far more intense than I imagined it would be.

I hear soft sobs coming from Sheila and my heart stops for a moment when I see the tears in her eyes. Fuck! What have I done?

“Why are you crying?” I ask, rolling off her and sitting with my back against the headboard. I wipe her tears with my fingers.

“It’s nothing.”

“It’s not nothing. I did my best to go slow, but if I was too rough, I’m sorry.”

She shakes her head. “You were sweet. I just...” She looks like she’s about to say nothing but thinks better of it. “Just hold me please,” she pleads, and I comply with no amount of hesitation.

Whatever it is, we’ll figure it out later but for now, I cuddle her and hopes she feels better in the morning.

CHAPTER 21

SHEILA

I'm in love with Damon. It's the sad but bitter truth.

Love wasn't exactly in any of my plans, but I realized it yesterday when we went sightseeing together. Unlike other times, I didn't find his troublesome antics irritating. Instead, I found it cute. It was fully confirmed when we had sex afterwards. It hadn't felt like we were fucking as usual. It had felt like Damon was making love to me, and the feeling was too intense I couldn't stop the tears that came after.

Just like that, my life had gone from just being complicated to super complicated. As he held me in his arms last night, I thought of ways to come out of this unscarred, but didn't come up with any good ideas, so I made a decision to quit both the contract and my job as his assistant.

There's no way I will be able to come to work and sit through each day knowing that he's so close yet so far beyond my reach. Plus, my baby bump has started to show a little. I couldn't face him rejecting our baby.

If he loved me, it would have been an entirely different case. The odds of him accepting the child would have been high. But he doesn't, so I would rather not subject my poor heart to further trauma.

We arrived in New York not too long ago, and Damon immediately went to the office to put a few things in order. I take a long shower and put a call across to Alexa. I need to talk to someone about these feelings I have bottled up before I go crazy.

"Hey, baby girl, what's up?" Alexa answers on the second ring, and on hearing her voice, I break down in tears.

"Sheila, are you crying?" she asks in a serious tone, and I nod but realize that she can't see me.

"I don't know what to do, Alexa. I'm just... I don't know," I say amidst sobs and hope my words are discernible enough.

"Woah, slow down. What's the matter? Did that son of a bitch do something to you? I swear I'm going to kick his ass if he did," she says, and I would have laughed at the absurdity of her thinking she can take on a man as massive as Damon if I didn't have more pressing issues at hand.

"He didn't do anything," I manage to croak out.

"Talk to me then. What's going on?" The worry is unmistakable in her tone. "I can come over if you want," she offers.

"Don't bother. I'll meet you at our spot in twenty minutes."

I get to the cafe before Alexa and order a latte. I need a little caffeine in my system.

A couple of minutes later, Alexa saunters into the café, and her gaze finds me at our usual table.

“Sorry, I’m late. I came as soon as I could,” she apologizes, sitting across from me. She looks as flawless as ever in a peach suit. “You scared me when you called earlier. Did something happen with Damon’s mother back in Minnesota?” she enquires with curious eyes.

I exhale shakily. “Eleanor was there, too.”

“I tried reaching you while you were there, but it never went through. Did that bitch do or say something to make you cry?” she fumes.

I shake my head. I can tell Alexa is growing frustrated by the minute with my vague responses.

“What is it then? I don’t think I need to say this, but you know you can talk to me about anything right? Anything at all.”

I nod. I know I can talk to her about anything which is exactly what makes this so difficult.

“I’m quitting my job and the contract with Damon,” I break the news to her, and she leans back in her seat.

“I don’t understand. Where is this coming from?”

“I just don’t want to do it anymore. I can’t.”

The instant the words leave my lips, I see realization flash in Alexa's eyes. She has it all figured out.

"You're in love with him." It's not a question.

I cover my face with my hands and sob bitterly. I feel so stupid right now. This was just supposed to be fun and sex. I wasn't supposed to catch feelings or fall in love with the man for fucks sake. How the hell did I get here? What have I done to myself?

I wait for Alexa to say she told me so, but the statement never comes.

"This is all my fault," she says instead, and I raise my head. I must look ridiculous with puffy red eyes and teary cheeks.

"What do you mean?"

"I should never have advised you to take the deal in the first place."

I won't let her blame herself for my misfortune. Looking back, I think I wanted to do it. Alexa was merely the nudge I needed to make a decision.

"It isn't your fault, and I don't want you thinking it is. Besides, the damage has already been done. All we need to do right now is come up with a solution."

"There isn't much to think of. You have to tell Damon about the baby and your feelings."

I look at Alexa incredulously, like she just asked me to jump off a cliff because she might as well have. Damon doesn't do

feelings. Our deal was pretty cut and dry. It was simply to pose as his fake wife not to develop feelings for him.

“I can’t do that,” I say, shaking my head defiantly.

“Believe me when I say I don’t want you to, either. But it won’t hurt to find out if he reciprocates your feelings or not. Or if he wants the baby or not.”

“I don’t want to make a fool of myself. Eleanor hurt him so badly that it’s difficult for him to move on and embrace such emotions.”

“That was a long time ago. Take a leap of faith,” she tries to convince me.

It’s easy for her to say. She’s not the one who’s pregnant or in love with a man who’s nineteen years older and elite.

I sip my coffee in silence. There’s no point arguing.

My mind is made up, and I’m not going back on my decision.



I don’t go home after my meeting with my best friend. I roam the streets of New York for a while, wandering around and feeling the wind in my hair. Going back home would mean going back to Damon and to be quite honest, I don’t want to be anywhere near him at the moment. I need space to clear my head.

After hours of aimless meandering, I pick up some chocolate cupcakes from a cafe for Belle and head home.

When I get there, I'm surprised to see her perched on the couch in front of the TV. It's half past nine and it's a school night. She shouldn't be up by this time.

On sighting me, she runs towards me and hugs my waist tightly.

"I brought this for you," I announce, holding out the bag containing the cupcakes.

"Thank you." She smiles widely, showing off all her teeth and snatching the bag from my grip.

I love it when she smiles. It soothes me in a way I can't possibly begin to explain. Maybe it's because I'm expecting a child of my own.

"Why are you still awake?" I ask, joining her on the couch.

"Daddy isn't home yet. I was waiting for him."

So, Damon isn't home. Maybe he's working late today because he wasn't around for three days. Belle smears some cake on her cheek, and I gently wipe it with my thumb.

"Where's Nova?" I look around, searching for the nanny.

"She put me to bed, but I couldn't sleep so I snuck out."

"That's inappropriate," I scold her.

She looks remorseful. "I'm sorry. I just couldn't sleep."

She's just so cute so I let her bad behavior slide just this once. "Just don't do it again, okay? It's not right."

She nods.

“Can I ask you a question?” she asks, and I nod encouragingly. “Are you going to be staying with me and Daddy forever?”

The question catches me off guard. Damon and I never explained to Belle that I was to be her substitute mommy for a while because we felt she wouldn’t fully comprehend the complexity of the situation.

“Belle, honey, your dad and I agreed that I stay here for a while so I can look after you.”

“I noticed that Daddy smiles more since you came to live with us. He never used to smile like that.”

Without warning, my heart skips a beat. Where does a six-year-old learn to say stuff like this? I know I shouldn’t indulge her, but curiosity rears its ugly head.

“Really?”

“Yes. The other kids at school always said my dad was gwumpy but they don’t say that anymore, and it’s because of you. Thank you, Sheila.”

Despite the hysteria uncoiling inside me, I smile in response, trying as much as possible not to read much meaning into the words of a child.

She can’t possibly know what she’s saying, right?

CHAPTER 22

DAMON

I didn't go home yesterday. There was a lot to do at the office, so I slept over. I called Sheila of course to tell her not to wait up for me. I spoke with Belle, too, when Sheila told me she was still awake.

I found it cute that the adorable munchkin didn't want to go to sleep without me, but I explained to her that I missed out on a lot of work because of our weekend in Minnesota. She was still adamant, so I promised to take her out for some ice cream during the weekend, and just like that, it was a done deal.

Right now, I'm slouched on my couch with several documents strewn on the coffee table in front of me. I'm so freaking exhausted from all the work I could pass out. I sneak a peek at my wristwatch to see that it's past eight in the morning. There isn't much left to do anymore, so I should be home before ten.

I could have easily called Sheila to come into the office and assist me, but I wanted her to get some rest. I believe she has

earned it after putting up with my mother and Eleanor throughout the weekend.

Thinking back to our last night in Minnesota, a smile finds its way to my lips. It was solely amazing.

Sheila was amazing. Unprecedented.

Everything was perfect, and I felt closer to her than I ever had since the first time we met. I only got scared when she cried afterwards. I have a lot of experience with women, but no one has ever cried after I have sex with them which kind of put me at a crossroads and left me wondering what the hell was going on.

I know for a fact that I wasn't rough with her as I had deliberately taken my time to love her body and treat her like the goddess she was, so it ought to have been something else making her cry. There was no time for us to talk about it the next morning, and I left for work shortly after we landed in New York. Hopefully, there would be time for us to discuss it after she comes home from work this evening.

I try my best to shove thoughts about her to the back of my mind and focus on the task in front of me. Barely ten minutes later, there's a knock on the door.

"Come in," I call out to whoever it is.

The door creaks open, and I raise my head to find that it's Sheila. She's wearing a sea-green turtle neck top and a black pencil skirt today. One look at the top, and I know she's trying

to hide the hickeys I so graciously gave her the last time we made love.

The satisfaction I feel right this moment knowing that this smart, confident, and sassy woman is mine knows no bounds.

“Good morning,” she says, coming over to me but retaining a considerate amount of distance between us.

“Good morning. How’re you?” I ask, smiling a bit.

“I’m good,” she nods, but I know something is off. She still has that look in her eyes from that night, but I don’t push it. I’m too drained to talk about it right now.

“Rough night?” she asks, and I groan, massaging my temples.

“Yeah. It took me a while to figure some stuff out, but I’m almost done.”

She’s holding an envelope in her hand, and I wonder what it’s for.

“What’s that?” I raise the question, gesturing to her hand and she starts fidgeting for no reason.

“It’s... It’s my one-week notice,” she finally lets out.

My whole body stills. I couldn’t have heard right.

“A week’s notice for?”

“I’m quitting. This is the one-week notice I’m required to submit to you,” she says, stretching it in my direction.

I laugh, and Sheila stares at me unbelievably. Well, what else was she expecting after making such a silly joke?

“You’re hilarious,” I say, looking back at my laptop screen.

“This isn’t a joking matter. I’m serious as a heart attack.”

The humor slips off my face expeditiously.

The fuck?

Where the hell is this coming from? We were okay up until yesterday when I left for the office. What had changed between then and now? I hastily procure the letter from her still-extended hand and tear open the envelope. Unfolding the paper enclosed in it, I go through the contents.

She wasn’t kidding. It’s indeed a letter of resignation.

“What the hell is going on?” I ask, trying my best to hide how upset I am about this.

Sheila averts her eyes. “I don’t want to work as your assistant anymore.”

“Did you get a better job offer elsewhere? Is that what this is about?” I’m aware she’s paid pretty well, but if her salary is the issue, then all she has to do is say the word and I’ll double it in an instant.

“No.”

“Does this have something to do with what my mother or Eleanor said at dinner that night?”

“Damon...” she sighs.

“Answer me, Sheila. You know you can’t take whatever my mom and Eleanor say to heart. They don’t know you like I do.”

“It has nothing to do with them.”

I’m confused. Was it me then? Fuck! I knew I had messed up somehow when she cried that night. I mentally curse myself for not poking harder for answers then.

“If I hurt you in any way, I’m sorry. I want you to know it wasn’t intentional. Tell me what I did wrong so I can apologize properly, but don’t just up and quit.”

“You did nothing wrong. I just don’t feel like I’m cut out for this.”

She’s done a great job at running my affairs so far, so I’m a little lost on what she means.

“You’ve been an excellent assistant.”

This doesn’t make any bit of sense.

“My mind is made up,” she says stubbornly, lifting her chin.

“What about the contract?” I ask, my heart in my mouth. Surely this won’t affect our agreement.

“I’m terminating that, too.”

I jolt out of my seat like I’ve just been burnt, circling the table, and going to stand in front of her. She averts her gaze again.

“Why are you doing this? It’s barely been a week.”

“Like I said, I thought I could do this, but I can’t.”

“Bullshit. Stop selling me that crap about not being cut out for this. We both know how well you do your job and how smoothly everything went back in Minnesota thanks to you.”

“I want out,” she says, the distress apparent in her tone.

I shake my head. This can't be true. I had started to warm up to her already. I had started to develop some unusual but intriguing emotions for her. I agree I'm yet to sort them out and figure out my shit, but that doesn't mean I don't want her around.

“No,” I disagree. I'm not letting another woman walk out on me, fake marriage or not.

“What do you mean *no*?”

“We had a deal, and you're supposed to honor it.”

“It's stated in the contract that I can leave whenever the hell I want, so you can't stop me.”

“I know this marriage is fake, but you can't deny the fact that we make a damn good team.”

And have amazing chemistry in bed.

I want to say more. Express just exactly how I feel about her, but I'm scared she will not feel the same way. Her quitting both the contract and her job says a lot.

“It's quite unfortunate then that we have to dissolve the team.”

I don't miss the sarcasm in her tone.

“What about Belle?”

Yes, I'm resorting to use my own daughter as a tool for emotional blackmail. I know it's ridiculous and lily-livered of me to hide behind Belle, but I do it anyway. Sheila adores her,

and I'm hoping this will serve as an incentive for her to reexamine her stance.

My question has the desired effect as Sheila swallows hard, blinking rapidly. She clearly hadn't thought about her before now. "Belle will understand," she utters.

I clench my jaw. I should have known that this wasn't going to last. The moment I experience even a ray of happiness, something or someone manages to snatch it away from me.

I'm pretty sure my eyes are bloodshot as I ask, "So this is it? You're just going to walk away from my life like nothing ever happened?"

My voice doesn't quite come out as strong as I would have liked. It's laced with melancholy, and I hate that it is. I don't want to show her how much this affects me.

She exhales shakily. "I'm afraid so."

Just fucking great.

"I'll move my things out of the house tomorrow," she says, exiting my office and leaving the vanilla scent of her perfume lingering behind.

I'm so devastated that I call the only person I know I can talk to about this.

"Hey, bro. What's up, man?" Dominic answers on the first ring.

"Sheila's leaving me," I hit the nail on the head.

"What? Why? Did you do something wrong?"

I'm offended that he'd assume it was my fault. "I didn't do anything wrong. She didn't even give me an explanation."

"This isn't good."

"Yeah, no shit." I sigh in frustration.

"What are you going to do?"

Sheila's mind has already been made up. There's no changing it.

"To tell you the fucking truth, I have no clue."

Dominic offers me the moral support I need and assures me that everything is going to be fine. But I doubt that it will.

CHAPTER 23

SHEILA

Turning my back on Damon was the hardest thing I have ever had to do in my whole life. It took a lot to quell the tears that were threatening to fall back in his office. I had wanted to reach out and hold him and tell him all that was on my mind, but I didn't.

He didn't seem too pleased because he knows I'm probably the only one in New York who would put up with his difficult ass, not because he has feelings for me, too.

As I step out of his office, I go straight to the restroom where I throw up. The morning sickness isn't exactly helping my case either.

I hold my hair back until the urge to puke recedes, then I splash some water on my face and rinse my mouth. There's a mirror above the sink and when I look at it, I can barely recognize the person staring back at me. My eyes are bleary and red with dark circles under them. My skin is pale, too.

Simply put, I look like I've been hit by a train. A total wreck.

All of a sudden, I can't breathe. It feels like the air inside my lungs has been expended by some unknown force. I drop to the floor, clutching my throat, battling for oxygen. I'm so dazed and lightheaded.

I know it will take a while for anyone to find me here if I pass out, so I will myself to calm down. I inhale and exhale deeply. Repeating the motion until I feel my breathing returning to normal.

So, this is what a panic attack feels like.

I remain on the floor for a while before getting up. Rolling out the toilet paper from the dispenser, I dab my cheeks and try as much as I can to fix my already ruined makeup.

I'll get through this.

At least, I hope I will.



Very early the next morning, I get up and arrange what's left of my belongings, then I order a ride and wait for it to arrive. After what transpired yesterday, Damon has been avoiding me like a plague. He completely shut down and even when he came down for dinner last night, we ate in awkward silence.

Belle noticed that something was amiss, and I tried my best to lighten the mood.

The knock on the door pulls me out of my gloomy thoughts. Damon comes in and Belle follows suit. He's put on a white long-sleeve shirt and black pants which makes him look absolutely drool-worthy.

I observe that Belle isn't smiling as usual, and my conclusion is that she knows I'm leaving. I was too much of a coward to tell her myself, so I guess Damon did it for both of us.

Damon's face betrays no emotion so I can't even tell what's running through his mind. I can't tell if he's happy that I'm leaving or not. It reminds me of when we first met, and I force myself to tear my gaze away from his strikingly handsome features.

"Is it true you're not going to be living with us anymore?" Belle asks with hurt shining in her blue eyes. It tugs at my heartstrings.

"I'm afraid so," I answer, and she pouts.

"Did I do something wrong?" she asks, and my heart shatters into tiny little pieces.

"Of course not. This has nothing to do with you," I counter.

"Will you come to visit?"

Damon's eyes instantly connect with mine, but he looks away almost immediately. A clear indication that I'm on my own.

"I'll come if I get the chance and only if it's okay with your dad, of course."

“Daddy, can Sheila come to visit us?” she asks with a voice anyone in their right mind would find difficult to say no to.

“Sure,” he answers in a clipped tone. But I know he secretly wishes I won’t.

My phone dings, and I turn to look at my screen. It’s a notification that my ride has arrived.

“My cab’s here,” I say, getting up and fetching my luggage from the bed. Damon offers to help me, and I don’t decline.

As we descend the stairs, I take my time to look at everything one last time. Even though I didn’t stay here for long, I’ll always remember the memories made in this house.

“I’ll miss you,” Belle says once Damon puts my luggage in the trunk of the car.

I pat her rosy cheeks. “I’ll miss you, too. Take care of yourself and don’t give your dad any trouble, okay?”

She nods and I look up at Damon. I know it’s not the last time I’ll see him, but it still breaks my heart to know I’m leaving the man I love behind.

“Have a safe ride,” is all he says, and I nod.

“Thanks,” I mumble. I want to say more but the stoic expression on his face is so discouraging that I shut my mouth, getting into the car instead.

This is for the best, I tell myself as the car drives through the gates of the mansion I’ll never forget.



Where's the damn file?

Tons of papers are scattered on my desk, and I wildly rummage through them as I search for a document in particular.

Damon has a meeting in approximately twenty minutes and the report is needed for the meeting to hold, but I can't seem to find it anywhere. I prepared it myself and placed it in the first drawer of my desk, but it's not there. Where the fuck is it?

Ever since I got back from Minnesota three days ago, I haven't quite been myself. I've been feeling unnecessarily weary and peeing more than usual. I've also noticed that I get mood swings, too. Sometimes I just get upset for no apparent reason.

I've booked an appointment with a gynecologist. I want to make sure I do everything right during this period.

I finally find the file containing the documents and heave a sigh of frustration. I don't know how Damon would have reacted if I hadn't found it, and I don't think I want to find out.

The meeting commences, and I join in to take notes. I don't concentrate, I just stare at Damon the entire time. Unlike me, he looks unaffected by everything going on, and even though I'm the one who ended things between us, it still bothers me to no end.

I feel like a fool for letting myself fall in love with a selfish bastard like him.

Before I know it, bile rises in my throat, and I bolt out of my seat. Without even seeking permission, I rush out of the room and head straight for the restroom.

I throw up again, holding my hair in place. This is seriously becoming annoying, and I want it to stop already. As I rinse my mouth, I hear someone calling out to me from outside, and I freeze. It's Damon. He must have followed me out.

Shit.

"Sheila, is everything okay in there? You looked like you were going to be sick so I thought I should check on you," he says, a little bit of concern in his voice.

"I'm fine."

I flush the toilet and step out of the stall.

I'm not ready for the emotions that course through me when I look directly into his eyes. This man is so sexy I still want to jump his bones. I try to convince myself that it's the pregnancy hormones, but I know better.

He left his important meeting for me.

"What happened?" he inquires.

I can't exactly tell him that I'm pregnant now, can I? "I guess I had something bad for breakfast." My voice comes out faint.

Motherfucking liar.

He scrutinizes me carefully under his gaze, and my heartbeat quickens. What if he can tell that I'm lying?

“You look pale. I think you should go see a doctor,” he says.

“Will do. Thanks.”

He exits the restroom, and I release a breath I didn't know I was holding.

Seeing him every day is sheer torture. I can't wait for the week to be over.

CHAPTER 24

DAMON

The universe has deliberately decided to fuck with me, I think as I stare at the cream-colored invitation card in my hand and the bottle of wine that came with it. It's an invitation to a dinner party, and clearly, I'll be expected to show up with Sheila on my arm since in front of the world she is still my wife.

Fan-fucking-tastic.

I hadn't wanted to go to the media with the story of us being married, but it was the only way to keep Sheila's dignity intact seeing as she was being castigated and deemed a gold digger. Although it didn't make the allegations go away totally, they were curtailed to an extent.

It's been about two days since Sheila moved out of the house, and I still haven't been able to figure out what instigated her decision. I've retraced every single moment right from when we went to Minnesota, but I just don't get it. I can't pinpoint where exactly things went wrong. We were happy.

Or at least, I was. I thought she was, too.

It hurts like a bitch to know Sheila doesn't want anything to do with me, and it doesn't exactly help that Belle won't stop talking about her. But I've been doing my best to appear tough.

Sighing in frustration, I pick up the telephone and ring her desk.

"Yes, sir," she answers, and I ask her to come to my office.

Even if I don't want to do this, I have to. It would sound utterly ridiculous trying to explain to everyone that my marriage crumbled in less than a week. They'll sense the foul play.

As she walks in, I tell myself to keep this strictly professional. This is not about my emotions but about the contract.

"We've been sent an invitation to attend a dinner party tonight," I say, and she stares at me confused.

"We?"

I knew this wouldn't be easy.

"Technically, you're still my wife. It's only accurate that we show up together and present a united front in front of everyone."

Sheila immediately becomes uncomfortable. "Can't you just come up with some excuse about me being sick or something?" she asks with apathy, and I'm hurt.

It's that bad that she doesn't want to coexist in the same space as me. Wow. If this is the universe's way of punishing me for being an asshole to her all those times in the past then it sure as hell is doing a great job.

"It won't hurt to show up. Plus, we don't need new sets of rumors circulating town."

She is quiet for a while, and the turmoil is evident in her entire countenance. She looks like she would rather eat grass than go with me to the party which bruises my ego.

"Fine. I'll go with you."

"Thank you," I say and turn to peer back at my screen even though there's nothing important I'm working on right now. It's a sign that she's dismissed, and she exits my office without another word.

I want to call her back, say more, or even do something but this new attitude of hers is really dispiriting so I don't. Instead, I let her walk away.

Later that evening, I drive up to her apartment to pick her up. She answers the door when I ring the doorbell and for a moment, I'm rendered speechless by how spectacular she looks. She's wearing a red long sweetheart-necked dress with a side slit that comes up to her thigh.

I know I shouldn't stare, but I can't help it when she's looking so mouth-watering. Standing under the moonlight on her porch, Sheila is nothing but a sight for sore eyes.

“You look stunning,” I compliment as if in a daze and she brushes the loose strands of her brown hair behind her ear, ducking her head shyly.

“Thanks. You don’t look so bad yourself,” she says.

I’m wearing a black tuxedo. “Thank you.”

“Shall we?” she asks, and I snap out of my reverie.

“Of course.”

I arrive at the party with Sheila on my arm, and we receive a warm welcome. Heads turn in our direction and whispers erupt but I simply dismiss them. I catch several men boldly staring at Sheila, and I wonder for a moment if she put an end to us because of the wide age gap.

The thought that she might have left me for someone younger and more her type fucks with my already messed up mind.

I introduce Sheila to some of my business associates, and although most of them are flabbergasted by the information, they are quick to obscure it. They expected the news about her being my wife to be a hoax to get the chatter to die down.

I wish she wasn’t leaving me.

A blond man makes his way to us. Immediately I recognize him and my mood shifts from gloomy to furious.

It’s Josh fucking Sandalls.

I know I shouldn’t be surprised that he was invited, but it irks me still. The last time I saw the man, he had been trying

so hard to get Sheila's attention. I'd have a fantastic time punching the asshole's stupid face if he tries anything funny.

"Fancy seeing you here, Mr. Finnegan," he says, extending his hand for a shake and I take it only because people are staring. They wouldn't miss out on the chance to gossip if I stir up any drama.

"Likewise," I say in a tone that suggests otherwise, and frankly, I don't give two shits. Even though Sheila is leaving me, there's no way I'm fucking letting him within a five-mile radius of her.

"Pleased to see you once again, Sheila," he says, taking her hand and kissing the back of her palm. I know I shouldn't be, but I'm green with jealousy at the action.

"Same here," she replies with a genuine smile.

I can't remember the last time she smiled at me like that.

"I must say it came as a surprise when I heard you two were married, " he says, and I instantly know he's fishing for information.

"Yeah, we are," I reply in a clipped tone. If he's waiting for an anecdote about our marriage, then I'm afraid he's not going to get any.

"That's a shame, really. I was looking forward to taking Sheila out to dinner sometime," the asshole says, and has the nerve to smirk.

I smile despite my inextinguishable desire to strike him in the face. "What a shame indeed. Tough luck, pal. Better luck

next time.”

I don't wait to hear whatever else it is the jerk face has to say so I steer Sheila away from him and towards a table consisting of some friends of mine. We make ourselves comfortable, and Sheila even joins in on the conversation.

We're both having a great time until Eleanor joins the table. I completely forgot she would also be invited. It had totally skipped my mind, otherwise, I wouldn't have been insistent on Sheila coming.

I sneak a peek at Sheila, and she looks uneasy.

“What a pleasant surprise. If it isn't the latest couple in town,” she says with a smirk.

“Hello, Eleanor. I didn't expect to see you here,” I say, and she plasters a fake smile on her face.

“Hello, Damon. And please, don't act surprised. There's no way a party like this would be thrown and I wouldn't be invited to it.”

Her gaze does a quick and derogatory sweep of Sheila.

“I love your dress. It's really beautiful,” she praises, and my suspicions grow. Eleanor is never nice.

Sheila looks unsure for a second before answering, “Thank you. Yours is beautiful, too.”

Eleanor does a deliberate flip of her hair for effect. “Oh, I got it in Italy recently. Yours reminds me of the dress I got for my maid last year. It was really nice.”

I knew something was off the moment the compliment slipped past her lips. Her comment causes a hoopla at the table, and Sheila's face turns a violet shade of red.

Eleanor smiles devilishly at me because she knows I won't say anything. If there's anything I hate, it's drama. But Eleanor lives for the drama, and right now, she's consciously baiting me to see if I'll fold.

I clench my fists under the table.

"Well, I think it's beautiful, and you look absolutely phenomenal in it, darling," I say, and the ladies swoon.

Sheila looks stunned. I guess she wasn't expecting me to jump to her rescue because of our present situation.

She offers me a grateful smile. "Thank you."

"And it's not the dress. You'd look great even in a potato sack." I lower my voice so the others don't listen in, and she laughs. The sound is so melodious, it has me smiling.

No matter what, I'm never deserting this woman.

I see Eleanor fuming, and I smirk in triumph.

Mission accomplished.

CHAPTER 25

SHEILA

The party was cool and the people were nice. I was expecting it to be filled with snobbish elites, but it was great and I was having a good time until Eleanor showed up.

If I had known she was going to be present, I wouldn't have bothered to come. I haven't told Damon what happened back in Minnesota because I don't want to cause problems between him and his mother, but Eleanor is seriously making me reconsider my stance.

I hadn't expected Damon to swoop in and salvage the situation the way he did when she tried to humiliate me in front of her friends. It was the sweetest thing, and it made my whole body come alive.

Damon isn't good for my heart and if I want to stick with my decision, it's best I don't let myself get distracted by his divine looks and charming personality.

I try to eat but nothing appeals to me. In fact, I start to feel nauseous the instant I take a bite of my steak.

“Are you okay?” Damon asks in concern.

I take deep breaths and try to suppress the urge to throw up.

“Yeah, I’m okay,” I lie, but he isn’t convinced. Suddenly, I feel lightheaded.

“We can leave if you’re not.”

I want to take him up on his offer, but I also know that there are many influential people here Damon would like to speak to and make alliances with, and I don’t want to ruin it for him.

“No, I promise I’m fine. I just need to use the restroom. I’ll be right back.”

I pick up my purse and excuse myself. The host directs me to the restroom, and I make a beeline for it. Getting into an empty stall, I throw up the food I just ate and wait for the horrible feeling to pass.

Seriously, pregnant people deserve some sort of award. It’s barely been two months, and I already wish it was over. Still feeling weak, I wash my mouth and exit the stall and run into the very last person I expect to see.

Eleanor.

Did she follow me here?

She eyes me with suspicion and upon hearing her question, I almost pass out.

“Are you pregnant?”

Shit!

The color drains from my face. I open my mouth to deny it, but she beats me to it.

“Don’t even think about denying it. You have a certain glow to you that only a pregnant woman does. I thought it was just sex glow back in Minnesota, but I see it clearly now,” she says, and I swallow in fright.

“Damon doesn’t know, does he? If he did, he would have told his mother about it.”

If I don’t do something, Eleanor will know our marriage is nothing but a sham. “Damon is my husband, and I only just found out. And keep your nose out of our marriage. It’s none of your business.”

“It is my business when you’re trying to come between me and my family.”

This woman is seriously deluded. She needs a reality check.

“You’re no longer married to Damon, Eleanor. And it’s not my fault that I and Belle are close,” I do my best to explain.

“You’re trying to steal my daughter.”

“I am not.”

Eleanor looks furious and frustrated, and I can feel the fervor radiating off her.

“You bitch. Who the hell do you think you are to waltz in here and steal Damon away from me? He’s mine and no one else, not even you, will have him.” Her words are laced with venom and she’s staring at me with so much malevolence. She

looks scary, and I don't feel good about this. When I look around, I notice we're the only ones here.

Before I know what's happening, Eleanor pushes me into an open stall and I lose my balance, falling to the floor. Before I'm able to gather momentum, she locks the door from outside.

"Open the door," I bang the wooden frame with my fists.

"Have a good night, you good for nothing gold digging whore," she says, and I hear the sound of her retreating footsteps.

I'm too weak to scream or call for help. Unexpectedly, it's hard to breathe. I clutch my chest, willing myself to calm down. This has never happened to me before. Deep inside, I want to take control, but I can't seem to get a grip of myself.

I slip to the floor, fighting to keep my eyes open but they flutter shut. The last thought on my mind before the darkness envelops me is Damon.

I hope he finds me.



I wake up to the beeping sounds of the monitor. I'm drained, and it's impossible to move my body. When I open my eyes, I'm rapidly hit by a terrible headache which causes me to wince and shut my eyes once more. I wait a few more seconds before trying again, and this time, it's not that bad.

The white walls and sheets tell me that I'm in a hospital. Damon is seated beside me, and I feel an instant sense of relief and happiness knowing that he found me. He has ditched his jacket and his sleeves are rolled to his elbows, leaving his forearms on display.

He's holding my right hand and observing it intently. He looks lost in thought. His hair is disheveled, and he looks so stressed, it's like he's suddenly aged ten years more.

I lift a finger, and he immediately knows I'm awake. His piercing blue eyes connect with mine, and there's a brief moment of surprise and relief in his features. I'm nowhere near prepared for the disappointment and pain that graces them next.

The hurt in his eyes says everything.

He knows.

He knows I'm pregnant.

He lets go of my hand, and I instantly feel the loss. Regret and guilt wash over me and I look away, avoiding his gaze.

"Is it true?" he asks. I know exactly what he's enquiring about, yet I still play dumb.

"What?" I ask, my voice laced with shame.

"Look at me, Sheila, and don't try to play dumb with me."

He looks so broken, my heart is shredded to pieces.

"I won't know what you're asking until you do," I say, desperately hoping deep in my core that this is about

something else entirely.

His lips part, and he breathes harshly.

“Are you pregnant? Damn it!”

I flinch. His tone is hard, and he looks like he doesn't want to believe that I am indeed pregnant. This is exactly what I was scared of. Him rejecting the baby.

“I am.”

“Fuck!” he curses loudly, moving away to the window, and I will myself not to cry. I blink rapidly to keep the tears threatening to fall at bay and climb off the bed.

This is it. I brace myself for the rejection.

“The doctor says you're six weeks gone. When were you planning on telling me?” he asks, and I stay quiet. “You were never going to, were you?” he asks again, throwing his hands in the air exasperatedly. “Why in the world would you do something like that? I expected more from you, Sheila.”

I don't know what to say. “I... I'm sorry. I didn't know how to break it to you,” I finally let out, moving closer to him.

“Is it mine?” he asks.

What the fuck?

It feels like a slap to my face. “What?”

“Is that the reason you kept it from me? It's not mine, is it?” he asks accordingly.

I can't believe Damon would think so lowly of me after everything I've done for him. Ungrateful son of a bitch. I'm

furious. The nerve of him.

“How could you ask me such a question? Do you think I’m some slut who simply goes around town sleeping with every man in sight?”

I know I didn’t do right by not telling him about the baby, but he has no right to talk to me in such a demeaning manner. I agree my life wasn’t that great before I met him, but at least it was drama free. He brought chaos into my world, and ever since then, I haven’t been the same.

Damon has the guts to look guilty. “I didn’t mean it that way.”

“Get out,” I say in a dangerously low tone.

“Sheila...”

“Get out! I don’t want to look at you right now. Leave.”

Damon looks like he’s about to contend with me, but thinks better of it and exits the ward.

Of all the ways I envisioned this going, this wasn’t one of the scenarios I had even dared to consider. As usual, Damon never ceases to amaze me in the most unpleasant of ways.

I don’t know why I keep choosing to see the good in him when he’ll always be a gigantic jerk.

The tears finally break free, and I let them.

I fucking hate my life.

CHAPTER 26

DAMON

I messed up big time yesterday, and I know it. I shouldn't have lashed out at Sheila like that or questioned her morals. I just didn't understand why she would choose to keep such a vital piece of information hidden.

After Sheila excused herself to go to the restroom last night, she didn't come back for the next fifteen minutes, and I grew worried. I tried calling her cell, but she wasn't picking up, so I decided to check the restroom. When I couldn't find her, Eleanor told me she saw her leave with Josh Sandalls, but I didn't believe it. I knew we were not exactly in a good place, but it just did not sound like Sheila to do something like that.

I later found her passed out on the floor when I double-checked all the restroom stalls, and I panicked. I immediately rushed her to the hospital where I waited outside until the doctor was done with the examination.

Shock couldn't even begin to describe how I felt when the doctor told me she was pregnant. It was like some sort of twisted nightmare because I wasn't sure if it was mine or not.

Sheila and I always used protection each time we had sex, and I also remember her saying she was on birth control.

At that moment, there were so many vile thoughts running through my mind. The only explanation that made sense was that the baby wasn't mine, and she was leaving me for its father.

I was hurt when she confirmed the doctor's words, and I hadn't meant for the question to come out the way it did. When I saw the hurt in her eyes, I knew I had made a horrible mistake, and that the baby was mine. It still didn't make sense though.

Why is she leaving if she's having my child?

Sheila didn't come to work this morning but called in sick. I know she's not feeling great, but something at the back of my mind tells me she's also avoiding me. This is a conversation we need to have like the two grown-ups we are because there's a baby in the picture, and it won't just simply disappear.

I round up what I'm working on and decide to pay her a visit. I get to her apartment and raise my fingers to ring the doorbell but instantly chicken out. What if she is still upset and asks me to leave again?

Deciding to take my chances, I ring the doorbell, and Sheila's friend, the one who was present at our wedding, answers the door.

"Hi, I'm looking for Sheila," I announce uncertainly, and she presses her lips into a thin line, not at all happy to see me.

“Sheila is not here,” she says with hostility, giving me the stink eye.

“Let him in, Alexa,” I hear Sheila call out from inside, and the blonde scowls.

“I’m not letting him see you,” she says with an ineffable resentment, and I don’t need a psychic to tell me Sheila has told her everything about us.

“Alexa…” Sheila says in a warning tone.

“I can’t believe you. He hurt you, yet you want him to come in. He doesn’t deserve to see you,” she raves.

“I’m here to apologize to her so hopefully, we can work things out. Please let me in so I can talk to her,” I finally speak up.

She eyes me with skepticism, and for a moment, I think she’s going to tell me to fuck off, but she doesn’t.

“If you so much as make her shed a single tear again, I’ll slit your throat in your sleep,” she says with an eerie sweet smile before shifting from the doorway so I can enter.

I guess someone isn’t my biggest fan.

The smell of lavender hits my nostrils as I step into the apartment, and the calming effect it has on my nerves is surreal. I’ve never been inside Sheila’s apartment before, but it’s beautiful and has a homey vibe to it.

Sheila is seated on the couch with a blanket draped over her and a box of tissues on the table before her. She looks like she

has been crying, and I feel like shit knowing that I put her in this mood.

“I’ll be in the bedroom. Call me if you need me,” Alexa says to Sheila before disappearing inside. She doesn’t even spare me so much as a glance.

I stand awkwardly, contemplating how to begin this conversation when Sheila asks, “What are you doing here? What do you want?”

Her head is bowed, and she’s putting the already-used tissues into a trashcan by her side.

“I came to apologize for yesterday. I acted like a jerk, and I want you to know it wasn’t intentional. I’m sorry. I just wish you had told me.”

Sheila sighs. “I didn’t know how you were going to take the news. We weren’t exactly planning to be parents. Who knew the condom would break and that my birth control would choose the exact moment to fail?”

The distress in her voice is clear as crystal. I agree I’m not ready to be a father to a second child, but that doesn’t mean I’d choose to not take responsibility for my kid. She should have had a little ounce of faith that I’d do the right thing.

“I still maintain that you should have told me.”

Her eyes shine with contrition. “I’m sorry. I was just scared you might not want the baby, and instead of facing rejection, I decided to take the easy route. I don’t want to have an abortion,” she explains.

“I would never dictate your life for you. I’m okay with whatever decision you make, but I’m glad you decided to keep the baby,” I begin. “It’s my kid, and I have the resources to care for it so I will,” I tell her, and she nods, her shoulders drooping in solace.

“I’m glad.”

“Come back home, Sheila. Forget about the divorce. Let me take care of you and support you in raising the baby when it arrives,” I cut straight to the chase not wanting to beat about the bush.

“No. I still want a divorce,” she says, and I wonder why she’s being so stubborn.

“Didn’t you want to leave because you were not sure if I’d accept the baby or not? I have accepted it. It wasn’t exactly in my plans for now to become a father the second time, but I’m willing to compromise for our child. What other reason could you possibly have for wanting a divorce?” I ask in frustration.

“I don’t want to do this anymore, and you can’t keep me against my will.”

“At least consider the fact that there’s a baby in the picture now.”

“Divorced parents still raise children. You and Eleanor did it, and Belle turned out just fine, didn’t she?”

“Does this have something to do with Josh Sandalls?” I ask.

She deadpans. “You always jump to conclusions. I met the man only like twice.”

I lower my head in guilt. My jealousy always gets the best of me, and it's not something I'm proud of.

"I'm sorry," I apologize.

"It was Eleanor who locked me in the bathroom stall."

I'm awestricken. "She did what?"

"I ran into her, and she got so upset when she found out I was pregnant. She became violent and pushed me into one of the stalls and locked me in," she explains.

"She knew you were pregnant and locked you in? Why am I only hearing about this for the first time since it happened?" I ask, clearly disgruntled.

The same Eleanor who told me she left with Josh Sandalls locked her in. Could she stoop any lower? This is wickedness at its peak.

"I didn't exactly get the chance to tell you yesterday because you were upset after finding out about my pregnancy," she rationalizes.

I'm mad with rage. I know Eleanor isn't Sheila's biggest fan, but I can't believe she would do this to a pregnant woman. She has crossed all her limits this time.

"You're carrying my child, and that automatically makes you my family. If someone even thinks of hurting a single hair on your head, I wouldn't take it lightly with them."

"What are you going to do concerning Eleanor? She detests me, and she won't stop until I'm gone from your lives," she

says, and a thought crosses my mind.

“Is Eleanor the reason you want to leave?”

“She isn’t.”

She isn’t making this easy for me at all. I’m still as lost as a goose in a snowstorm.

“Well, I hope at some point in the future, you’ll trust me enough to tell me. As for Eleanor, you don’t have to worry about her because she won’t be bothering you anymore. I’ll handle it,” I say with determination.

It’s time to put an end to my ex-wife’s shenanigans once and for all.

CHAPTER 27

SHEILA

Instant relief.

That's how I felt after Damon and I had our heart-to-heart yesterday. Turns out I had been worried over nothing. But I still can't go back to that house and office when I know for a fact that my feelings are unrequited.

I stare at myself in the mirror for a moment after applying my lipstick. It's my last day at the office and as Damon's wife, and I don't know how I feel about that.

The divorce papers I procured from my lawyer are in a brown envelop in my handbag, and I contemplate if I should still go through with this. Damon's intentions for me are genuine but I can't be with someone who is only with me based on circumstances.

I take one last peek at the mirror and lift my chin in feigned confidence. Fake it till you make it, right?

When I walk into the office building, I reminisce about my first day when I was filled with so much hunger and

enthusiasm to do everything in my power to impress my boss and do my job to the best of my ability. I was happy and hopeful unaware of the mayhem that awaited me.

I give myself a pep talk as I ride the elevator. When I get off, Damon's cologne twirls my senses, and that's how I know he's in. I decide to get him to sign the papers before clearing my desk. I hope to God he doesn't prolong this or make it harder than it already is.

He beckons on me to come in when I knock and as usual, he's seated behind his desk.

“Good morning.”

“Good morning. Are you feeling better today?” he asks.

“I am, thanks,” I respond, and he waits for me to state why I'm here even though he already knows.

“I brought the divorce papers for you to sign.”

He eyes the papers in my hand, all the while keeping his expression indecipherable. It's hard to tell what he's thinking, and I'm disappointed. I was expecting him to at least show some atom of unhappiness over this.

“Let me see,” he requests, and I hand them over to him. It takes a moment for him to go through them properly and while he does, I seize the opportunity to admire his features.

Has he gotten hotter or is it just me?

Damon signs without saying anything, and I take back the papers. Just like that, it's a done deal.

“So, this is it?” he asks.

“Yeah.”

“I just want to say thank you for helping me out in Minnesota and also with Belle,” he says, and my heart aches.

Be cool, Sheila. This marriage wasn't real.

Just because it wasn't real doesn't mean it hurts any less to walk away from it.

“It's fine. Belle is fantastic so it wasn't a bother at all having to spend time with her.”

I can't say the same for his mother and Eleanor though.

“Still, I'm grateful,” he says, and I nod.

“I have my first appointment with a gynecologist at three o'clock tomorrow. You don't have to come or anything, I just thought I should let you know since we've decided to do this together,” I tell him.

“I'll be there. Just text me the details,” he says.

“Okay.”

Exiting his office, I begin to clear my desk. I feel an enormous sense of sadness as I gather my stuff. This was what I wanted so why does it feel like a mistake?

I really do hope I've done the right thing by closing this chapter of my life.



It's about twenty minutes before the scheduled time of my appointment when I arrive at the hospital. I sit in the reception, waiting for Damon to show up, but it's been over twelve minutes and he isn't here yet. I wonder what could be keeping him. The prospect of him suddenly changing his mind and deciding he doesn't want to have anything to do with the baby crosses my mind, and I'm scared shitless.

I know I wanted to raise the baby without him before, but he gave me hope and there is nothing more painful than being let down. For the first time since I found out I was pregnant, I consider abortion. Tears prick my eyes, but I blink them back.

My mind is a mess. I don't want to cry in public. That would be downright embarrassing.

"Are you okay?" a pregnant lady beside me asks. She has dark hair and gray eyes. Her stomach is more prominent, and it looks like this is her second trimester.

"I'm good," I lie, and she offers me a warm smile.

"First time?" she probes further.

"Yeah," I sigh, nodding my head.

"Ah. I remember the feeling. It was new and weird and not in a very nice way at all." She breathes a laugh. "It was difficult for me to adjust to those new feelings and changes happening to my body, and, at some point, I just wanted it to be over with."

"I feel the exact same way. How did you cope?" I find myself asking. I don't know this woman but if she can give me

some insights, then I'm game.

"I think the secret is to just live one day at a time. I know this might sound unrealistic, but try not to overthink. Most times, our fears aren't real. They're only there because we put them in our own heads."

"Is it worth it, though? Going through all of that?" I ask.

"I'm pregnant again, so yeah, it is. It's not exactly a walk in the park, but whenever I look at my baby, Jordan, I think to myself, it was worth it."

I smile for the first time since the beginning of our conversation. "How old is he now?"

"He turns four in December," she reveals.

"That's really wonderful."

"Sheila Cromwell?" a nurse calls out to me.

I sit up straight. "That's me."

"The doctor will see you now," she says.

I turn towards the lady I had just been speaking with. "It was really nice to meet you. Thank you for the talk," I say with a grateful smile.

"It's no problem."

Damon isn't here yet and even though it bothers me, I decide to shove the thought to the back of my mind. Just as I'm about to step into the doctor's office, he shows up, walking briskly towards me and yelling my name in the hallway. I'm surprised to see him.

“I’m so sorry I wasn’t able to get here sooner. There was so much to do at the office, and the traffic on my way here didn’t exactly help,” he says but I’m not concentrating on anything coming out of his mouth. I’m just glad he’s here with me. “I haven’t missed anything, have I?” he asks, breathing heavily.

“No. I was just about to step in to see the doctor.”

“Okay.”

We go in together. The doctor is nice and does her best to make me feel comfortable. I lie on the bed, and she rubs a bit of gel on my belly before we begin the ultrasound.

Damon sits beside me, taking hold of my hand, and I look at him in surprise. He’s gazing at me with an emotion so raw, a ton of butterflies take flight in my stomach.

It’s sheer devotion. He’s giving me an assurance that we’re in this together, no matter what happens.

He offers me a small smile, one I reciprocate. The doctor begins to move the ultrasound device on my belly, and I look away from him to watch the screen.

I can’t describe what I’m looking at as I stare at the screen, but all I can say is that it looks a bit like a small tadpole.

“That’s your baby right there.” She points at the screen. “It’s still tiny because you’re just five and a half weeks along,” the doctor says but I’m too engrossed by what’s in front of me to pay her any mind.

“Wow,” Damon says in awe and tears fill my eyes. “Can you tell the sex?”

“No, not yet. That can only be determined at about fourteen to sixteen weeks. I’ll give you guys a minute,” she says, leaving us alone in the room.

“It’s so... tiny,” Damon says, and I laugh through my tears. I don’t know why I’m crying, but I can’t seem to help it. I guess it’s the euphoria of seeing the life growing inside of me for the first time combined with my pregnancy hormones.

“Yeah. I’m glad you came,” I tell him.

“I’m glad I came, too. I wasn’t going to miss this for anything.”

“For a second, I thought that maybe you had changed your mind,” I share my fears.

“I would never. I gave you my word, and I’m a man of my word. We’re doing this together,” he assures me, clutching my hand in his tightly, and I remember the words of the woman from the waiting room. My fears are only in my head because I put them there.

There and then, I resolve to worry less and look more on the brighter side of things.

CHAPTER 28

DAMON

Sitting right there in the hospital and seeing our baby for the first time awakens something in me that I can't explain. That sense of pride that comes from fathering a child. It reminds me of when I first saw Belle's sonogram and how elated I had been.

Nothing beats this feeling.

The only downside is that I and Sheila aren't living together in the same house anymore. It would have been better if she had accepted to stay. I want to be involved in every way possible, and our living separately is an impediment.

"I'll drop you off. Where to?" I inquire of Sheila as we exit the doctor's office. She's carrying my child, and I don't want her to stress. I make a mental note to get her a car.

"You don't have to," she replies.

Always so modest.

"Look, Sheila, I don't want you stressing during this period. I think it's a good thing you quit yesterday, and I don't want

you job hunting either.”

She rolls her eyes. “I’m pregnant, not sick. Besides, the doctor said everything looks good, so why are you worrying so much?”

I sigh. I guess I’m overreacting a little. It’s just that when Eleanor was pregnant with Belle, she worked herself too hard because she didn’t want to take a break from modeling, and in the end, there were complications with the pregnancy. She almost lost her life in the process, so, yeah, I guess my apprehension is justified.

“Just be careful, okay?” I ask in concern.

“I will.”

“Now, where do I take you?” I ask once again. We are outside in the hospital’s parking lot.

“You can drop me off at home,” she says, getting into the car.

I get in and mentally curse when I realize that from my vantage point, I have a full view of her cleavage. She’s wearing a pink off-shoulder top that does nothing to hide just how full her breasts are. I look away. Getting nasty thoughts about her right now is out of question.

All through the ride, I try my best to concentrate on my driving and not this woman beside me who’s unknowingly got me bewitched.

“So, how’re you holding up?” I ask, trying to divert my attention from her body.

“I’m doing okay.”

“Aside from the vomiting, any other symptoms?”

“I always feel so tired, and my bladder is always full. It’s really exhausting,” she complains. “Plus, I’ve started craving the weirdest things.”

A smile tugs at my lips. “Like what?” I ask, taking a left turn.

“The other day I was craving for peanut butter with fucking tabasco sauce!” she exclaims, and I laugh at the absurdity of it. “And just yesterday, I wanted eggplant on a pizza. Who the hell eats eggplant on a pizza?”

Okay, that’s plain disgusting.

“It’s only normal. So long as it’s healthy, go for it. It’s just temporary,” I try to pacify her.

“In that case, I can’t wait for it to be over.”

We finally get to her apartment building, and I kill the engine.

“Thank you for the ride,” she says as the car comes to a stop, unbuckling her seatbelt.

“Any time.”

“I’ll call to remind you of the next appointment. I know how busy you get at the office, so I’ll just do it in case it skips your mind.”

I smile. She’s always so thoughtful. Honestly, I’m glad it’s Sheila who’s carrying my child. I don’t think I would’ve been

able to do this with someone else. She understands me perfectly, and it pains me that I lost her.

“Thank you so much for your thoughtfulness,” I appreciate genuinely.

“It’s no problem,” she brushes it off, opening the door.

“Take care of yourself,” I say as she climbs out of the car. “Don’t forget to call me if the need arises.”

“Take care of yourself, too, and yes, I’ll call you if and only if the need arises,” she says jokingly, and I smile.

I’m glad there’s no bad blood between us. I was scared for nothing. It’s only when she gets into her apartment that I drive away, heading to my next destination.

I’m going to pay Eleanor a long overdue visit.

What she did was vile and cruel on all moral grounds. Sheila could have lost our baby, and all this would have been a different story entirely.

Eleanor has always been a selfish person, never compromising for others, not even our daughter. I was completely in love with her and she hid her true nature the first few years of our marriage and only began to show her true colors when she found out she was expecting our child. She hadn’t wanted to keep it because she wanted to maintain her party girl lifestyle.

I had always wanted to talk about children at the beginning of our union, but she always had a way of brushing it off or

changing the subject, saying that it was a hurdle we were going to cross when we got there.

Turns out she had other plans of her own, and I was too fucking blind to see it because I trusted her completely. It took a lot of begging and even intervention from my mother before Eleanor finally decided to keep it.

After Belle was born, she became a negligent mother. Simply put, she hated our daughter for distorting her perfect body and distorting her life. It killed me when Belle would cry, and she would ignore her. She ended up growing up under the care of nannies at a very tender age.

The last straw was when she left Belle in the car alone to go cheat on me with another man. Belle had suffered from heat stroke, but thank goodness, the doctors were able to get it under control on time. I immediately filed for a divorce, and since I had the upper hand in the case and all odds were against her, she signed without contesting it.

Since then, she has been on my case. But all of that ends today. There will be no more games.

Eleanor lives in a large mansion where she hosts her vain parties and tries to appear like she's doing perfectly okay, but I know it's all a front. Her life is as empty as a bird's nest in fucking December.

The butler recognizes me and lets me in. Eleanor must have seen me drive in because she waltzes in barely a few seconds later.

She looks shocked to see me and a mischievous smirk stretches on her lips.

“Well, well, now who do we have here? Did you lose your way or something, Damon Finnegan?” she asks in that sweet but poisonous voice of hers, descending the stairs.

“I’m afraid not,” I say coldly.

“I must say I’m surprised to see you here. I’ve missed you,” she says, and I scoff loudly.

“I’m not here to play games with you, Eleanor. I’m only here to ask you to stay the hell away from Sheila and our unborn baby.”

A look of disappointment takes over her expression. “So, she finally told you?”

“Yeah. And she also said you locked her in that bathroom stall. I can’t believe you would stoop that low. It’s fucking pathetic even for you,” I spill, unable to keep the resentment from my tone.

“Sheila doesn’t deserve to be with you. She’s not in the same class as you. We fit so perfectly well together,” she says the last part in a sultry tone, covering the distance between us and peering at me from underneath her eyelashes. “Damon, I’ve missed you so much and I’m sorry for everything I did to you in the past. I was in a really bad place, and I regret my actions. We were so great together. Remember how I used to let you bend me over your desk and take me from behind, just

the way you like it?” Her hand starts making its way to my face, but I take hold of it in a strong grip.

In her wildest dreams.

“We are done. The sooner you accept it, the better for you.”

“What about our daughter? She deserves to be raised by both her parents.”

“Don’t you fucking dare. You despised Belle even before she was born so don’t try to use her as bait. It’s no secret that you’re a terrible mother.”

Eleanor looks hurt and I can’t tell if she’s faking or not. With her, you never really know.

“How could you say that to me?”

“Because it’s the truth. You’re delusional and crazy if you think there’s even the slightest bit of chance that we’re getting back together. I’m getting a restraining order against you for Sheila and our baby.”

She looks stunned. “You can’t do that. You wouldn’t do that to me.”

“Oh yes, I would, and you’ll never get to see Belle again if you try anything funny.”

The look on Eleanor’s face is comical. She looks horrified. “Don’t even think about it.”

“Oh please, dare me. It’s not like you wanted her in the first place so quit acting.”

She fumes in rage but knows she's lost the battle. "This isn't over," is all she says.

"Wake up, Eleanor. It is."

And with that, I walk out of the mansion, feeling a sense of accomplishment.

CHAPTER 29

SHEILA

“So, how did it go?” Alexa asks, coming out of her bedroom and sitting beside me. She’s sipping from the can of soda in her hand.

It’s a Sunday afternoon, and we’re currently at her apartment plopped on the couch and watching reruns of *Friends*. Since I’m not working, for now, I might as well have as much bonding time as I can with my best friend because when the baby arrives, a lot of things will change.

“What?” I ask, genuinely lost. I was too busy laughing at Chandler’s absurdity to hear what she was saying.

“I’m talking about your appointment with the doctor. Damon went with you, didn’t he?”

“He did,” I respond.

“So how was it, then?”

I sigh. “It was fine. At some point, I thought he was going to ditch me, but he didn’t. Seeing the fetus for the first time

together was so amazing. I can't explain it, but I know it felt good."

"*Okay.* I hope the fact that you're in love with him isn't clouding your judgment?"

"*Alexa,*" I say with a weary sigh.

"What? I'm just looking out for you." She smiles weakly.

"No, it isn't. If it were, I wouldn't have moved out of his house or quit my job at his company."

"If you say so."

"We are just co-parenting, that's all," I defend.

I know Damon doesn't reciprocate my feelings. It would be foolish of me to ignore the warning bells that say I'll get my heart broken again.

"Well, I'm glad. You've been through a lot these past couple of months, and I don't want you going down that road again. You deserve to be happy," she says with profound concern, and I'm touched.

Alexa compensates for my lack of a family, and I'm so thankful we're friends.

"Thanks," I say, smiling gratefully.

"Anyway, I've been wanting to tell you something but there was never a great time to," she says, and I'm instantly captivated.

"Oh, what is it?" I ask. I've been so focused on my own issues that I failed to ask what was happening in her life. I feel

guilty.

“I finally decided to give Bret a chance,” she says, and my jaw drops to the floor in unadulterated shock. “Don’t be so dramatic. Close your mouth or you might actually catch some flies,” she deadpans.

“Well, excuse me for being surprised. It’s about fucking time! What happened? Why the sudden change of heart after two whole years?”

“He seems legit, so why not? It can’t hurt to try,” she shrugs.

I’m smiling so widely my cheeks hurt. “I’m happy for you. Good luck.”

We watch the show in silence, steadily laughing. No matter the number of times I watch *Friends*, it still manages to crack me up.

My phone rings, distracting me, and I excuse myself. It’s Damon calling. He probably just wants to check on me.

“Hello?” I answer.

“Hello, Sheila, how’re you?” he asks, and I tell myself not to dwell on how good his voice sounds on the phone.

“I’m fine. You?” I ask.

“I’m good. I’m just calling to check on you. I hope everything’s okay over there?” he asks, and I think it’s sweet that he’s worried about me.

“Yeah. I’m at Alexa’s,” I divulge.

“Have you had something to eat for lunch?” he asks, and as if on cue, my stomach growls loudly. Thankfully, he doesn’t catch the sound.

“No, I haven’t.”

“What do you say we meet up for lunch?”

I want to refuse for obvious reasons, but then, I’m hungry and I’m not in the mood to cook and neither is Alexa. I don’t want to order from the Chinese place downstairs either.

“It’s just lunch. This is me trying to be as involved as possible in yours and the baby’s lives,” he says when I’m quiet for too long.

I don’t want him to be involved in my life, but I guess the baby and I are a packaged deal. One can’t be separated from the other. “Fine.”

“Alright. Text me your location.”

A few moments later, Damon shows up looking edible as usual, and we drive to a restaurant.

“What would the lovely couple have?” the waitress asks, and I notice that Damon instantly becomes uncomfortable.

I rapidly correct her. “Uhm... we’re not a couple,” I say, slightly flustered.

She has a sheepish look on her face. “Oh, I’m so sorry. It’s just you guys look so cute together, and I thought you were a couple. My apologies,” she confesses.

Could this get any more awkward?

Damon immediately places his order and I order food meant for two people. Well, I'm eating for two so duh.

"You really weren't kidding when you said you had been craving the weirdest things," Damon remarks.

"Story of my life," I say, and he smiles a tad. I love his smile, but he doesn't do it very often. What Eleanor did must have affected him greatly. He can't even open up his heart to love again. "How are things at the office?"

"I haven't hired a new assistant yet but I'm getting by."

The silence that follows is deafening, and I'm sure he's thinking about our time together at the office. I know because it's the same thought that crosses my mind.

Indeed, nothing lasts forever.

The waitress arrives with our meals. "Enjoy," she says before walking away, and I dig in.

Halfway through the meal, I look up and catch Damon staring.

"What?" I ask, hoping I don't have anything on my face. It's not classy at all.

"You have something on your chin," he says, and I turn bashful at my clumsiness. I try to wipe out the smudge, but Damon says it's still there.

Just when I start growing frustrated, he says, "Here, let me do it."

He leans in and helps me out of my misery and God knows it takes everything in me not to grab him and kiss him right there. He's so close and his touch feels like a glass of chill water after a really hectic day.

"I hope it's a girl," he suddenly utters out of the blue and I must look lost because he clarifies, "Our child."

"Oh. Why do you say so?"

"I want her to have your pretty eyes and the color of your hair, as well as your traits, character-wise," he says, and I'm lost for words. Damon is no amateur when it comes to charming the ladies, and his words have the desired effect. I blush to my roots.

I want a little boy who's a miniature version of him, but I don't say that out loud.

"What do you want?" he asks.

"I don't know," I lie instead. "Whatever gender is fine by me."

"Surely, you must have a preference," he pushes, and I finally budge.

"I think I would prefer a boy to a girl," I tell him, and he smiles.

"I guess we'll just have to wait and see what nature has in store for us. I want to show you something."

When we're done eating, I ask that we split the bill, but Damon insists on paying so I let him. After so many weeks

spent with him, I know arguing is pointless. He always gets his way.

“What is it you wanted to show me?” I ask Damon when we step out of the diner.

“Look,” he says, pointing towards a brand-new Tesla.

“Erm... okay. That’s someone’s car. I don’t understand.”

He pulls out a bunch of keys from his pocket. “Here are the keys. It’s yours,” he says like he’s talking about the weather, and I’m instantly frozen to my spot.

Holy shit!

“This is too much. I’m sorry I can’t accept it,” I say, my eyes wide.

“It’s just so you don’t stress with the baby. I thought that maybe if you had your own car, you’d move around effortlessly with no restrictions. You get easily tired these days; having a car to help won’t be so bad.”

This is so thoughtful of him. He has a point but it’s a fucking car. It’s just too big a gift to accept from him.

“It’s too much,” I complain.

“How about you just use it for the time being? I can take it back once the baby is born if you feel you don’t need it anymore.”

Sounds appealing.

Who in their sane minds would say no to a Tesla? “It’s a deal,” I say, and he nods in affirmation.

“Do you want to test it?” he asks in amusement.

“Hell to the yeah!”

What happened to playing cool?

As I and Damon take the car for a test drive, I can't help but wonder if things would have been different if I told Damon about my feelings. *It's not too late*, a voice at the back of my mind whispers but I choose to ignore it.

“You deserve the best, Sheila. Nothing is too much to do for you so long as I'm concerned. I'll always be here for you no matter what, whether you need me or not. Always,” he says after he walks me to my doorstep later that night, and my heart skips a beat.

This man has a way with words and his gestures say a lot about him indeed looking out for me.

I want to believe I haven't made a mistake by letting him go.

CHAPTER 30

DAMON

Sheila has been nothing short of amazing in accommodating me in her life.

I know it's difficult for her because she doesn't want me around, but I'm glad we're making effort to coexist because of the baby. She visits Belle at the house sometimes, and Belle goes over to her apartment on some weekends. She even helps her out with her homework.

I'm presently in my office going through the files my assistant submitted this morning for a merger. I finally got a new one a month ago, and he does his job efficiently. He's not Sheila, but at least he knows not to get on my nerves.

My cell chimes, and I look at my screen to see it's Sheila calling.

Shoot!

I totally forgot we planned to go baby shopping today. I pinch my brows in frustration as I answer the phone. "I'm so

sorry, Sheila, it skipped my mind. I'll make it up to you," I apologize, not even giving her a chance to speak first.

"Calm your pants, Damon," she says. "I'm not calling to scold you. I know how busy you are, and I knew you were going to forget."

I sigh in relief. Thank goodness she's so understanding. "Regardless, I'm sorry."

"I hear you. When will you be able to make it?" she asks.

What I'm working on is important, but I close the files. "I'll see you in twenty."

When I arrive at Sheila's apartment, I call to inform her I'm downstairs and in a couple of minutes, she comes out wearing a loose white dress that looks good on her. Her baby bump is a little obvious now, and I must say she still looks as sexy as ever. Her skin has a certain glow to it, and her breasts are a little fuller. How am I supposed to survive in the same space as her for the next six months when she looks so ravishing?

I'm in for one hell of a ride today. Literally.

"Hey," she says, getting into the passenger seat. Her vanilla scent takes over the atmosphere.

"Hi. You look fantastic in that dress," I compliment.

"Thanks. And you look stressed," she observes as I turn on the engine and hit the road. "Are you getting any rest at all?" she probes.

"I try my best to," I say.

“Erm... I reckon that’s code for never. I can’t believe you. When was the last time you had a decent amount of rest?” she asks, and I momentarily look at her before returning my gaze to the road.

She’s clearly worried about me. I still want us to go back to the way we used to be, but she has made it pretty damn clear that she’s over us. Something must be wrong with me because this is the second time I’m having unrequited feelings for a woman.

Boy, I love my life.

“Honestly, I don’t remember,” I say in reply to her question, and she throws her hands up in the air, clearly irritated.

“You work too hard. Try to rest once in a while. It’ll help,” she advice.

I don’t say anything in response because I know my job is really demanding. We continue the rest of the ride in silence.

One of the workers at the mall directs us to the baby section when we arrive. There’s a lot of stuff and my head immediately goes blank. This is why I don’t shop. Usually, I know what I want and go straight for it. I’m only doing this because it’s for the baby, and I don’t want to leave everything to Sheila.

“So, what’s on the list?” I ask her, peering down at the paper she’s holding in her hand. It’s endless.

“Nursery furniture and gear, baby linen, crib, baby blankets... Phew! It’s a really long list,” she sighs.

And this is why I hate shopping.

“We’ll just buy whatever we can today and get the rest later. The baby doesn’t come for another six months, so I think we have ample time to get the remaining items on the list,” I reason.

“Good idea. So, where do we begin?”

We move around looking for items we feel would be suitable for the baby based on color, texture, and the like. We make a lot of jokes as we shop, lightening the mood.

“What do you think of this color?” Sheila enquires, holding up a cute blue baby blanket.

“It’s perfect,” I respond, and a teal green short sleeve bodysuit catches my eyes as we stroll down the aisle with the shopping cart. “Oh, look at this,” I say to her.

“Wow, you have a good eye. You should shop more often,” she says, and I look at her in surprise. “Oh, please don’t think I haven’t noticed you cringing like you’ve got a stick up your ass since the moment we got here.”

Busted.

“I’m not exactly a fan of searching for the perfect outfit or whatever. I know what I want, and I go for it,” I add the last bit, looking directly into her eyes, and she catches my double meaning but doesn’t react.

She has really moved on. Wow.

“Hey, look at this,” she says, moving ahead of me and discarding what I just said like broken glass. It hurts so fucking much but I act cool.

Lord knows I’ve tried to distract myself with work and other elements all in an attempt to get rid of my feelings for her but my tactics so far have been as futile as a knife in a gunfight.

I should seriously consider getting some help because this woman is driving me insane.



“Baby, Sheila’s here to see you,” I yell, and Belle runs down at a neck-breaking speed.

“Sheila!” she exclaims delightfully, engulfing her in a hug.

“How’re you, pumpkin?” she asks, grinning and patting Belle’s cheek.

“I’m fine. When is the baby arriving? Have you considered the cute names I picked yet?” Belle bombards an obviously tired Sheila who is still standing on her swollen feet with questions, and I think I have to intervene.

“You guys should sit first before chatting. I’ll fetch you both some juice,” I say, and Belle leads Sheila to the couch where they talk animatedly.

I smile to myself as I watch them before leaving for the kitchen. Sheila and I have talked about baby names, but it has

never been anything serious. We're yet to decide, seeing as we have various opinions on what our child should be called.

"I drew a picture of our family today," I arrive just in time to hear Belle say to Sheila.

"Oh, really? Let me see," she says.

Sheila takes the picture from her, and I peek a glance as I drop the tray containing the juice on the table. There are four people in the picture with a yellow balloon and a puppy.

Belle has always wanted a puppy, but I don't think she'd be able to take care of it. I plan on getting one once she's mature enough to take responsibility for it.

"This is Daddy, Mommy, and Sheila," she says, pointing us out in the sketch with her forefinger.

Eleanor doesn't deserve to be in the picture, but we can't change the fact that she's Belle's biological mother. It's something I have to live with.

"That's so sweet," Sheila comments, teary-eyed. Her voice is choked with emotions. She's been exceptionally emotional throughout the course of her pregnancy. "Thanks for including me in the picture."

"Well done, baby. It's really amazing. Wow!" I exclaim, and she smiles proudly, showing off her missing teeth.

We all chat for a while before Belle brings up her homework and Sheila, as usual, offers to help her with it. I opt to read *How To Talk So Kids Will Listen*. It's a pretty good book on parenting.

As I watch them together from my peripheral view, I wish we were a family in the real sense of the word. I guess I'll just have to take what I've got and hope for some sort of miracle.



I'm in Minnesota the next day to see my mother. Sheila is three months pregnant and I want to inform her about the pregnancy. Hopefully, this will make her see things in a new light. Eleanor is bad news and the sooner she realizes that, the better for her. Eleanor has managed to deceive my mother with her goody-two-shoes act, and I don't blame her for falling for it. I, too, fell for it once.

"Hey, mom," I greet, kissing her on the cheek. She looks surprised to see me. I didn't inform her beforehand that I was coming.

"Damon, what a pleasant surprise," she says, getting up from the couch to give me a hug. "How're you?"

"I'm good, mom. And you?"

"Just getting old," she says and I laugh a little. She observes me for a moment. "Is everything okay?"

It's now or never. "Sheila's having our baby," I break the news to her.

My mother opens her mouth in shock but no words come out. I guess she doesn't know how to feel or react which is understandable, considering the fact that she's never liked Sheila.

“Why would you do this to us?” she finally utters, her voice barely a whisper. It sounds strained.

“I don’t understand.”

“Eleanor is the perfect fit for you. Sheila is a nobody.”

“Oh, come off it, mother. Sheila is a thousand folds more than Eleanor will ever be. Eleanor almost killed your grandchild for crying out loud, yet you still root for her. She cheated on me with another man. I don’t understand why you would still want me to be with someone as selfish as her,” I lash out, unable to keep my cool. I’ve been quiet for too long.

“People change. Our mistakes do not define us. Eleanor has changed and she’s willing to make things work between you two.”

So this is the story she’s fed my mom. Fucking hilarious.

“Mom, Eleanor hasn’t changed.”

“You don’t know that.”

I sigh, pinching my brows and growing frustrated. “She locked Sheila in a bathroom stall, knowing fully well that she was pregnant, and poor Sheila passed out and was rushed to the hospital. Tell me, does that sound like someone who’s changed?”

My words have the desired effect and my mother is stunned into silence.

“Didn’t see that coming, did you? Eleanor has always and will always remain a vile woman. And there’s no way in hell

I'm ever letting such bad influence anywhere near Belle."

My mother remains quiet for a while, no doubt contemplating what I've just divulged.

"So, Sheila's pregnant huh?" she asks and I nod. "How many months is she?"

"Three months."

"Wow," she offers me a bittersweet smile. "I'm shocked to learn about Eleanor, to say the least. I can't believe she lied to me. She preyed on my fondness for her. But that doesn't mean I'd automatically accept Sheila now."

"I wasn't expecting that either. But it'd be at least nice to have the both of you get along even if it's just for the sake of the baby."

I can see the wheels in her head turning. My mother loves me, and I know she was only doing what she was doing because she thought it best for me. She thought Eleanor had changed and wanted us to be a family again.

"Just for the baby," she says after a long silence.

"Just for the baby," I concur.

"I guess I could try that," she says and I release a breath of relief.

Feels so good to hear her say that after months of animosity.

CHAPTER 31

SHEILA

I don't know what possesses me to prepare lunch even when I know I can barely carry myself. After eight months of being pregnant, I felt like I had mastered pregnancy but boy, was I wrong. Pregnancy isn't a walk in the park, and then there's the anxiety of being a parent in less than two weeks.

My back aches a lot yet I force myself to get up from the couch and head to the kitchen. I'm hungry, and I know I should call Alexa or Damon to help me out, but I don't want to trouble them. They've been nothing if not helpful, but I think they need a break.

I'm with child, not invalid. I can make my damn meal myself.

I'm craving an omelet, so I drop the pan and decide to get the filling ready first before anything else. I feel dizzy but I manage to drag myself to the refrigerator where the tomatoes are. I grab some and proceed to the chopping board.

My dizzy spells become worse as I pick up the knife, but I know I have to do this if I don't want to call anyone. I've been skeptical about where I eat these past months of my pregnancy so most of my meals are homemade, else I would've ordered takeout.

I chop a few slices before the knife finally cuts into my finger. It hurts like a fucking bitch.

On reflex, I drop the knife and turn to the sink. I turn on the faucet, and the water rinses the blood trickling from the cut. Suddenly, I hear the sound of someone opening the door, and I whip my head around. Only Alexa and Damon have the keys to my apartment and none of them called to say they were coming.

“Sheila!”

It's Damon. Now, that's a pleasant surprise. I didn't know he was coming.

“In the kitchen!” I yell and he surfaces shortly. The smile rapidly slips off his face when he sees my bloody finger.

“What the hell happened? Where's the first aid kit?” he asks coming close to me and putting pressure on my cut.

“It's over there in that cupboard,” I say, pointing to one of the cupboards and he grabs it in an instant, leading me to the living room, and making me sit on the couch.

“What the hell happened?” he asks in concern, putting a Band-Aid on it.

“I was trying to make an omelet, but then I felt dizzy. I was hungry so I kept going anyway.” I shrug, and he mutters some profanities under his breath.

“You should’ve called me if you weren’t feeling strong enough to cook. God forbid it was something else that happened to you.”

His lips are pursed in a frown, and his brows are narrowed as he keeps applying pressure on my finger. It’s a pretty deep wound.

“You’re overreacting. It’s just a cut. I’m fine,” I reason.

“It’s not just a cut, Sheila. You’ve been complaining about back aches and pains, dizziness, and fatigue. It’s obvious you can’t do this on your own. Let me help you,” he says with a look of concern etched on his face.

“You’re helping me. Alexa is too,” I say, and he shakes his head.

“That’s not what I mean.”

I’m officially lost. What else could he possibly mean?
“What is it then?”

Damon’s blue eyes pierce directly into mine as he utters his next words, “Come live with me.”

I seriously thought we were over this.

“No, that’s not necessary. The baby is almost here. If I go back, I’ll have to move out again in less than a month.”

He runs his fingers through his hair in frustration and I honestly can't tell why he's getting so worked up. "You're missing my point. I want you back in my life," he cuts to the chase, and I'm petrified.

What the fuck?

I open my mouth, but no words come out of it. I agree my feelings for Damon are still as fresh as the morning dew, but I've also worked hard at locking them away. He can't just up and ask me to live with him just because he wants me back in his life. I'm not a toy but a living breathing human.

"Why?" Surely there must be some sort of reason.

Damon looks nervous, and I wonder what's going on. Damon Finnegan is a man who is always in control and never gets nervous. His next words hit me like a ton of bricks.

"I love you, Sheila," he says, and my heart stops for a minute.

I probably have an awestruck expression on my face because he adds, "You're an amazing woman, Sheila, one I was so fucking stupid to let go of because I'm a damn dunce. When I first met you, I was a broken man with no ray of hope that anyone would ever love me or that I'd ever be able to find love again. But you had me mesmerized from the very moment I set my eyes on you. I didn't understand those feelings then and I thought it was all because I was having a pastime, but I only felt that way because I experienced all of that with you, Sheila. It was all you."

“Damon...” I say, my voice, strained. I’m stunned to my core.

“I love you so much and I know you don’t have any feelings for me, but I just thought you should know how I feel about you,” he concludes, his eyes shining with emotions so authentic it disarms me completely.

My brain goes into overdrive. He loves me? I don’t know how to feel about this. I was pining for him for months, and he never noticed and now this confession. There are a lot of thoughts going through my mind, and I’m slightly trembling. Is he doing this because of the baby? Is that it?

“Is this because of the baby?” I ask.

“No. I’ve always loved you. I just didn’t know what my feelings meant at the time. But these past few months have been the best months of my life. My time with you, Sheila, has left me wanting more. I want to keep experiencing these emotions with you. After Eleanor, I never thought I was worthy of being loved but you came into my life like a ray of sunshine. You’re an angel.”

This is all too much. These are the words I’ve been longing to hear for months. I blink rapidly to keep my tears in check.

Stupid pregnancy hormones.

“I need some time to think about this. I need to be certain you’re not doing this for the baby.”

He clasps my hands in his. “Take all the time you need. I’m not going anywhere.”

Damon takes me out to dinner the next day. He assured me the restaurant's food was safe and healthy, so I agreed to go with him.

“Has anyone told you that pregnancy looks good on you?” he asks with a charming smile, and I blush like a teenager in love for the first time.

“Yeah, you've told me only just about a gazillion times.”

“Have I?” he asks, pretending to think for a moment and I giggle. “Well, if I have, it's only because you look absolutely beautiful.”

I duck my head, so he doesn't see how red I've become. Ever since yesterday, Damon has been more forward with his advances. Always showering me with praises even though I'm aware of the fact that I look like a whale. He's been sweet, too.

“I look like an overly inflated balloon,” I say, rolling my eyes.

“A sexy balloon then,” he says, and I can't help the laughter that evades my lips.

“You're not funny,” I say through my laughter.

“At least I got you to you laugh. That should count for something,” he shrugs.

He drives me home once we're done and I'm impressed by how gentlemanly he's been this evening. He hasn't tried even once to make any sexual advances towards me, and that says a lot for a man who has such a filthy mind.

“Thank you for dinner,” I say when we arrive at my front porch. “I had a great time.”

“Yeah, me too. Thank you for coming with me. I hope we do this even after the baby arrives,” he says.

I smile warmly at him. I’m thrilled he reciprocates my feelings but that doesn’t mean I’m going to jump his bones. At least, not yet.

“We’ll see.”

His eyes dart to my lips for just a millisecond and I think he’s going to kiss me. I don’t believe I’m ready, but I won’t be able to resist him if he does.

Give me a fucking break. The man is freaking sex on wheels, and it’s been months since I got some.

“Have a good night,” he says instead.

“You, too,” I answer, going into my apartment.

Everything is finally falling into place, and I hope they stay that way.

CHAPTER 32

DAMON

“**M**om is still a little pissed,” Dominic says on the phone. It’s a Saturday morning, and I’m running on the treadmill at my private gym.

Ever since I told mom about Sheila’s pregnancy and Eleanor’s antics, she’s stopped talking about me getting back together with Eleanor. And thank goodness, Eleanor has decided to stay the hell away from all of us. I still haven’t told anyone about I and Sheila’s divorce though, except for Dominic of course.

“I know she expected someone who’s elite but she’ll get over it,” I say to my brother.

“And if she doesn’t?”

“Well, I guess she’ll just have to live with it then.”

Dominic runs our business, and he’s damn good at it. I didn’t want to depend on them forever, so I built mine. Unlike me, he’s a playboy who has a different woman on his arm every week.

“So, what’s up with you these days?” I ask. We are close and we’re as involved in each other’s lives as possible. He’s the one person I tell everything.

“Nothing much,” he says dismissively.

“Still breaking hearts all around the world, I see.”

He doesn’t have a specific type.

“I’m offended,” he lets out, feigning hurt.

“Oh please, you’re America’s biggest whore.”

“Such disrespect!” he says with a dramatic and false gasp, and I laugh. He joins in after a couple of seconds.

“Or is there anyone special I should know about?”

“Not really,” he tries to play it off. But I know my brother like the back of my hand. Something is up. There’s definitely someone. I’m intrigued.

“Who is it?” I ask.

“Who is what?”

“Don’t fuck around with me. Come on, spill. What’s her name?”

He sighs, and I instantly know I’m right. “Her name is Amelia.”

“*Oh*. Now that’s interesting. I need to meet this woman who has my brother on his toes,” I tease, trying to get on his nerves.

“It’s nothing serious. There’s no reason to make a mountain out of a molehill. We’re just seeing where this goes,” he says

but I know he's in deep. Dominic doesn't do relationships. His trying says a whole lot.

“Well, whatever. Doesn't change the fact that you're whipped.” I laugh, and he immediately changes the topic.

“When is Sheila due again?”

“Any time now. It's been thirty-five weeks already.”

“Well, I'm glad. Another Finnegan boy,” Dominic says proudly, and I can't stop the smile that spreads on my lips. We found out the sex three months ago.

“Yeah,” I say, getting off the treadmill and going to pick up a towel with which I wipe the sweat off my face.

There's an incoming call and it's from Sheila. “I gotta go. Talk to you later,” I say to Dominic and hang up.

“Hello?”

“My water just broke.” I freeze. There's clear apprehension in her tone.

Shit! I will myself to stay calm, so she doesn't sense my fear.

“Erm... okay. Where are you?” I ask, immediately heading out of the gym to get my car keys.

“I'm at home. I'm so scared, Damon.”

Fuck! “I'm on my way. Stay calm, okay? Just try to relax. I'll be there faster than you know it.”

I drive like a madman, and it's a miracle that I arrive at Sheila's place unscarred. I help her to the car, and all through

the ride, she keeps getting contractions.

“Drive faster!” she yells, and I honk like crazy, trying my best to beat traffic.

“I’m trying!” I yell back.

“I swear to fucking God, Damon, if you don’t get me to that fucking hospital in fucking time, I’m going to rip your fucking eyes out!”

Woah! Sheila in labor isn’t exactly loving or sweet. She says it with such conviction that I’m scared she might actually do it.

We finally arrive at the hospital, and I thank my lucky stars. The nurses help her onto the stretcher and as they roll her in, I hold her hand.

“*Holy fuck!*” she screams.

“It’s going to be okay. Just breathe,” I try to soothe her.

Sheila is in pain, and I don’t want to leave her alone or let her out of my sight. When we’re inside the labor ward, she’s transferred from the stretcher to the bed.

“Do something,” I yell at the nurses. “She’s in so much pain.”

“That’s normal during labor. But I assure you that your wife is in capable hands, and she’ll be fine.”

I’m too tense to correct the nurse when she calls Sheila my wife. The doctor eventually comes in, and time goes by. I

don't exactly know how long she pushes, but the baby finally comes out, his cries echoing in the four walls of the room.

“Congratulations, it's a boy,” the doctor says, and I'm awestruck. He offers me the scissors to cut the umbilical cord, and I do it with shaky hands, getting emotional.

I let myself have a good look at our baby. He has beautiful dark brown hair like Shelia and I, but his eyes are coffee brown, just like Sheila's. My eyes fill with tears, and my heart swells with love for this tiny human.

The doctor hands him over to me, and I'm instantly filled with the need to safeguard and pamper him like the little handsome prince he is. I touch his hand, and he cries even louder.

“He's so cute. Welcome to the world, Denzel,” I say, handing him to Sheila.

“Are you okay?” I ask, planting a kiss on her forehead.

She smiles weakly. “I'm okay.”

“Aside from having my eyes, he looks just like you,” she says, and I smile.

Soon after, the doctors and nurses exit the room with little Denzel to clean him up, giving Sheila and I some privacy.

“Thank you for giving me such a precious gift,” I say, sniffing. There's honestly nothing better than this. “I love you even more now.”

“I love you, too,” she responds and, for a second, I think I must have heard wrong.

“You love me?” I ask for clarification.

“Yeah,” she nods through tears. “I was just so scared of telling you.”

The joy in my heart knows no bounds. She fucking loves me. My feelings are not unrequited.

“I’m sorry I made you feel that way,” I apologize.

“I need to tell you something. I didn’t want to before, but I feel you should know.”

“What is it?” I ask, a little on edge.

“Your mother and Eleanor tried to pay me off when we went to Minnesota together. They said I wasn’t in your class and that it’d always be a barrier between us.”

The fuck! I can’t believe my mom would do something like that. I’m alarmed and hurt. As for Eleanor, I wouldn’t put anything past her. Nothing she does surprises me anymore.

“I’m so sorry. I sincerely apologize on my mom’s behalf. Why didn’t you tell me about this? Was that why you left?”

“No, it wasn’t. I had started to develop feelings for you, and I knew we were just faking being together so I left so I wouldn’t get hurt.”

“I want you to know that Eleanor or my mother won’t be bothering us anymore. I’ve given Eleanor strict warnings to

stay away from you and our baby. And as for my mom, I'll take care of it. You don't have to worry about it."

She smiles. "That's a relief."

"Nothing will ever come between us," I say in promise to this extraordinary woman I love.

A promise I'm more than prepared to battle all odds to uphold. And when she smiles radiantly at me, I know that for the first time ever in my life, I've made the right choice.

EPILOGUE

SHEILA

It's been two months since I gave birth to Denzel. He's such a cute baby, and he looks just like his father, only with a few exceptions. He doesn't cry much, and I'm grateful.

I'm presently at home, dressed, and all set for my date with Damon. He's cooking dinner for me at his house and according to what he told me, it'll just be the two of us since Belle is at Eleanor's for the weekend.

I never did move in with him. What's the point of moving in with a man who isn't married to you for the second time? It just didn't make any sense, so I opted to remain at my apartment, and he understood where I was coming from. That didn't stop him from loving me any less. Damon was sweet, caring, and simply amazing to both me and the baby.

And although we've had several heated moments together since our son was born, we've never really gone all the way. I guess he's just waiting until I'm comfortable. It'll take a while for me to properly heal and him waiting is kind of sweet.

I'm waiting for Alexa to arrive before I leave for the date. She offered to help me babysit while I go see Damon. I'm a little anxious about leaving my baby alone because I've never done it before, but Damon and Alexa said it was completely normal to be worried. Alexa assured me she was going to take care of him to the best of her ability and call if the need arises.

The doorbell rings, and I know she's here.

"What happened to your key?" I ask immediately I open the door.

"Lost it. Sorry," she answers, slipping through the door. "Where's my godbaby?" she asks, going to Denzel's crib and picking him up. "Aren't you the cutest baby in the world? Yes, you are," she coos.

"You know where everything is and if anything happens or he starts to cry, just call me," I say.

Alexa deadpans. "It's normal for babies to cry, Sheila."

I know I'm overreacting. "Alright, if he starts to cry excessively, just call me, okay?"

"Will do. Now, shoo, you have a date to get to."

I look at Denzel longingly even though I know he's in good hands. My best friend literally pushes me out the door.

When I arrive at Damon's mansion, I let myself in and I'm surprised by what I see. The living room is decorated with ruddy fabric. There are vases filled with bouquets on the table and rose petals are scattered throughout the space.

My mouth opens in awe. The room is illuminated with the soft glow of candles, creating a path for me to walk through. The rest are dispersed across the room in an ornamental manner.

At the end of the path is Damon, standing on the large heart-shaped petals, and looking as dashing as ever in a nice suit that fits him perfectly.

I'm dumbfounded. "What's all this?" I ask, walking towards him.

Once I'm within close proximity, he retrieves a small box from his pocket and drops on one knee. He opens the box and I'm staring at a huge diamond ring. My heart starts thumping in my ribcage as I try to process what's happening here. His eyes look dousing in the dim lighting of the room.

"Sheila..." I almost pass out. My emotions are everywhere. "Will you marry me?"

"I... What?"

"I'm not perfect, and I come with a whole lot of baggage. I'm sorry for everything my family has put you through, and I promise never to let anyone hurt you anymore. I know I'm older, but you're it for me, Sheila. It's always been you. There's no such thing as a world without you because you give me the strength to get by each day," he says and my eyes glisten. I'm getting emotional. "I would be lucky to have you as my wife. And if you would do me the honor of having me, I promise to make you happy for the rest of our lives," he finishes.

I'm smiling so much my cheeks hurt. My heart is filled with joy.

"I'll marry you," I say, and Damon puts the ring on my finger. It's really beautiful, and it looks like it must have cost a fortune.

I put my arms around his neck once he gets up and hug him tightly. I'm nowhere close to his imposing height, but the heels I'm wearing give me a little advantage.

This is all I've ever wanted. To be with him forever.

"I love you," he whispers.

"I love you, too."



"Wow, you look so amazing, I'm going to cry," Alexa says as she stares at me in my white dress.

Damon and I decided that the Naka Island resort was the perfect place to tie the knot. So here we are after three months of planning, in Thailand, and it's my fucking wedding day. I can't believe I'm getting married to the man of my dreams. It feels so surreal.

After he proposed, I felt like the luckiest woman in the world. Damon Finnegan was finally going to be mine.

"You really think so?" I ask my best friend who is also my maid of honor. She's wearing a champagne-colored thigh slit floor-length dress.

“Yeah.” she nods vigorously. “Damon will be blown away when he sees you, without a single doubt.”

My dress is a terrific, laced A-line dress, with an open back and an elegant detachable train. It’s strapless with a sweetheart neckline. Alexa and I picked it out together, and Damon hasn’t seen me in it yet.

“I’m so glad this day is finally here, but I don’t know why I feel nervous.”

She takes my hand. “It’s just pre-wedding jitters. You’re not getting cold feet, are you?” she asks, a little worried.

“No. I’m certain I want to be with him. I can’t imagine myself with anyone else.”

“That’s all you need. You’re just anxious. It’s normal. Everyone’s waiting outside. Come on.”

Seeing as I don’t know that many people, only a few of my extended family is here, alongside some friends of mine from college. The rest are from Damon’s side, ranging from his business partners, and friends to his family. Dominic is his best man, and Belle is my little bride.

Denzel is with Debra who is more than ecstatic to take care of her grandson for the day. She adores him, but still hates me. Still, she’s here and she’s promised to stop interfering in our relationship. Locking me in the bathroom while I was pregnant was enough for Debra to give up on Eleanor whom she thought was a changed person, which Damon and I are both grateful for. Guess I can live with that.

Our wedding is by the beach, and I must say, the decorators did a fantastic job. As I walk down the aisle, the music starts playing. Damon is wearing a navy blue tux, and my heart melts as I take him in.

When his gaze lands on me, his lips part in amazement. His eyes do a quick sweep of me, and I'm exhilarated I have the same effect on him as he has on me.

"You look beautiful," he says with moist eyes when I finally reach him.

"You look dashing as always."

The ceremony begins, and it's the most wonderful feeling. I shed a few tears when Damon recites his vows, and he also gets emotional when I do mine.

"Do you, Damon Finnegan, take Sheila Leah Cromwell to be your wife? Do you promise to love, honor, cherish, and protect her, forsaking all others, and holding only unto her forevermore?" the officiant asks.

"I do," he responds, looking at me with transparent devotion.

"Do you, Sheila Leah Cromwell, take Damon Finnegan to be your husband? Do you promise to love, honor, cherish, and protect him, forsaking all others, and holding only unto him forevermore?" the officiant directs his question at me this time.

"I do," I reply without hesitation.

We exchange rings and the officiant says, “I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may now kiss the bride.”

Damon grips me by the waist and kisses me in a deliciously toe-curling manner as we seal the deal.

When I met him in that club about a year and a half ago, I never thought he was going to be my forever, but I’m glad we’re here right at this moment.

“What do you say we make more cute babies together, Mrs. Finnegan?” he asks me, and I laugh, leaning my forehead against his.

“How many more do you want, Mr. Finnegan?”

His answer has me cracking up like a hyena.

“How about a whole soccer team?”

The End.

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It was Him.

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ABOUT AUTHOR

Olivia Pearl writes contemporary romance that begs to read from beginning to end. Billionaire bad boys filled with steam, angst, and swoon that lead to happy endings are her specialty.

Olivia lives in California. When she's not writing or reading, she enjoys spending time outdoors. Whether it's hiking, skydiving, going to the beach or giving back to her community.

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