



THE
GRUMP'S
FAKE WIFE

TAMING THE BOSS SERIES
CASSI HART

The Grump's Fake Wife

Taming the Boss Series

Cassi Hart

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Cassi Hart

The book cover features a woman with long, wavy red hair, wearing a grey crop top, posing with her hand on her head. The title 'The KINGPIN'S Obsession' is written in a mix of serif and script fonts, with 'CASSI HART' at the bottom.

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*Dedicated to all the dreamers out there, you never know
when your happily ever after will come. Cheers!*

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Cassi H♥rt

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Chapter One

Lily

Get it together.

I stare back at the reflection of myself in the mirror, trying hard not to give in to the panic rising in my chest as I nervously run my hand over my dress. It's a smart green number that stops just above my knees, and although Dana swore it's perfect, I can't help but feel anxious. It's my first time interviewing for a job at a corporate organization, and although I passed the first stage of the interview, I'm not so confident that I'll get so lucky the second time around.

Just then, in walks Dana, a stunning petite woman with shiny brown hair that's presently tied in a messy ponytail. Ever since she saved me from bullies in third grade, Dana has always been my biggest ally. Even now, when it seems like the universe has turned its back on me, she continues to stand by me. She welcomed me into her tiny one-room apartment and put up with me for the past month since I arrived in Chicago. And even though she had to work double shifts at the club to keep up with our bills, she's never complained or made me feel guilty about it.

But I *do* feel guilty watching her get back from work early in the morning with dark circles under her eyes from lack of sleep. That's why I accepted the interview for this job when she told me about it, even though I feel so inadequate.

"You got this, Lily," Dana says, coming to stand behind me in the mirror.

"I'm not sure I do," I reply with a soft sigh. "I basically have no work experience."

"Yes, you do," Dana says, her tone reassuring. "You got to the final interview stage, and that counts for something. Now, you need to leave if you want to make it in time."

I glance at my old leather watch and a loud gasp escapes my lips. "My God! I'm going to be late."

I spin around so suddenly that I almost knock heads with Dana. She sidesteps me just in time, used to my clumsiness. Quickly grabbing my handbag from the bed, I rush towards the door.

“Bye, Dana!”

“Good luck, hun!” she calls after me.

Thirty minutes later, my taxi pulls up in front of an imposing skyscraper with fancy signage that spells ECOTECH SOLUTIONS INC. I look up in time to see the taxi driver watching me through the rearview mirror, his kind, weathered face lit up with a knowing smile.

“First day, is it?” he asks. “You look nervous as hell.”

I shake my head. “I’m here for an interview.”

“Oh,” he mouths, then smiles wider. “I’m sure you’ll do well.”

I wish I could believe him. And Dana.

“Thank you,” I say anyway, handing him my payment.

I get out and return his little wave with a small smile. I watch the car zoom off and for one insane moment, I think of running after it. *But I’ve come too far to chicken out now.*

Taking a deep breath, I head towards the building. Once inside, I stop to look around me. Although I’ve been here before, it still feels strange to be surrounded by such opulence.

Just like the first time I came for the preliminary interview, I feel like I’ve been suddenly transported into a whole new, shiny world that I don’t belong in. The gleaming marble floors... The dazzling chandeliers and gold-plated signage on the walls... Everything feels so overwhelming. Even the employees resuming work in their well-tailored suits and elegant dresses all seem intimidating. They looked goal-oriented and accomplished, far removed from the reality I’m used to. I instantly feel small, intangible.

Everything in me wants to run, but I have no choice. I need the money – and fast. The phone call from my mother has been replaying in my mind all day.

“Lily.”

“M- Mom?”

I still couldn't believe she was calling me. It was the first time in seven months... The first time since the incident.

“I guess you're alive then,” she said dryly. “I called to tell you that your sister's condition has worsened and she'll be needing an emergency surgery.”

“Oh, Ella...” I muttered breathlessly, my chest tightening with a fresh wave of guilt and pain. It had been so long since I'd seen her. The last time I'd spoken to her was Christmas, when she called me behind Mom's back during a dialysis appointment. She sounded okay. Could things really have gotten so much worse in just a couple months?

“Luckily, the hospital moved her name up on the recipient list,” Mom continued. “She's been scheduled for an emergency kidney transplant, but they need an initial deposit of two hundred thousand dollars.”

“What?!” I blurted, my eyes opening wide with shock. “I don't...”

“It's your fault we lost our financial support, Lilian,” Mom said, her voice growing edgier. “You messed it up, so you need to fix it.”

My throat tightened painfully. “Mom...”

“You nearly took one life. Do you want to be responsible for this one, too?”

And with that, she dropped the call.

Taking care of my little sister is worth all of this. I have to be here. I have to get this job. After all the damage I've done to my family, this might be my only chance to make it right.

Anxiety claws at my chest, and just as I'm about to hightail it out of there, I hear a high-pitched voice beside me.

“Hello, ma'am. Welcome to Ecotech. How may I help you?”

I look up to the familiar face of the front desk receptionist, a pretty blonde woman with a polite smile that always seems a

little too practiced. I glance at her nametag to recall her name. *Amanda Sanchez, that's it.*

I clear my throat nervously, shuffling uncomfortably on my feet. "I'm here to interview for the role of Executive Assistant."

Her eyes flash with surprise, but it's gone quickly, replaced with that fake polite smile of hers as she gestures towards the elevator. "If you take the elevator by the right, it'll take you directly to the CEO's office."

"T-the CEO?" I stutter, staring blankly at her.

She nods, her fake smile dropping slightly. "You're going to be his assistant if you do get employed," she says, stressing the last part as if she didn't see the possibility. "So, yes, he'll be interviewing you himself."

My anxiety level instantly shoots up from ten to one hundred, but for some reason, I don't want to give this woman the satisfaction of seeing me intimidated. So I raise my chin to meet her condescending gaze squarely.

"Thanks for your time, Miss Sanchez," I say curtly, mimicking her fake smile. Without waiting for a response, I turn around and head in the direction of the elevator, praying desperately to the heavens that she doesn't see me quaking in my old suede heels.

The elevator ride is shorter than I hoped and before I know it, I'm standing in front of the CEO's office. I let out a shaky breath before knocking briefly on the door.

"Come in," comes a deep, velvety voice from within.

"Here goes nothing," I mutter to myself before pushing the door open.

This time, I can't marvel at the bold display of wealth in the large office because all my attention is focused on the tall, broad-shouldered figure standing by the window. Even with his back turned to me, I can feel the power emanating from him. Everything else seems to fade in comparison to the magnetic presence of his imposing figure. Then he turns around and I momentarily lose my sense of reality.

Holy moly! He's handsome!

I don't know what I expected the CEO of Ecotech to look like, but my imagination couldn't have prepared me for this magnificent Adonis standing right in front of me. I read somewhere that God has favorites on earth, and I'm pretty sure he's one of them with his perfectly sculpted face and silky dark hair. The edges of his sideburns are just beginning to turn white. *And his eyes!* They're the most gorgeous shade of gray I've ever seen, almost like storm clouds on a winter evening. *Intense. Powerful.*

His gaze meets mine and I feel my breath hitch in my throat. Something flickers in his eyes, but it disappears so quickly that I might have imagined it.

"You seem lost," he says quietly, his gaze pinning me in place. The husky timbre of his voice instantly sends goosebumps down my arms as I stare helplessly into his handsome face.

"Are you?" he asks, raising a perfectly arched brow at me.

"W-what?" I stammer, unable to form a coherent thought.

"I'm asking if you're lost."

"N-no. I'm not, I, uh – I'm sorry..." I let my voice trail off, licking my lips nervously.

Something flares in his eyes. Anger? Disdain? I can't tell.

"Well, are you going to stand there and stutter all day, or are you going to state your business in my office?" he asks impatiently, his eyes never leaving mine.

There's something about the intensity of his gaze that has my stomach all tied up in knots. My palms feel sweaty and my heart is pounding at an unnatural pace.

Get your head on straight, Lily!

"I- I'm here for the interview. Sir," I add as an afterthought, clearing my throat nervously.

"I see."

An emotion akin to amusement flickers in his eyes as he walks over to his desk. He pulls out his seat and gestures to the

visitors' chair. "Have a seat, Miss Thompson."

I blink at him in surprise, wondering how he knows my name. Then it dawns on me: of course he knows my name and the reason I'm in his office. He must have seen my resume, after all. Yet he made me seem like some random weirdo who wandered aimlessly into his office.

What a jerk.

"Thank you, sir," I murmur as I gingerly lower myself into the chair.

"Why should I employ you for this role, Miss Thompson?" he asks without any preamble.

I stare at the gold-plated nameplate that proudly displays his name and position: **Gabriel Foster, CEO**. I feel my chest closing up with anxiety all over again. I remember practicing the answer to this very question with Dana, but for some reason, I can't seem to recite my well-rehearsed response.

"Because I need the money," I blurt without thinking.

My eyes instantly open wide in realization, but it's too late to take my words back, so I clamp my lips together before I dig my grave further.

I probably wouldn't be getting the job, anyway.

"I see," he says, his expression unchanging. "You're hired."

I blink at him in confusion, wondering if I heard the words right. "What?"

"You heard me, Miss Thompson. You're hired, but not as my Executive Assistant."

"I don't quite follow, sir."

He leans forward in his seat, his eyes boring directly into mine in that intense way of his that makes my skin tingle. "I'm employing you to be my wife, Miss Thompson."

"What?!"

Chapter Two

Gabriel

I watch the interplay of emotions in her enchanting hazel eyes as she gapes at me: confusion, disbelief, shock, and then some more confusion.

God, she's gorgeous.

I knew from the moment I glimpsed her in the lobby on that day of her first interview that I wanted her. Something had set her apart from the other applicants. Maybe it was her flaming red hair or the charming freckles dusted across her face, but something made me want to get a closer look... And that's why I made sure she passed the first round of interviews.

There's no way she'd have made it through otherwise.

Josh Meyers, head of HR, had been visibly shocked at my choice of candidate and decision to conduct a personal interview, but he hadn't dared to question me. I own the damn company and will do as I see fit, after all.

I've waited impatiently for this day, and now that she's here, I can't seem to get a hold of myself. Nothing prepared me for the force of her beauty up close. Several times since the minute she walked into my office, I've had to fight the urge to get lost in the depths of her mesmerizing hazel eyes. I thought she was gorgeous in her photos – yes, I stalked her Instagram page, to my own surprise – but nothing prepared me for all of her. Her soft, almost rhythmic voice... The subtle, flowery scent of her perfume... The sensual curve of her lips and the adorable little knot of confusion currently forming between her brows...

I want her with an urgency that's beyond reasoning, and with each second that passes in her presence, I can feel my composure slipping. No woman has ever affected me in this way... Never.

“Excuse me, Mr. Foster, I...”

“Call me Gabriel,” I interrupt gently, letting my lip curl up in a nonchalant smirk. “It’s only appropriate, as my wife-to-be.”

“What?” She blinks at me like I just spoke in a foreign language. “W-wife?”

“Of course, it’ll be a fake marriage,” I explain when I see the panic clouding those exotic orbs of hers. She must think I’m some sort of psycho. “Strictly contractual. Our marriage will last three months, and after that, we don’t have to see each other again.”

She shifts in her seat, inclining her head slightly as a deep frown settles on the ridge between her eyes.

What would it be like to trail my lips over the delicate curve of her neck, gripping it ever so slightly while I...?

“Why would you ever need a fake wife?” she asks, her voice once again breaking me out of my lustful thoughts. “And why me?”

Oh, if only she knew the plans I have for her...

“I mean, you can have anyone you want as a real wife,” she continues, her eyes searching my face as if the answers are pasted on my forehead. “Why choose me?”

“I want you,” I reply simply. “Isn’t that enough reason?”

It’s a half-truth.

“No,” she says, shocking me.

“What?” I ask, genuinely dumbfounded.

“I said no,” she repeats. “I’m not interested in entering into a fake marriage with you. I’m not sure what this is about, but...”

“Name a price,” I cut in, irritated. *No rejection has ever stung so deeply.* “Every woman has one. I’m sure you do, too.”

Her expression instantly grows cold. “What?”

“I ask how much it’ll take to put you exactly where I want you, Lily Thompson.”

Her face reddens and her grip tightens on her purse. “I don’t know what kind of person you think I am, Mr. Foster, but no

amount of money in the world is going to convince me to sleep with you.”

“Ouch! That stings,” I chuckle. The way her freckles stand out against her pink cheeks is adorable. “But that wasn’t the offer. I’m just looking to put on a convincing show. Any other... *perks* would be optional. Though I would certainly make it worth your while if you took me up on them.”

She stands so abruptly that her chair tips backward. “I-I don’t have to take this. You can’t just – “

She falls silent as I open my desk drawer and pull out my checkbook. I flip it open and sign the bottom line. “Here,” I say, sliding it to her along with the pen. “Write whatever figure you want, and I’ll pay it. All you have to do is stand next to me at some fancy parties for the next few months and play the doting wife. Not such an awful deal, is it?”

She creeps forward a step, her eyes glued to the checkbook. “But... Are you sure? I can ask for as much as I want?”

“Absolutely.”

She picks up the pen, and I steel myself for the number I’ll be faced with. I’m asking for a pretty big favor – one that clearly hurts her pride. I expect to spend a few million at the very least.

So I’m stunned when she slides the check back and I see, written in tidy handwriting, a mere two hundred thousand dollars. I know that’s not exactly chump change for most people, but I offered her my entire fortune at her disposal. Why would she go with such a low figure?

She clears her throat, not quite meeting my eyes. “A-and I need it upfront,” she says. Then, quietly, she adds, “Please.”

“And after?”

She shakes her head. “That’s all I want. I don’t need anything else.”

How interesting. I want to know more, but I know better than to ask. She’s already red-faced and trembling. “Alright,” I say. “I’ll have a wire transfer completed by the end of tomorrow.”

Her beautiful eyes finally find mine again. “Thank you,” she breathes. And then, just like that, she’s gone.

Hours later, I’m seated in my usual spot at a high-end private bar in the heart of Chicago, downing my third shot of whiskey.

“You’re sure not going easy tonight, my friend,” says Derek Sawyer, my best buddy and owner of the bar where we’re currently at.

I snicker in response and he arches his brows at me, a curious smile forming on his lips. “What’s got your panties in a twist, mate?”

“What kind of gifts do women typically love?” I ask, ignoring his question. Derek has known me long enough to know I don’t discuss my emotions, but he always figures things out anyway. It’s why we’ve remained friends for so long.

“So, it’s a woman, huh?” Derek asks, his smile widening. “That’s new.”

“You’ve got any ideas?”

“Must be serious if you’re this invested,” he retorts, searching my face. “I haven’t seen you have more than a passing interest in any woman.”

“She’s just... different,” I say with a shrug, pouring myself another shot. “Keeps me on my toes.”

Derek laughs. “A keeper, then. Well, women typically love flowers and expensive jewelry, as far as I know. You can get her a designer bag. It works with my woman. *Women*,” he corrects with a cocky smile.

“Not this woman,” I mutter, shaking my head.

I can picture her shoving whatever gift I get her right back into my hands. The thought makes me smile. She sure is different. With her, I’m out of my element. *And that is as exasperating as it is exciting.*

“Oh, man,” Derek says with an amused chuckle. “You’re in for one wild ride.”

“If that ain’t right,” I mutter, downing another shot of liquor.

“But hey, that’s what keeps it interesting, right?” Derek says with an amused chuckle. “And you, my friend, are due for some challenging fun.”

Chapter Three

Lily

When I tell Dana about my new “job,” she’s happy for me. “It should be easy at least, right? After all, you’re just pretending. In the meantime, you can focus on finding a regular job.”

“I guess,” I grumble, scrubbing our old frying pan with excessive force. “He’s just such a *jerk!* I can’t believe I have to pretend to be married to a man like that!”

“I know.” She gently pulls the pan out of my hands to rinse, dry, and shelve it. “Just focus on the positive. Is he at least good-looking?”

I hope she can’t see me blushing. “You could probably say that.”

She shrugs. “Then maybe it won’t be so bad. You get to help your sister, you get to go to fancy parties with a handsome guy, and you might even get a nice dress or two out of it. It may not be ideal, but it’s not the worst way to make money.”

I sigh. She’s right about that. I’d marry Gabriel Foster ten times over if it meant saving Ella.

Dana must know where my thoughts have gone, because she asks, “How’s she doing?”

“I still haven’t been able to talk to her.” I swallow around the lump in my throat. “Mom called to say she got the money, though. So at least I know that’s been taken care of.”

Dana wraps an arm around my shoulders and gives me a squeeze. “You’re amazing, Lily. Your family’s so lucky to have you.”

My stomach turns. *If only they felt that way.*

That night, I relive the worst moment of my life in my dreams – the way I do every night.

It’s all just as clear as it was the first time: my stepfather, drunk and raging; my mother, covering her terror with a

snarl; and my poor sister, already sick and feeble, hiding from our stepfather's blows under the kitchen table.

No matter how many times it happened – and it happened plenty – it was still utterly nightmarish. I felt so helpless clutching onto my trembling sister, watching the man who attacked us at least once a week bear down on our mother.

“You dumb bitch!” he slurred. He fumbled for my mother's wrist and missed. “Don't you know how much better I could do than you? You're lucky to have me!”

“Oh, please. You're drunk!” she snapped, backing into the fridge. “Just get to bed. You'll be fine tomorrow.”

“Goddammit, woman, don't you talk down to me!” He grabbed the front of her shirt with one hand. The other curled into a fist.

Ella sobbed into my neck. “I'm scared, Lil,” she whispered.

I felt something break inside me.

I had stood by and watched him terrorize my family for long enough. It was time to finally do something about it. If my mom wasn't going to toss Greg out to protect Ella, then I was going to do it.

“Stay here,” I whispered to my sister. I pried her fingers off my arm and rushed to the hall closet, listening to my mother's cries of pain. I flung the door open and grabbed the black gun case sitting on the floor.

With shaking fingers, I opened the clasps and pulled out the gun. I checked the safety and ran back to the kitchen, the hunk of metal in my hand feeling like it weighed a thousand pounds.

I stood with my back straight and aimed the gun at my stepfather. “Get away from her. Right now.”

He stared at me blankly for a moment, then let out a loud laugh. “Please! Like you're really gonna shoot me?”

“Don't think I won't.” I pulled the hammer, cocking the gun with a click. Despite my trembling knees, my aim was surprisingly steady. My stepfather had no clue I'd started

going to the shooting range with the gun he left unlocked in the closet.

And I was getting good.

His face contorted in fury, and he rounded on me. “You little fucking cunt – “

That was all he managed to say before I fired a bullet through the garage door.

I put my aim back on him, my throat tight. “Get the hell out of this house. Or the next one’s going in your head.”

After a moment of staring at me in stupefied terror, Greg scrambled for the door, snatching his keys on the way. I heard him running down the block, tripping over his own feet as he went.

Silence fell over the kitchen. Ella let out a sob. I slid to the floor, the gun held limply in my hands. It was over. It was finally over.

Then I looked up to find my mother’s red, angry face inches from mine. “You idiot, what did you just do?!”

“W-what do I need to do?” I ask, shifting uncomfortably in my seat. Being in Gabriel’s office now is just as intimidating as it was the first time. “How does being your fiancée work?”

“You don’t need to do much,” he replies. “We just have to make it seem as real as possible.”

“When you say real, you don’t mean we have to...” I let my voice trail off as a slight blush creeps up my cheeks.

“To what?” he asks, his mouth tilting with the slightest hint of amusement.

That jerk. He knows exactly what I’m talking about but takes pride in torturing me.

“You know... Do we have to...?”

“Are you asking if we have to have sex?”

“Yes!” I snap, barely resisting the urge to glare at him. *It feels like I’m going to die of embarrassment.*

“Do you want to?”

I gasp loudly at his scandalous question. “My God, no!”

“Why are you being so prudish?” he asks, an arrogant smirk forming on his handsome face. “It’s not like you’re a virgin or something.”

My face explodes with a hotness that burns my skin from the inside out. I’d give anything for the ground to swallow me right now.

“Are you?” he questions, his expression morphing into that of shock as he searches my face. Suddenly, his eyes cloud up with a dark emotion that sends tantalizing sparks shooting down my spine.

“My God, Lily... You’re a virgin,” he mutters, his voice an octave deeper. *Sexier.*

“I- I have to go,” I say, standing up shakily. Without waiting for his response, I spin around and head towards the doorway.

He’s faster, though. He catches up with me at the door, his large, warm palm covering my hand as I start to turn the knob. I freeze, suddenly unable to breathe. His scent, a heady combination of wood and mint, clouds my senses, rendering me incapacitated for the moment.

Looking at him so up close, I realize how handsome he is all over again. Our faces are inches apart, his breath hot against my skin. I drop my gaze quickly, clenching my fist against the sudden urge to trail my fingers over the sensual curve of his lips.

“W-what are you doing?” I stutter, looking anywhere but his face.

“What else? I’m stopping you from walking out on me *again*. Look at me, Lilly. Please,” he adds when I don’t oblige.

I raise my eyes to him, and I’m surprised to see the gentleness on his face.

“I’m sorry,” he says softly. “I didn’t mean to embarrass you. We don’t have to do anything you don’t want to. Besides, being a virgin is nothing to be embarrassed of. It makes you even more special.”

I blink at him in surprise. I can’t believe someone like Gabriel Foster just apologized and called me special in the same breath. *Maybe I judged him too soon?*

“Thank you, I guess...” I mutter, wondering what he could be playing at. “Can I go now?”

“Not until you have dinner with me.”

“Dinner?”

“Yes, Lily,” he replies, his lips tilting in that arrogant smile that I’m beginning to associate with him. “Your duties as my fiancée start now.”

Chapter Four

Gabriel

“Where are we?” Lily asks, looking around. Her magical hazel eyes are lit up with a childlike wonder, making her seem younger than her twenty-one years.

Somehow whenever I’m with her, I forget that I’m older.

“My house,” I say, in response to her question.

She looks at me then, her eyes slightly opening in surprise.

“W-why did you bring me here?”

“I figured you might not be comfortable being seen in public with me just yet,” I reply, searching her face for a reaction.

“That’s thoughtful,” she mutters, avoiding my eyes. She looks around once more, her eyes lighting up with awe all over again. “You have a really beautiful house.”

My chest swells with pride at her words. I’ve gotten tons of compliments over my house from guests over the years, but they were most pretentious words aimed at pleasing me. But there’s a simple honesty about Lily that makes her words much more impactful.

“This way,” I say, leading her toward the open kitchen. I pull out one of the high stools and gesture for her to sit. “I’ll make dinner.”

“You cook?”

I look up to see her gaping at me with such unabashed shock that I can’t help but chuckle. “Nothing grand. I figured we could get to know more about each other over some pasta and wine.”

“There’s nothing much about me anyway,” she murmurs, dropping her eyes. Her words are accompanied by a deep sadness that breaks my heart. I know there’s a reason she agreed to this charade, but it’s one she isn’t ready to tell me. Not yet.

“Have some wine, wifey,” I say, sliding a glass over to her with a smirk that’s sure to ruffle her feathers.

She wrinkles her nose. “Don’t call me that.”

I chuckle. “You’re the only one that gets to take such an impudent tone with me, you know.”

She ducks her head to hide the rosy hues on her cheeks. “I’m sorry...”

Damn. She’s too adorable for her own good.

The rest of dinner goes more perfectly than anticipated. I make a simple pasta dish and try to keep a simple conversation going. Although she doesn’t say much about herself, she looks more relaxed twenty minutes into dinner than when we arrived. Somehow, her flaming red hair has escaped its messy bun, cascading down to her shoulders like molten fire. The soft glow of the kitchen light highlights the gorgeous features of her face: enchanting hazel eyes, a button-like nose, high cheekbones, and those lips... Plump and just begging to be kissed.

Right now, she’s laughing at some lame joke I made seconds ago, and I’m finding it increasingly difficult to repress the urge to kiss her.

“Dance with me,” I say, surprising even myself.

The laughter dies on her lips and she blinks at me in surprise. “D-dance? But there’s no music...”

I stand up and hold my hands out to her. A brief hesitation crosses her eyes, but then she stands up and places her hands gingerly on mine, ducking her head to avoid my eyes.

“We’ll dance to the rhythm of nature,” I mutter, gently guiding her hands to my shoulders. Her scent, a heady mixture of lavender and jasmine, pervades my senses as her body molds perfectly into mine.

We start to move together in perfect synchrony to the harmonious beat of our thudding hearts. She fits so naturally in my arms, like it’s where she always belonged.

“You haven’t told me why you need a fake wife,” Lily says, her soft voice breaking the charged silence that’s settled between us.

“It’s for work,” I reply, trying to concentrate on my words rather than the softness of her body against mine.

“Work? Why would you need a fake wife at work?”

“I’m looking to partner with a Chinese company on an important project. The CEO is a traditional man whose company values are based on commitment and family-oriented principles. I need a fake wife – or fiancée – to enhance my chances of securing a partnership.”

“Oh,” she mouths, nodding. “That makes sense, I guess.”

I tighten my hand around her waist, pressing her body closer to mine. A soft gasp escapes her lips as I bury my head in the curve of her neck, trailing my lips over her soft, velvety skin.

“W-what are you doing?” she whispers breathlessly.

“Giving in,” I mutter against her skin. “I can’t resist you any longer, Lilly.”

Her breath hitches, but she doesn’t try to pull away. That makes me happy. I drop my forehead to hers, searching her eyes for any sign of hesitation. She’s breathing fast, and her pupils are dilated with an unexploited desire that makes my pants tighten impossibly.

God, she’s indeed my weakness.

I lower my mouth to hers, gently nipping at her lower lip. “I want to kiss you so badly, Lily.”

“You said we didn’t have to do anything.”

“Not if you don’t want to,” I reply, praying to whatever god is listening that she wants this too. “You can stop me at any point.”

She melts into me, a soft sigh escaping her lips, and that’s the last straw. I press my lips to hers. Hot and hard.

She doesn’t fight it. Instead, she wraps her arms around my neck, angling her head to grant me deeper access. Her body,

flush against mine, feels like heaven. I can feel my cock thrumming impatiently in my pants, ready to plunge into her warmth.

But I must take things slowly with her. *Even if it kills me.*

I guide her towards the closet wall and press her back against it, splaying my hand over her neck as I run my lips over her jaw. I nip at her bottom lip, eliciting a soft, hungry moan from her.

“Damn, you’re driving me crazy,” I say, cupping her left breast through her shirt. I squeeze gently, loving the soft firmness and how she fits perfectly in my palm. “I could kiss you all day, sugar, and I’d never get tired.”

“Me too...” Her voice is a breathless murmur, one that makes me want to do wicked, wicked things to her.

I pinch her nipple between my thumb and forefinger just as I thrust my tongue into the heat of her mouth, robbing us both of our breath. I suck hungrily at her lip, running my hands all over her body, desperate for all of her.

I lift her in my arms without breaking the kiss and she instantly wraps her legs around me, burying her fingers in my hair with a soft moan that almost sends me over the edge. I make my way to my bedroom, which suddenly feels miles away.

Once inside, I set her on the bed and reluctantly pull my lips away from hers. We’re both breathing hard, and it’s taking every bit of my control not to swoop in again.

“I want to see all of you, Lily.”

“N-now?” she asks, blushing furiously.

“I’ll go first.”

Without taking my eyes off her, I strip, slowly removing every item of clothing until I’m completely naked. She roams her eyes over my body, her coppery green orbs darkening with a growing desire that makes me even harder.

“If you keep looking at me like that, I won’t be responsible for what I do next.”

Lily blushes even harder and averts her gaze. She lifts her shirt over her head and I almost keel over right there. She isn't wearing a bra.

"Oh, fuck," I mutter, growing impossibly harder at the sight of her full and perky tits. Then she pulls down her pants and stands before me in all her naked glory.

"My God, you're perfect," I mutter, unable to take my eyes off her.

In the past few days since we met, I've tried to imagine what she'd look like beneath those humble skirts and baggy shirts, but nothing prepared me for this perfection. Her flawless skin shimmers prettily in the dim lighting of the room, calling attention to the graceful curves of her slender body.

I let my eyes linger on the light patch of hair nestled in the crook of her legs before traveling up the flat expanse of her stomach to the sexy mounds of her full breasts. I finally meet her eyes and my breath hitches in my throat. She's staring at my cock, her eyes filled with curiosity and a hesitant hunger that only serves to add fuel to the fire in me.

Damn. This woman is going to be the death of me.

"I warned you not to look at me like that, angel."

My voice comes out harder than I intended, but I'm past the point of caution.

She swallows nervously, a deep crimson spreading rapidly across her face. "I..." She trails off, nervously licking her lips. "You just look so... magnificent."

My chest swells with pride at her words, and my lips stretch in an unconscious smile. "Do you want to touch it?" I ask, searching her eyes to gauge her reaction.

She blushes even harder but nods, a shy jerky movement of her head. I chuckle lightly in amusement, fascinated and excited by her sweet naivety. The women I've been with in the past were experienced; they knew exactly what they were doing and what to expect. But with Lily, it's all new. Her shy, yet unfiltered, response to my touch... Her curious caresses... Her tentative kisses... Everything feels so invigorating.

To think I'm her first for everything...

I'm determined to be her last. The only one that gets to elicit those little erotic moans and drive her crazy with pleasure. I'll teach her all she needs to know and then some.

"Come here," I say, gesturing to her as I lower myself to the edge of the bed. "Kneel between my knees."

She obeys without hesitation, kneeling between my legs. She glances up at me as if to ask for permission, and I give her an encouraging nod. She reaches out and gingerly strokes her hand along my length. I let out a hiss at the burst of sensation that tightens my very core.

"Oh, fuck!"

She quickly withdraws, her expression stricken with guilt. "I'm sorry."

I blink at her in shock. "What? Why?"

"You... you looked pained."

"Oh, no, angel," I mutter, taking her hand and placing it back on my twitching dick. With my hand over hers, I start to guide her up and down my length, gritting my teeth against the immense pleasure coursing through my nerves. "Your touch feels so damn good."

"Really?" she asks, her eyes lighting up with an emotion akin to awe.

I let go and watch as she continues to worship me with her palm until it feels like I'm going to combust in her face.

She licks her lips and that's as much as I can take.

"Fuck, I can't take this anymore," I mutter, roughly jerking her up against my body.

"What do you...?"

I seal my mouth over hers, savagely thrusting my tongue into the mouth. The kiss is aggressive, a testament to the lust running in my veins. I kiss her until we're both out of breath, then trail my lips down her jaw to her neck, nibbling lightly on a pulsing vein above her shoulder blade.

“How do you feel when I kiss you like this, baby?” I ask, running my tongue over the tip of her ear.

She shivers in response, arching into my touch. “I feel... good.”

I toss her back on the bed and crawl over her, supporting my weight with my elbow.

“Just good?” I tease, kissing the spot above her breast.

She gasps softly, her muscles bunching in anticipation beneath my mouth.

“More than that... Oh God!” She gasps when my teeth graze her hardened nipple. “I... I feel... God, don’t stop.”

I chuckle lightly, lifting my mouth to hers. “Now, I like the sound of that.”

I kiss her again, this time taking my time. I run my tongue over her lips before sliding into her mouth, slowly savoring the taste of her. I let my palm slide up her stomach to her breast, grazing her rock-hard nipple with my thumb.

She moans into my mouth, arching her back to press further into my palm. I guide her to the bed and make her lie down, then spread her legs and start to trail light kisses up her thighs. The scent of her instantly fills my nose, teasing the hell out of my senses.

I can feel her quivering beneath me, the sheets bunched tightly in her fingers. Gently, I slide a finger into her and she gasps loudly, unconsciously lifting her hip to meet my thrust.

Damn, she’s dripping. Ready for me.

“Does it hurt?” I ask, searching her face for any sign of discomfort.

“N-no,” she replies, shaking her head. “No, just a little strange.”

I pull out slowly and slide in again, this time, brushing my thumb over her clitoris. She lets out a muffled cry, her eyes snapping shut.

“What about now?” I ask, still pumping my finger in and out of her. “Do you want me to stop?”

“No,” she musters, running her tongue over her upper lip. “No, don’t stop, please.”

Oh, there’s no stopping me now.

Unable to resist the temptation any longer, I place my mouth over her clit and suck lightly while my finger continues to move within her.

This time she grabs my hair as she convulses violently beneath my mouth. “Gabriel!”

I continue fucking her with my hand and mouth until her body becomes weak with pleasure. Then, I slide up and seize her mouth in a sizzling kiss that leaves us both breathless.

I lift my head to smile into her dazzling, gold-freckled eyes. “This will hurt a little, honey.”

She nods and returns my smile as if to let me know that she trusts me. My heart tightens with an indecipherable emotion at that moment.

I reach into my bedside drawer for a pack of condoms and take one out. She places her hand to stop me just as I’m about to tear the sachet. I glanced at her face in time to see an indecipherable emotion cross her eyes.

“What’s wrong, hun?”

“I, uh, started on the pill last month, so you don’t need...” She trails off, averting her gaze as a deep blush spreads across her face.

The implication of her words dawn on me and I suddenly felt like a jerk.

“Oh, no, hun... That’s not it. I would gladly plant my seed in you and take delight in watching it grow.”

She blushes harder and I lean forward to kiss the tip of her nose. “My God, Lily, you’re so adorable. I just wanted you to feel safe, being your first time and all...”

“I do feel safe,” she says in a small voice. “With you.”

My heart skips a beat in response to her words, and everything in my world seemed to align perfectly at that moment. Right there and then, I realize I'm going to cherish this woman forever.

"I'm going in now," I mutter, leaning forward to kiss her forehead. She nods, her lips stretching into a soft smile as she looks into my eyes.

I've never experienced such total surrender... such trust.

Carefully, I arrange myself against her folds and gently slide into her. She tenses, clenching sporadically around my length. I stay still, not daring to move. I lean forward to kiss her forehead, cupping her angelic face in my palms.

"I'm sorry, beautiful..."

"I'm fine," she says, leaning into my kiss. "It doesn't hurt."

I start to move inside her again – slowly at first, then faster. Harder. Deeper. Until the world around us faded into nothingness with our breath intertwined, ragged and lustful.

She feels so good. Too good. *All mine.*

Deftly, I flip her over on all fours, then rise on my knees behind her and plunge into her wetness. She arches her back, pulling me in deeper, rocking her hips in tune with my strokes. The sight of her jiggling ass around my dick excites me even more, propelling me to go harder. Faster.

I slap my palm over her ass, watching the sumptuous cheeks jiggle deliciously. A guttural groan escapes my throat as I throw my head back and give into the animalistic urge to fuck until we're both blind with pleasure.

Suddenly, she cries my name, clenching hard around me before spiraling into a bout of frenzied spasms. I pull her up by her hair and seize her mouth in a hard, almost violent kiss as I continue to fuck her, riding the waves of her orgasm. I keep going until I can't anymore...

Then I let go, dropping my head into the curve of her neck with a voracious groan as I submit to the overwhelming wave of my climax.

I've never felt so raw... *so vulnerable.*

Chapter Five

Lily

I stare at my reflection in the mirror as the memories of the previous night invade my head. Even now, I can feel my body burning with a strange hunger, an insatiable craving for him. It doesn't make any sense that I feel this way about a man that I just met.

Yet, it felt so natural to be with him. So good.

A loud knock at the door distracts me from my thoughts. I glance in the direction of the sound with a slight frown, wondering if Dana forgot her keys or something else.

I quickly go over to the door and pull it open. "Did you... G-Gabriel?" I gasp as my eyes fall on the very man that's been on my mind all day. He looks incredibly handsome in a dark gray suit that molds perfectly to his tall, muscular body.

"H-how did you find me?" I ask, blinking at him in surprise.

"The address was on your resume," he answers simply, looking into my eyes with an intensity that sets my body on fire.

"B-but why are you here?" I ask, stepping outside and closing the door behind me. I don't need him to see my chintzy little apartment with its Goodwill furniture and Dana's socks strewn about the floor.

"You were gone when I woke up," he replies. "It seems you've forgotten the details of your contract. I've come to take you home, wifey."

"You shouldn't call me that," I say despite the warmth spreading across my face. "It's all fake anyway, right?" *It has to be. A man like Gabriel would never really want a woman like me.*

He advances slowly, trapping me between the door and his large body. "And last night?" His husky voice sweeps across my skin, leaving goosebumps in its wake.

“All of it,” I mutter, avoiding his piercing gaze. “W-we shouldn’t have done that last night.”

He steps forward, closing whatever gap remains between us. He lowers his head to my ear, his hot breath fanning my skin.

“Is that how you really feel, Lily?”

“I... Uh...” A soft gasp escapes my lips as he suddenly nibs at my earlobe. I immediately lose my train of thought and my head becomes a jumbled mess.

His right hand starts a slow trail up my thighs, bunching up my dress along the way until I’m almost bare to his smoldering gaze. My eyes unconsciously drift closed as I let myself get lost in the wicked sensations of his expert hands and mouth. I can feel a steady pressure mounting in the pit of my stomach, threatening to spill out of control.

He presses his palm against my aching pussy while his lips find their way to a sensitive spot on my neck. Just as I think I’m going to combust from an overload of pleasure, he slides a finger into me. I let out a muffled moan as my sex ripples around his finger, taking him even deeper.

“You’re so wet, angel,” he murmurs, withdrawing his finger and sliding in again, slowly.

I open my eyes to look at him and I almost forget how to breathe. His usually clear gray eyes have gone dark with a consuming hunger that sent chills down my spine.

“So ready for me...” he continues in an impassive tone as if he isn’t torturing me with his fingers. His strokes grow faster, deeper, until I’m panting for breath, grinding helplessly against insistent fingers, desperate for release.

Suddenly, he nips my clitoris, tweaking his hand in a way that sends me spiraling off the edge. I jerk violently against the door, biting down hard on my lip to muffle the scream that rise in my throat as I become subdued by the powerful wave of orgasm.

“That felt real to me, angel,” Gabriel says, slowly stepping away from me.

I search his face, trying to make sense of what just happened. I can't believe I just climaxed against the door, in the hallway, where anyone could have walked in on us.

And why do I find the thought exciting?

I close my eyes as I'm suddenly overcome by a series of conflicting emotions: confusion, excitement, arousal, and more confusion.

"God, what are you doing to me?" I ask, opening my eyes to look at him again. "I can't... This doesn't make any sense."

"What doesn't? The glaring attraction between us?" he asks, his stormy gray eyes boring into mine, holding me prisoner to his gaze. "There's no denying this, Lily. You want this too. But I see you've not come to terms with your desires. I promise, as difficult as it is, not to do anything until you ask me to. I'll wait. No matter how long it takes."

"What if I never ask?"

He smirks, an arrogant curve of his lips that make him look even more handsome. *Lethal*. "Oh, you will."

"I-I think you should leave now."

"Yes, *we* should leave now," he says, glancing at his watch.

"W-we?"

"Yes, Lily. You read the contract my lawyer sent to you, right? You have to live in my house for the duration of our fake engagement."

"Yes, I did. Of course."

Of course I didn't. I was so desperate for the money that I immediately signed the copy of the contract sent to my email and sent it back.

"Okay, great," Gabriel says with a nod of approval. "Let's pick your stuff and get going."

"Uhm... I can't"

"Why not?" He asks with an impatient frown.

"I have to be at an interview."

“What interview?”

“Oh, I applied for the position of secretary at Rhiley’s Cosmetics, and I have to be there in an hour.”

“Forget it.”

“What? Why?”

“Because you, Miss Thomson, have been employed as my executive assistant,” he replies, his expression unchanging.

“Effective immediately.”

Chapter Six

Gabriel

It's been a long, torturous week. Having Lily in my home and office all the time but not being able to touch her is a form of torture specially coined for me by the devil. Many times, I've wanted to go back on my words, damn the consequences... But for some inexplicable reason, I want to be honorable to her. *For her.*

It's why I stayed out late tonight, hoping she'd have gone to bed by the time I got home. As usual, I plan to have a long, cold shower and fall into a fitful sleep where my dreams are filled with her.

I walk into the living room to see her, closing the door behind me with a tired sigh. I've almost walked past when my eyes fall on the huddled figure on the long couch.

She's lying on her side, her wavy red hair cascading like a fiery waterfall over the edge of the couch. Even in sleep, she's so gorgeous. *Delicate.*

I walk over slowly, careful not to make any noise that'll disrupt her sleep. I squat in front of her, an unconscious smile tugging at my lips as I reach out to caress her face with the back of my knuckles.

I could watch her sleep for hours and I wouldn't get tired. She looks so peaceful. So content. That peace was one of the things that drew me to her the very first time I saw her. *Well, apart from her staggering, yet innocent beauty.*

But for some reason, I crave that gentleness about her, that beautiful purity that shines from within... Perhaps it's because I've made decisions that I'm not proud of in the course of my life. Maybe I'm finding redemption by association.

She shifts slightly in her sleep, and suddenly, the serenity is disrupted by a deep knot in between her brows. She twitches again, more violently this time, her features ravaged by a heart-wrenching pain.

“No,” she mutters, shaking visibly now. “No... no, please...”
A teardrop slides down her face, her lips trembling slightly.

My heart breaks at the sight, and I can't help but wonder what type of demons she's battling behind those closed lids.

“Wake up, angel,” I say, shaking her slightly.

She opens her eyes slowly and for a moment, she stares at me, her gaze unfocused. I watch closely as recognition creeps into those magical, golden green orbs, followed by the slightest breath of relief.

“Oh, Gabriel!” she mutters, throwing her arms around my neck.

I stagger from the unexpected action but instantly wrap my arms around her, holding her close to my body. “It's alright, hun. I'm right here.”

She nods in response, burrowing deeper into my embrace. I pull back a little to look at her face. “Let's get you to bed, alright?”

I pick her up, bridal style, and head into the room she's been staying in since she arrived at my house. I gently lay her on the bed and arrange the sheets around her.

“Do you want to talk about it?” I ask after she's settled in comfortably.

For a second, I think I see a fleeting panic in her eyes, but I'm not sure because she looks away from my eyes and shakes her head.

“No, I don't.”

“It's fine, darling,” I say, giving her a reassuring smile. “I'll leave you to get some sleep.” Gently, I move the stray strands of hair away from her face and lean forward to place a soft kiss on her forehead. “Sweet dreams this time, angel.”

“Thank you,” she mutters with a grateful, albeit hesitant smile. “G'night.”

I nod in response and turn around to leave. I'm almost halfway to the door when her voice reaches me.

“Gabriel?”

I turn to face her. “Yes?”

“Can you-” She swallows nervously, licking her lips in a way that sends blood shooting straight to my cock. “Can you stay with me tonight? I- I want you.”

Oh, she doesn't have to ask twice.

Chapter Seven

Lily

Gabriel trails light kisses up my shoulder blade to my neck, then captures my mouth in a sizzling kiss. His hands are everywhere: my back, my ass, my breasts... *Squeezing. Kneading. Teasing me senseless.*

We've somehow managed to get rid of our clothes in a frenzy, and now he's determined to drive me crazy with his mouth and hands. *Not that I'm complaining.*

I love the taste of him. I love the way he kisses me like he can't get enough of me... I love how his hands leave trails of fire behind on my body...

I've come to love all the sinful things he does to me. It makes me wonder if I can make him feel even half of the pleasure he gives me.

Mustering all of my strength, I flip him so I'm lying on top of him.

Gabriel lets out a surprised laugh. "Ooh, honey, that's hot," he teases, his eyes twinkling with humor and an unsheathed hunger that ignites my own lust. "I never knew you were so strong."

I chuckle despite the heat crawling up my neck. "I was wondering..." I murmur, trailing a finger down the ripped muscles of his chest. "What do you taste like?"

He smiles, watching me for a second with an unreadable expression. "Why don't you find out for yourself, honey?"

"Can I?"

"Sure, love. I'm all yours."

Something about the lightness of his tone and the unabashed eagerness in his eyes serves to bolster my courage. I suddenly feel... empowered.

I lean forward to kiss his shoulder down to his chest, loving the smooth, yet rugged feeling of his body beneath my lips. I

hover hesitantly over his nipple for a second, then swirl my tongue over one hardened bud. He hums, his eyes darkening in that way that always steals my breath away. I kiss his other nipple, loving as it instantly pebbles under my ministrations. Then I move to his rib bones, scooting backward in a way that brings my ass in contact with his growing hardness.

“Oh, fuck,” Gabriel mutters, twitching lightly. “What’re you doing, love?”

Instead of replying, I continue to trail butterfly kisses down his abdomen, lower... until my lips are hovering above his throbbing length. I run my fingers lightly over him, thrilled by the sheer magnificence of his size.

He tenses beneath my touch, his muscles jumping in a way that sends chills down my spine. I love to see him like this... intentionally vulnerable. Laid bare – *for me*.

I take him fully into my hands, watching as his eyes darken almost dangerously. “Oh damn,” he hisses through his teeth. “Who taught you things like that, honey?”

“You,” I reply, imitating his lopsided smile.

“Oh fuck,” he mutters, his voice laced with amusement.

I wrap my lips around his tip, watching as his expression morphs into a tortured grimace. Then I swirl my tongue around him, loving the salty taste on my tongue.

“Oh, Lily,” Gabriel moans, closing his eyes. “You’re killing me.”

I take him fully into my mouth and freeze, momentarily overwhelmed by his fullness. He must have sensed my hesitation, because he weaves his hands into my hair to pull my face to his.

“You don’t have to, angel,” he says with a soft, reassuring smile.

I shake my head, pressing my lips together as a feeling of shame crawls up my chest.

“I want to,” I say when I finally find my voice. “You taste – feel – so good... I-I just don’t know what to do now that I’m

here.”

I try to duck my head but his hand on my skull holds me steady. “It’s nothing to feel ashamed of, honey. I love teaching you these things.”

And I love the way he calls me honey...

“Want me to help you?”

I bob my head even as my face grows hotter. I don’t care that I’m embarrassed, though, I just want to pleasure him as much as he does me.

He moves my mouth over him again. “Slowly, hun,” he mutters, his hands guiding my head as I take his length into my mouth. He seems to grow bigger the more I take him in until I can’t anymore. He bobs my head up and down again until we establish a steady rhythm.

“Use your hands, love,” he says, his voice unusually hoarse.

I wrap my palm around the lower part of his shaft and start to pump in rhythm with my mouth, slowly getting used to the feel of him on my tongue... the soft, velvety feeling of his flesh... the taut rigidity of his muscle... the overwhelming fullness and the delicious saltiness...

I love it all.

“More tongue, less teeth, honey,” Gabriel instructs. His voice has become so husky it’s barely audible. “Yeah, just like that.... Oh, fuck me. Oh, Lily...”

I take him in deeper until my throat tightens around his tip and he lets out a long string of mumbled curse words, his hands tightening painfully in my hair. He jerks my head upwards, almost as if he’s in pain, but I immediately go down on him again, taking him even deeper this time.

I don’t care that my throat is burning like crazy or that I’m choking so bad it feels like I might drop dead at any second... None of that matters as long as Gabriel is enjoying it. His uninhibited moans sound like music to my ears.

I continue to suck him harder. Faster. I hollow my cheeks to tighten the friction while caressing his balls in my palm.

Suddenly, he starts to shudder beneath me, his fingers biting into my scalp as he lets out a tortured grunt. “Oh, fuck! I’m going to come in...”

A wetness shoots up my throat, hot and thick. I jerk backward in time for the rest to land on my face. I run my tongue over my lips, tasting him. He watches me, his eyes clouding up with a dark passion as he jerks me up roughly.

“Oh, come here,” he grunts before smashing his mouth to mine. The kiss is hot, aggressive, and, at the same time, toe-curling.

Then, without warning, he flips me over and drives into me with a ferocity that shakes me to the bones.

“Gabriel!”

He buries his head in my neck and continues to plunge into me in long, deep strokes until I become a shivering mess beneath him.

And just when I think I’ll die of pleasure, he sits up on the bed and swings me onto his lap, setting me down on his hard length in one brutal thrust. I let out a tortured cry and my muscles contract to accommodate him.

“Oh, you’re in for it, love,” he mumbles, nibbling on my earlobe as he continues to plunge into me, his hand on my waist guiding my movements. “You shouldn’t have teased me like that.”

“Oh, but I wanted to,” I gasp in between jerky moans as his thrusts grow deeper. Faster. “I – like – to please – youuuu... Oh, God!”

“Do you like when I fuck you like this too?” he asks, kneading and spanking my ass.

“Yeah...” I whisper, forcing the word past my clogged throat.

His hands roam down my back and settle on my bottom, and then he lifts me and slams me down again.

I scream his name, burying my head in the crook of his neck as an insurmountable pressure starts to build in my core. His hands remain on my bottom, guiding my hip movement as I

ride him relentlessly. I close my eyes and throw my head backward as pleasure courses through me in powerful waves. At that moment, it feels like gravity has ceased to exist and I'm flying, spinning down a bottomless pit full of sinful pleasure.

It doesn't matter that I've climaxed three times in the last hour since he accepted my invitation to stay. Each time feels like the first, yet better than the last. Every touch, every thrust, sets my body on fire anew.

I can't seem to get enough of him. Not tonight. *Not ever.*

Suddenly, his hold on my waist tightens and I feel him rippling inside of me, filling me up even more as we climax together. I grab onto his shoulder to steady myself as the orgasm goes on and on.

"Look at me, Lily!" he commands, his tone urgent. "Now."

Mustering the last of my energy, I hoist myself upright to look at him. His eyes lock on mine, and at that moment, I glimpse a vulnerability that shakes me to the core. Something passes between us then, something magical that defies logic.

It's a long time before we both come back down to earth. Only to go again. And again.

Hours later, I lay in the safe cocoon of his arms, spent and sated. I'm almost drifting asleep when his voice breaks the silence.

"I'm glad I found you, angel," he whispers in my ear and pulls me even closer against his chest.

I snuggle deeper into his embrace, feeling safer than I have in a long time. "Me too," I mutter as I give in to the insistent pull of sleep.

The next morning, I wake up surrounded by Gabriel's intoxicating, yet reassuring scent. He wasn't beside me but he'd left a note on his pillow:

Hey, sleeping beauty.

You looked so relaxed that I didn't have the heart to disrupt your sleep.

Out on my morning run. Be back soon.

Love, Gabe.

PS: Would you like to go to dinner with me tonight?

I trail my finger over the confident, sprawling handwriting. How can everything about him be so uniquely beautiful?

“Of course I’ll go to dinners with you,” I mutter, a silly giggle escaping my lips as I hold the letter to my chest.

Just then, my phone rings, jolting me out of my reverie. I glance at the screen to see an unknown number. I pick the phone up, taking a deep breath before placing it over my ear.

“Am I speaking with Miss Lilian Thompson?” asks a firm, feminine voice as soon as the call connects.

“Yes. How may I help you, ma’am?”

“This is Kate Sawyer from Hopeville Hospital in Havenbrook. I’m calling about Miss Ella Thompson. We were unable to locate her guardian, and you were listed as her next of kin. I’m sorry to inform you that the patient passed.

“What?” I ask blankly. The words don’t register. *That can’t be right. I gave Mom the money. She had her surgery. She’s fine.*

“Miss. Ella Thompson. You’re her sister, aren’t you?”

“Y-yes. But Ella can’t be dead. There must be a mistake. She had her transplant just a week ago.”

“Transplant?” she repeats, response voice resounding with confusion. “There was no surgery scheduled for Miss Ella. Her condition worsened last month, but she lost the fight a few days ago. Since then, we’ve tried to contact her guardian to no avail.”

“That’s not possible,” I say, my head reeling as fast as my pounding heart. “I wired two hundred thousand dollars to Mom for the transplant just two weeks ago. How can there be no surgery?”

“I’m sorry, but we have no knowledge of that transaction,” Ms. Sawyer says. A contemplative silence passes, and then she sighs softly. “If your mom is Ella’s guardian, then she hasn’t

come around since she left after Ella was rushed down here. That was two months ago.”

“W-what?” I mutter. My head suddenly feels like lead as I try to make sense of my churning thoughts.

This had better be a dream, because it doesn't make any sense.

“That doesn't make any sense,” I repeat out loud. “I spoke to Mom after the money was deposited and she confirmed the payment. I- I can't believe...”

“Did you speak to your sister?” The nurse cuts in gently. Her voice holds no accusation but a heavy weight instantly settles on my chest. Guilt burns brightly in my throat as it dawned on me how lackadaisical I was about my sister.

“I was busy...” I let my words trail off as they sound lame, even to me.

Busy? Too busy fucking Gabriel Foster to check in on my sister? Sure, that'd be an acceptable excuse.

I would have justified my carelessness with the fact that I had to earn the money for her medical bills, but that isn't true. The money's been sent. The truth is I've gotten so lost in this magical bubble that's Gabriel Foster's world, so lost that I've forgotten my reality.

Now Ella is dead and it's all my fault!

“I'm sorry about your loss, Miss Thompson,” Ms. Sawyer says, her voice softening with genuine sympathy. “However, you'll need to come down to the hospital at your earliest convenience to claim the body and make arrangements for a burial. Goodbye.”

The line goes dead.

“No... No...” I mutter, springing out of bed and running towards the door like the devil was on my heels.

Ella can't be dead.

Chapter Eight

Gabriel

I press hard on the gas, praying to the heavens that she's safe. And that I find her. I never believed in prayers but now I'm desperate enough to supplicate for help from a higher being. I'll kneel – no, I'll crawl on the ground and *beg* if that's what it takes to bring Lily back to me.

My angel...

It's been three days... Three long, torturous days since I got back home to find her gone. I've called her a million times, but I keep getting her voicemail. Her soft and perky voice, instructing callers to leave a message, is the only thing keeping me sane right now.

I must have gone back to the address she used to live at a hundred times, but each time, there's no one at home. I don't have her friend's phone number and no one in the whole damn apartment building had useful information. It's infuriating, to say the least. I feel like I'm slowly losing my mind and there's nothing I can do about it. These past days without her made me realize that I can't live without Lily. It doesn't matter that I haven't known her that long. One thing is certain: I'm in love with Lilian Thompson:

And that's why I kept going back to Dana's apartment even though I knew no one was home. It was all I could do to stay sane. Today though, I got lucky. I met Dana at the door on her way to work. Before giving me Lily's hometown address, she'd told me a part of Lily's past that broke my heart and made me angry.

From what Dana told me, her stepfather was a violent drunk who took his rage out on their family, and her mother was a neglectful shrew who insisted Lily always respect the "man of the house." After spending her whole life trying to protect her sick little sister, she took matters into her own hands and sent him running out of their lives. Now her mother blames her for the fact that their breadwinner is gone. Apparently, her getting

more than a part-time job is out of the question. Instead, it's Lily who must pay for their bills, even though her mother has cut her off and kept her from her sister for months. Worse, she took all of the money I gave Lily and left Ella to die alone while my angel was none the wiser.

I was angry at those whose job was to protect her but hurt her instead. I was angry at the universe for dealing her such a shitty hand and at myself for not paying better attention. I now understand the deep pain on her face as she battled the demons in her nightmare. I now understand the fear in her eyes when I asked if she wanted to talk about it.

My angel had a really hard life, and that pisses me off to no end. I'm determined to protect her against the world now and forever. So here I am, pulling up in front of a small bungalow with fading white paint and what looks like a once-thriving flower garden.

I get out of the car and run to the front door, hoping to God that she will let me in. I press the doorbell, but there's no response. I'm convinced she's inside the house, though. So I keep knocking until the door is pulled open from within.

And there is Lily, staring at me with a blank look. I blink at her in shock, unable to believe my eyes. In just three days, she looks like she's been to hell and back. Her hair is all over the place, and her skin is unnaturally pale. She has deep bags around her swollen red eyes, and her lips are so dry they're starting to blister.

"Oh, angel," I mutter, reaching out to hug her, but she steps back stiffly.

Disappointment courses through me, but I push the feeling away. This isn't about me.

"How did you find me?" she asks in an unusually detached voice.

"Dana gave me the address."

She nods and steps aside a little. "I see. Come inside."

The inside of the house is almost as shabby as the outside, with old furniture and tattered wallpapers.

“Please, sit,” she says, gesturing to the couch. “Would you like something to drink?”

“No thanks,” I reply, wondering why she’s being so cold. I’ve never seen her this way. It’s beyond terrifying.

“I’m sorry about your sister,” I say, moving to stand in front of her. “I don’t know...”

“You shouldn’t have come,” she cuts in, looking squarely into my eyes. “I’m sorry I left before the contract ended. I promise to pay you back. I have some money saved now, and I...”

“That’s not the point, Lily,” I say, taking her hands in mine.

“What’s the point, then?” she snaps, snatching her hand away to gesture around widely. “What other business can you possibly have in this hell?”

“Lily, I...”

“My life is a hoax, Gabriel,” she says with a self-deprecating snicker. “You know nothing about me. I’m not some innocent angel like you want to think. I tried to kill someone. I’m an attempted murderer, and a fucking liar and failure.”

“Lily! Why would you say such a thing about yourself?”

“Because it’s true!” she replies, running a hand through her hair as tears fill up in her eyes. “I got tossed out of my family and lied to by my mother, and now Ella is dead and *it’s all my fault!*”

She closes her eyes, tears streaming down her face as she falls heavily against the wall behind her.

“This was her revenge,” she continues limply. “She blames me for running off her asshole husband and my sister was a sacrifice in her lies and games. I didn’t even get to say goodbye to Ella. The poor girl was alone in her last moments. It’s all my fault... if only I’d just walked away and gone to bed that night. If only I never left home...”

I walk over to where she’s standing and gently cup her face with my palms. “Look at me, angel,” I say gently and I’m glad when she obeys. Her once-lively eyes are now filled with a

host of heartbreaking emotions. I can see the sadness, confusion, anger, and even her cry for help.

She needs me as much as I need her...

“Dana told me everything,” I say, keeping my voice leveled and my eyes locked to hers. “Whatever happened with your stepfather was in self-defense. It’s not your fault that you were surrounded by crappy adults who hurt you instead of protecting you. I’ll protect you now, Lily. No one, not even your mom, will be able to hurt you now.”

“W-why?” she asks in a small voice, tears flowing down her cheeks unchecked. “Why would you even bother with me?”

I smile into her eyes, brushing my thumb over her cheeks to clean her tears. “Because I love you. I love you, Lily.”

Her mouth drops open and she blinks at me like I just dropped a bombshell. “T-that’s not possible.”

“Why not?”

“Because y-you just can’t love a woman like me,” she replies with a helpless shrug. “Look around you. This is my reality. I don’t belong in your world, nor you in mine.”

“There are no boundaries in love except the ones you set to stop yourself, Lily,” I say gently. “You’re an exceptional woman and I’d be lucky to have you by my side.”

“B-but...”

“No buts, Lily. I loved you from the moment I laid eyes on you in the lobby on the day of your first interview. And that’s why I came up with this ridiculous fake marriage thing; it was the only way I could get closer to you.”

“The thing about your Chinese business partner was a lie?” she asks, blinking up at me in surprise.

“Yes, it was all a ruse,” I reply with a small smile. “I couldn’t come up with anything better at the time. I wanted to have you all to myself, so I lied.

“But I don’t regret the lie, Lily. The past three days have made me realize that I don’t want to live without you. I can’t.”

“Oh, Gabriel,” she sobs, throwing her arms around my shoulders and burying her face in my neck.

I wrap my arms around her and hold her tightly against me as she sobs. “I’m not going to let you go,” I mutter against her hair.

We remain that way for a long time, and when her sobs finally quiet down, she pulls back slightly and smiles shyly at me. Swollen eyes and all, she’s easily the most gorgeous woman to me.

“I- love you too, Gabriel,” she says, holding my gaze despite the furious blush spreading across her face. “I think I started to fall for you when you cooked for me at your house. Or maybe earlier than that,” she adds with an embarrassed chuckle.

“I want to hear you say it again,” I say, trailing my thumb slightly over her lower lip. “Say you love me, angel.”

“I love you, Gabriel.”

I start to lean in for a kiss, but she pulls away, shaking her head with a playful laugh. “I haven’t had a proper wash in days. I must stink so badly and...”

I seal my mouth to hers, cutting off her nervous rant. She instantly melts into me with a small moan of satisfaction. She slides her arms around my neck and buries her finger in my hair, pressing herself closer to my body.

“Gabriel!” she yelps in surprise when I sweep her up in my arms. Her tinkling laughter sounds like music to my ears, and I can’t imagine a life with that beautiful sound.

“What way to the bedroom, hun?”

Epilogue

Lily

One year later

I curl up into his warmth with a contented sigh, and his arms instantly wrap around me – the same strong and possessive arms that have shielded me from the world in the past year. They have become my favorite place to be... It's where I find the most peace.

The past year has been a whirlwind of events, from learning to forgive myself and everyone in my past to getting married to the most amazing man on earth. Gabriel has been by my side at every step of the way, and now I can't even remember what my life was like before I met him.

“Are you tired, honey?” Gabriel asks with a soft kiss on my shoulder. “What do you say we see the stars again?”

Seeing the stars is our innuendo for lovemaking, and I can already tell he's growing hard. The feel of his hard length against my naked ass instantly sends a jolt down my spine. It doesn't matter that I just had an earth-shattering orgasm moments ago or that we make love countless times every other night – and several times during the day, sometimes – I always want him with a renewed vigor each time. Maybe it's the unfiltered passion and lust that I see in his eyes each time he looks at me, or the indisputable knowledge that he loves me against all odds... For some reason, every time with him feels like the first time, but better than the last.

I turn around to face him, sliding my leg between his naked thighs. I smile into his handsome face, slowly trailing my fingers over the defined muscles of his chest. “Thank you.”

“For making you see stars over and over again?” he asks with a playful smile, leaning in slightly to peck me on the nose.

“No, silly.” I laugh, then shrug lightly. “Well, that too... But I just want to thank you for making me the happiest woman on earth.”

“Well, you make me happy too, angel,” he says, kissing my forehead this time. “My life has made more sense since you walked into it. What do you say I thank you with a mind-blowing orgasm. I can thank you all night long, you know?”

I chuckled, shaking my head at his silliness. I’m sure the public would be shocked to discover that the almighty Gabriel Foster has such a goofy side to him. A side he shows only to me... I guess that’s what makes it all the more special.

“I’ve been wanting to tell you something,” I say, looking into his eyes.

“Okay, love...”

I take his right hand in mine and gently place his palm over my flat stomach without taking my eyes off his. “We’re going to be parents, baby.”

“What?” he asks, staring at me in disbelief. “R-really?”

I nod eagerly, watching the beautiful transition of emotions in his gorgeous eyes. “Yes. I took a confirmation test earlier today and it was positive.”

His face lights up with a bright smile even as tears glisten in his eyes. “My God, angel...” he whispers, his voice filled with awe as he presses his palm gently over my stomach. “My child’s in there?”

A tear slides down from the corner of his left eye.

“Are you crying?” I ask, running my thumb over his wet cheek.

He chuckles, raising his tear-filled eyes to mine. “It’s just... I’m just very happy. I was lonely for the longest time. I’ve always wanted to have a family, and then you came along to make my dreams come true.” He wraps his arms around my back and presses me closer to himself, burying his face in the crook of my neck. “Thank you so much, my angel.”

We stay like that for a long time, each settling into the realization of the next phase of our lives. I have no doubt it’ll be magical... even more than the past year.

“I love you, Lily,” Gabriel says, finally breaking the silence. “I love you so much.”

I pull back a little to smile into his eyes. “I love you too, Gabriel.”

Putting my hand between us, I wrap my palm around his length. His breath hitches and his eyes instantly darken with lust. Slowly, I start to stroke him, and then I smile, watching his beautiful reaction to my touch on his face.

“Can we go see the stars now?” I ask in a sultry voice that’s sure to get him riled up.

“Oh, definitely!” he says, sealing his mouth to mine in a long, passionate kiss.

~The End

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I made my nightclub the hottest spot in Chicago all on my own. But since a scandal rocked the club's reputation, I've found myself crawling back to my father for help. His expectations are clear – I have to find a wife, fast.

When I meet a green-eyed spitfire working as one of my waitresses, I know I've found the right woman.

Now I just need to *tame* her.

Dana

With my stalker closing in, I need to make enough money to get out of Chicago. But even though I'm working myself ragged, it's taking forever to save anything with my waitressing job. My boss makes me a crazy offer: pretend to be his fiancée and walk away with enough cash to start over.

This is a business arrangement, nothing more.

I won't let myself be tamed.

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The Kingpin's Obsession

Alice

I saw something I shouldn't have, and my life is in danger.

The police won't listen, and I have no choice but to seek help at Benedetti's, a bar known for its criminal clientele. But I'm barely inside the door before a dark eyed devil drags me back out and demands to know why I'm there. I shouldn't trust him, but I don't have a choice when he's the only one willing to help me.

Too late, I learn who he really is, and now I'm left to wonder... when this is all over, will he save my life only to break my heart?

About the Author

Cassi lives to write brazen OTT, insta-love, short stories, about possessive alphas and the women they love. Stories that will leave you satisfied, and maybe blushing a little. Cassi loves pedicures, being pampered in any way possible, her darling golden Princess, amazing coffee, and traveling too anywhere warm.



Cassi  *H*  *nt*