"I swear, sir! I had no idea!"

Leo.

under his nose.

loosening it.

The man said with pleading eyes that flickered away from mine more o en than not. I knew people found it hard to return my gaze, but the least this bastard could do was try hard enough if he wanted to convince me that he wasn't aware of the that had been going on Sweat beaded his forehead. His hands tugged nervously at his tie, "You're telling me," I said in a calm voice, tapping my finger on the arms of the chair I was sitting on. Hischair in hiso ice on the finance

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Chapter 2

department floor, while he stood on the other side of the desk, "that you, the head of the financial department of the whole corporate, did not know that one of your employees, who worked right under your nose, was embezzling funds?" He gulped before slowly nodding, clasping his hands behind his back so I wouldn't see them shaking. Too late! thought, standing to my full height, putting my palms on his desk and leaning forward. "Millions of dollars gone. And you had no idea?" I asked lowly, my

face not showing the smallest hint of emotion. "Y-yes, sir. I would never let something like that slide, s-sir," he stammered, looking over my shoulder, never meeting my eyes. My gut had never steered me wrong when it came to people. Something I inherited from my mother, as she so o en liked to remind me. And my gut told me this particular human being was up to his eyeballs in this mess. A few years ago, I had been hesitant to agree to his promotion to be the next head of finance. But he looked good on paper, his colleagues liked him, and there was no reason whatsoever to object. Except for my instincts. I hadn't listened to my instinct at the time. And now I paid for it. "Hmm," I nodded, then straightened up. "I see," I said, buttoning my dark blue suit and walking past him in silence out of his o ice. The other employees were focused on their work, or pretended to be, since they had been so focused on the happenings in their boss's

o ice a second ago. Four pairs of feet followed me as I walked to the elevator. I would give the department head a couple of hours to come clean. Otherwise, he was as good as dead. Well, he was done for anyway. He would certainly never step foot in any of my companies, that was for sure. But if he came clean, I might

consider not going hard on him; he might escape the fate of the other bastard who had been taking my money unrightfully. If he knew about the embezzlement, he would deserve everything I would do to him. If he didn't know, which was unlikely, he would also deserve it because he hadn't been doing his job properly, costing me millions of dollars due to his incompetence.

I walked through the silent floor towards the elevator. I could see one of the cleaning sta wiping away at the elevator buttons, her cart next I stood in front of the elevators as my assistant, Brandon, pressed one of the buttons for the elevator before standing back behind me.

The cleaning lady had obviously not noticed us or simply didn't care. She was rubbing at a corner furiously, her long black hair in a ponytail that le silky tendrils tickling the pale nape of her neck. At least someone was doing their job properlythought as one of the elevators dinged open. The other two were on their way up to the highest floors. The one that opened was the one with the cleaning cart in front of it, blocking its entry. The employee inside the elevator straightened as his wide eyes realized who was standing before him.

Brandon cleared his throat loudly, trying to catch the attention of the cleaning lady, but it was in vain. The employee inside the elevator was holding it open for us, his finger on the button while he looked in confusion and apprehension between the cart and the cleaning lady. Brandon awkwardly cleared his throat loudly again. I wasn't that bothered by the situation. It was quite entertaining, actually. Although my face must have told an entirely dierent story.

I was about to move the cart on my own because I obviously had two hands, and the fools behind me didn't want to touch it for some

reason. It was probably cleaner than their damn houses. But then one of the finance department employees that accompanied us in her outrageously bright red suit walked up to the woman and whispered hotly behind her. When the woman didn't make any sign of response, the employee grabbed her pale arm and jerked her backwards to see what was happening. I was not prepared for the sight that greeted me. She was a cleaning lady, and I had thought she would be a middleaged woman like most of them were. But I knew how judgmental I had been when I took in the young girl that couldn't have been more

than her early twenties. She blinked at us with puppy-like dark brown eyes. They were unsettling. She held my gaze longer than most people did. As soon as her eyes le mine, I wanted her to look back at me again. But she was staring at her cart with wide eyes, realizing no doubt the situation. Her cheeks tinged pink as she hurriedly freed herself from the employee's grip and dragged her cleaning cart out of our way. It gave me a moment to analyze her other features. Dainty features. A small, upturned nose and heart-shaped lips. Sooty lashes that framed impossibly dark eyes. Pale, unblemished skin but for the dark shadows under her eyes and the scarlet on her cheeks. I managed to wrench my gaze from her fascinating flushed cheeks

s hidden by the blue uniform she had on, and right wl

and stepped into the elevator, my assistant and two of my secretary department following closely. She still had her eyes down when we walked into the elevator. My eyes trailed over her small figure that was about to close, my heart almost skipped a beat when her eyes li ed to meet mine again. They were... unsettling. *** *** It was like I le my damn mind back on the tenth floor. Those enchanting, dark eyes refused to leave my thoughts even when I got back to work. Luckily, Jayden arrived around noon and was able to distract me with his usual foolishness. "Dude, I still don't know why you don't have a female assistant. You don't know what you're missing out on," he said as he sauntered into my o ice, his dress shoes echoing on the dark wooden floor. Brandon rushed behind him, looking nervously between me and Jayden. I had forgotten he wasn't used to Jayden just walking in without

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permission. "It's alright, Brandon. He's fine," I said, waving him o . He nodded, front of my dark oak desk, no doubt memorizing his face for future references before walking out. "New assistant?" Jayden said, looking at the closed door where the blonde young man had just walked out from.

looking at Jayden, who had plopped down on a black leather chair in "Mhm," I replied, finishing o some documents while Jayden waited. "You're going to get slapped for your sexist comments someday, and I will sit back and enjoy every moment of it. What do you want?" I said, "Ah... that ever-present scowl of yours," he said mockingly before his "They never learn," Jayden breathed out a laugh and shook his head.

"He's cute, though the wrong sex for me," he said before looking at me with a teasing glint in his green eyes that I was well used to a er decades of knowing him. "If I didn't know any better, I would have said you preferred men". leaning back in my seat. eyes turned serious. "So, what did the asshole say?" "What do you think?" I asked with an arched brow.

"What are you going to do if he doesn't come clean?" "The same fate as the one who was caught," I replied. "The investigation will take time since they covered their tracks well. But in waiting, I'm going to make sure they don't get out of the country, and that no one will employ them." I had enough connections to ensure both things. "That's harsh." "I know." I stood up. Jayden barked out a laugh and joined me. Running one of his hands through his brown hair, he stu ed the other into his dress pants. "You're as heartless as your father," he said as we both walked out of my dark colored o ice. "Actually scratch that. You're worse than he Brandon, who had stood up to look at me for instructions. "I'll take He nodded firmly and watched Jayden and I as we took the elevator. He was a good kid, Brandon. A er going through countless assistants, job. Even though it was still early to judge, I thought I might keep him. since I could remember, and surprisingly had never approached her about it. She was oblivious to his feelings. I was not. I had threatened

is". "I'll take that as a compliment," I said before turning to look at care of my lunch today, Brandon. You can go for yours." I may have finally found someone serious and good enough for the "How's Lydia doing?" Jayden asked casually, or as casually as he could when it came to my little sister. He had a thing for her, ever him to an inch of his life if he ever hurt her. "Good," I replied, my voice going so when I talked about my little sister. "Focusing on her business." "Still didn't find a man yet?" he asked, glancing my way. "If you don't man up and stop chasing everything in a skirt, she's going to find one soon, and it won't be you." "Jerk," he muttered under his breath. "I thought brothers are supposed to be opposed to their sisters having a love life." there's no reason for me to mind."

I sighed and gave him a long look. "If the man is good enough for her "And I'm good enough?" he asked, his green eyes expectant. "Not yet," I replied, and his hopeful expression turned into an annoyed scowl. Jayden was a couple of years younger than me, in his late twenties, making him a couple of years older than my sister, Lydia. Our families since I could remember. He took over his father a few years a er I did. They owned hotel and restaurant chains across the world. "What about you?" Jayden said as we walked out of the elevator. We were on the ground floor. Employees were returning from their lunch breaks, passing us by. My eyes caught one of the cleaning sta, and I found myself disappointed that it wasn't a little pale brunette with disarming dark eyes. I need to get laid! thought with a sigh.

"Leo?" Jayden walled in a frown as we walked through the busy street. "Not yet," I replied, trying to change the subject that I knew my mother would be too eager to address. "I'm living for the day I see you wrapped around someone's little finger," he said with a smirk. "Like you're one to talk. You'd hand Lydia your balls if she asked you to," I retorted, and his smirk widened. "Oh, she can have my balls anytime she want-ngh," he groaned and stopped to hold his side. "That hurt, you jerk." I kept walking without acknowledging his calls. A few seconds later, he was next to me, already recovered from the elbow jab I had given him. Hmm, maybe I was too so.

had known each other for ages, and Jayden had been in our lives ever å a "That hurt like crap," he grumbled as we walked inside the usual place where we got our lunch. It was packed, though not as much as it would have been at noon. That was why I always had lunch an hour later than regular employees. "Next time my sister and your balls come o in one sentence, I'll cut them o," I said lowly, as the waiter caught sight of me and walked inside the kitchen to get me my usual. "Hey, you started it!" "I used it as a figure of speech." "I used it as a figure of speech, t-" he stopped talking when I arched a brow at him, then rolled his eyes. "Fine, maybe not. He sat down on a stool by the counter grumbling lowly, "You know I'd never disrespect her."

"I know," I replied, paying the waiter who got me my order. "You're having lunch in that secret spot of yours again?" Jayden asked, eyeing my packed lunch. "Still not going to tell me where the hell it is?" I patted his shoulder before leaving the busy restaurant. Back at the building, I walked into the elevator and then headed straight for the The door was open as usual. I walked towards my usual spot, the top of a small structure on the roof, enjoying the cool breeze that whipped past me. I climbed the ladder as I usually did and then had my lunch. The distant noise of the city filled my ears as I took a bite of my sandwich. But my damn mind was still caught up on a pair of dark eyes that seemed to see more than they should. Her cheeks had been an endearing pink and her lips, bare of any stain, looked so . "Shit! I seriously need to get laid," I mumbled to myself, taking a drag of my cigarette, shaking away any thoughts of her for the rest of the day. What's so special about her that I couldn't get her o of my mind? a The next day I was hoping to catch sight of her in vain. I was even tempted to go back to the tenth floor. Luckily, I was too busy to do that, but not busy enough to keep her o my mind. Even the damn co ee reminded me of her eyes. Then the day a er, I woke up more annoyed than usual. The meeting I had with human resources and the finance department considering a replacement for the head of the finance was even more strenuous because I kept shooting down all their proposals. And when we were done, Brandon had to redo the meeting's report four times before I finally approved, which was saying a lot about my mood, since he was usually very meticulous with his work. Brandon had my lunch for me, and I was about to have it in my o ice since I was fed up with everything when I decided against it, and

headed for my usual secret spot. That was the best damn decision I had made in my entire life. I was climbing the last steps of the ladder when my eyes caught large, dark brown ones. She blinked at me in a surprise that matched mine. She had a sandwich midair to her open mouth, ready to take a bite. We were paused like that for a couple of seconds, a couple of seconds during which all the frustration and annoyance of the day drained out of me as my eyes drowned in hers. Her eyes were... stunning.

d6 ď But then the moment ended. Her eyes widened dramatically. She scrambled to her feet, holding her sandwich in a death grip. She looked around for a way out before realizing where she was then took a small step back. I almost walked up to her and held her in place because we were on the damn roof of a thirty-eight-floor building, quite close to the edge, and she wasn't looking where she stepped. "Whoa," I said, holding up one of my hands, "it's okay, you can stay." She froze, looking at me as I stepped on the surface. I decided against standing and just sat down. She stayed up. "You can stay." The words tumbled out of my mouth before I knew what I was saying. "If you want to be alone, I can go," I added, then made a move to stand up. She quickly shook her head and her hands no. I nodded, fighting back

a smile, then crossed my legs in a comfortable position while she stood there for a few minutes, just looking at me. Then a giddiness I hadn't felt in so long bubbled in my chest when she sat down, cross-legged, caddy-corner to me where she had originally been. Far enough so I couldn't reach her but close enough to hear what I said. "You come here o en?" I asked, looking at her. Her eyes were fixed on

my lips as she nodded. It made inappropriate thoughts that I shouldn't have been having about someone I had just met course through my head. I nodded back, then cleared my throat awkwardly while unwrapping my lunch. Jayden would give away half his fortune to see how awkward I was at the moment. What was I thinking when I decided to stay? But then I peeked at her while she took a bite of her peanut butter and jelly sandwich and decided that I had made a good call. I could at least find out what made her special. I thought that if I spent some time with her, I'd figure out she was just another girl a er all. Nothing special about her. We ate in silence, and surprisingly it wasn't as uncomfortable as I would have expected. She finished her sandwich and looked up at the sky, lost in thought. The way strands of her silky black hair teased the pale skin of her neck made my fingers twitch. Was that all she was going to eat? thought, feeling worried for some reason. A peanut butter and jelly sandwich was not a filling meal, especially for someone who did physical work. When did I start caring about strangers? a "How did you find out about this place?" I asked her to keep my mind from wandering to unnecessary questions. She stayed silent. I was quite sure I spoke loud enough to be heard, ď I tried catching her attention by waving my hand in her line of sight.

but when she stayed silent for another two minutes, I decided she probably was too lost in her thoughts. That or she was ignoring me. She jumped slightly and turned to me with surprised eyes, like she forgot I was even there. "How did you find this place?" I asked again. She turned her head from me, silent again, and looked down at her pocket from where she fished out a small notebook with a pen. I was lost as to what was happening, but my confusion didn't last long before realization washed over me, a cold shower of reality. 'I found it one day during my lunch break. I was looking for some place away from crowds,' she wrote on her notebook. I nodded then looked between her and the notebook, a question in my eyes. Her lips twitched up, sensing my hesitation to ask the question, then wrote in her notebook. 'I'm deaf.' She held up the notebook that had the answer to my question. I was silent for a second, just looking at the word. Deaf. A four-letter word I never thought I'd hear... or read, in this case. "You can read lips?" I asked, and she nodded. So that was why her We were silent for a few more minutes, me eating the rest of my food

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attention was trained on my lips. I felt ashamed of my improper thoughts earlier. Self-absorbed jerk! thought to myself. while she looked ahead to the distance. My eyes kept sneaking glances at her, I couldn't help but notice how her face was completely free of makeup- a rare sight- or how she had black circles under those eyes of hers, or how her fingers played with the pen in a de manner as if it was part of her hand. The pen and the notebook wondered if that was her only means of communication with everyone around her. Did she know sign language? She probably did. Then I found myself wondering how long she had been deaf. Was she born with it? But no, if she were born with it, she wouldn't know how to read lips, right? But then, how did she lose her hearing? I sighed internally, wrenching my eyes away from her, and taking a violent bite of my sandwich. What the hell was wrong with me? Why was I so damn curious anyway...? A small pale hand tapped my arm slightly, barely noticeable. I looked up to find a pair of dark brown eyes blinking at me, with a notebook held up. 'Do you work here?' My brows almost shot up to my hairline. Almost. I managed to keep a cool expression while I took in her question. but wouldn't she know who her boss was? Although technically, I was not her boss. More of a temporary

Was she serious? She didn't know who I was? Not to be self-absorbed, employer, for as long as the contract we had with her cleaning company lasted. I looked at her. She didn't seem like she knew who I was. But she could be a good actress... My instincts revolted against the idea. No... the innocence I saw in her eyes was genuine. I felt it in my guts. I nodded. "Yes. I do work here actually." She nodded back, then bit her lip deep in thought. What was she thinking about? I finished my sandwich, my hand automatically reaching out for the cigarette in my pocket, but then I froze. Maybe not such a good idea to smoke in our first meeting. My hand slowly retreated. "Do you come here o en?" I asked, and she nodded then wrote on her notebook. Her writing was neat, the letters small and cute. Cute? When the hell do I ever think shit is cute? I caught sight of her biting her bottom lip as she wrote. Yep, definitely 'I do. Every day for lunch break.' "I come here every day for lunch break, too," I said with a frown. "How come we've never met?" 'My schedule was switched. I used to have my lunch at 11,' she repuea.

I wondered why her schedule was switched up. She took her phone out of her pocket. Her large eyes widened when she saw the time. She quickly scribbled something in the notebook. 'I'm late. See you later.' She held it so I could read then scrambled to her feet, stu ing everything back to her pockets, then walked past me to the ladder. Her eyes caught mine before she disappeared, and she waved at me with a wide smile that dimpled her cheeks. I stared at her, awestruck, as she descended the ladder, because she had gotten a million times prettier when she smiled. No, not pretty. She was beautiful It was such a genuine smile. No ulterior motives, no sultry invitation. Just a pure smile. When was the last time a woman smiled at me like that? When others smiled in my face, it was either out of respect or because they wanted something. The latter applied more to women. I had seen sultry, seductive smiles loaded with desire and greed more times than I cared to recall. But her smile, it was something so untainted... "I didn't even get her name," I mumbled to myself a er I snapped out of my trance. A er some time, I walked back to my o ice, already eager for my lunch break the next day. "Good a ernoon, Brandon," I said, walking past his desk as he stared at me with wide eyes, no doubt wondering about the reason for my sudden change of mood as I almost skipped to my o ice.

The rest of the day went by considerably better than the first half. By the end of the day, I realized that I hadn't smoked even once in the a ernoon. Which was probably a good thing since I had smoked too much in the morning. My mom would be glad. "Hey, I'm heading to Matt's club. Wanna go?" Jayden asked, walking into my o ice, uninvited as usual. I looked at my watch. It was long past ten. I hadn't even realized it was this late. I sighed. "I don't know. You know I don't like how crowded it is." Jayden rolled his eyes as he sat down. "Oh come on. When was the last time you actually got laid? I'm genuinely worried for you as your future brother-in-law." "You're awfully confident about your chances with my sister for someone who is going to a club, possibly to find a one-night stand," I replied with an arched brow. He grinned, rubbing his hands together. "Well, I'm actually going there becauseyour sister will be there."

I frowned, then remembered she had told me about it. One of her friends had a birthday party at Matt's. They were reserving a private room in his club for the occasion. She even said her friend invited "Right, I'm actually invited," I said, rubbing my face, suddenly tired. "I guess I'll go." "You're invited?" Jayden asked, surprised. "Apparently. Lydia did beg me to come. Her friend is having a birthday party there and asked her to invite me." "You lady charmer. She's probably one of your fans," he said with a grin. "Well, that settles it. You got your night fixed up." He wiggled his brows. I shot him a scowl then walked past him shaking my head. For some reason, the thought didn't appeal to me as much as it would have done a few weeks ago. I was starting to get tired of the trivial flings and the empty encounters. My soul was yearning for something deeper, something meaningful. Jayden took his own car because I warned him I would probably leave earlier. Knowing him, he'd stick his ass to my sister to ward o any interested males. Which worked well for me. I wasn't worried about her around him, since I had warned him a long time ago what would happen if he ever got his hands anywhere near my sister and they weren't in a relationship. It was probably time to remind him again. "Jayden," I called as I gave my key to the parking valet when I reached the club. Jayden was already waiting for me. "Yeah?" he asked as I fell in step next to him, heading for the door from which I could already hear music blasting. "If you go anywhere near my sister without making things clear with her, I'll cut your balls and make you watch the crows eat them," I said, looking ahead. He sighed dramatically. "I have no idea how many times I have to tell you, don't worry about it," he said, waving me o . I caught his hand tightly in mine and looked at him. "Be careful. If you hurt her, I'll destroy you," I said, meaning every word of it. He must have sensed the serious threat in my low voice

because his expression turned grave. He nodded. I nodded back, then let go of his hand that he shook, slightly wincing. We walked through the backdoors, avoiding the crowded dance floor. The security knew us since their boss, Matt, was our friend. He wasn't as close to me as Jayden, though. I wasn't a very big fan of his overly frivolous nature. I was no saint, but he took things to another level. The loud music was just background noise for me as we walked up the stairs towards where a bouncer said they'd be. I could instantly spot my little sister downing shots when we entered the room. Great I thought, making my way between the scantily clad girls and drunk boys towards where she sat by the bar counter. It was a VIP room with a bar, a small dance floor and a few couches and seating arrangements. A ground to ceiling glass wall looked down to the main dance floor of the club. "Lydia," I called, standing next to her, gesturing for the bartender to take back the shots he was getting for her. His eyes widened when he you finishing up?" I asked, pushing some bl a Jayden snorted. I shot him a glare then looked back at Lydia. She was Leelee", she said, then waved her hand at the bartender while Jayden children. She only used it now and then when she was drunk or when was playful sometimes, he was always responsible. Especially when it

saw me, then he retreated. "Don't scare away the bartender," Lydia whined. Her blue eyes similar to mine- looked hazy under the dim lights of the room as she glared at me. "I want another!" "How about you take a break," I said, taking the bottle of water the bartender had put in front of me. At least he had some sense. Lydia gulped down the water I uncapped for her. "This isn't what I want..." hair out of her sweaty face as Jayden joined us, looking worried about Lydia. "Not yet!" she said, standing up and almost tripping over her own feet. Jayden caught her quickly and she looked at him with a frown before she smiled widely. "Jayden! You came!" She threw her arms around his neck. Jayden looked at me with wide eyes, holding his hands up. I didn't do anythinghis eyes tried to say. I rolled mine then helped my sister to sit again. "I want more shots," she said, slamming her hand on the counter. Then pointed at me, her eyes struggling to stay focused. "And you should drink, too! and get that stick out of your ass!" drunk out of her wits. "Is someone driving you home?" I asked, and she thought for a moment, looking over her shoulder around the room, then her eyes settled on me. "Why do you think I said you must come? you're my drive home bit back a smile. Leelee was her nickname to me when we were she wanted to tease me about something. Which happened quite o en. Although she always got quite frustrated since it never bothered me. "Don't drink, Jayden," I said, and he nodded. Even though Jayden concerned Lydia. For that I was thankful. Lydia whined about drinks to Jayden. I waved the bartender to me. "Get me and the man with her some water," I said a er he rushed to me, then made sure Lydia wasn't looking when I told him, "and water down her drinks." He nodded then did as told. Lydia cringed when she took a sip. She eyed her drink suspiciously, before shrugging and finishing her drink. "Hi! You made it!" A woman called from my other side, looking at me in a smile I recognized all too well. Her brown eyes trailed over my suit clad body. I had seen her before, probably a model for one of Lydia's shows. She was attractive, but her eyes held a glint I was well familiar with. "I'm Selena, I asked Lydia to invite you, I didn't think you would actually come", she said as I shook her so hand. She squeezed mine a little before letting go. She flipped her brown hair- or was it red? I couldn't tell under the dim lights- over her shoulder, then joined the three of us by the bar. Jayden was trying to keep Lydia from drinking too much. But there wasn't much he could do once she blinked her baby blue eyes at him. He was making a commendable e ort, though. I watched over them out of the corner of my eye as Sabrina, or was it Serena? Anyway, she kept talking about things half of which I blocked out because I was itching to leave this place. I had no desire to hear

about how her last photo shoot went. Whenever I caught her eyes, I couldn't help but think they were the wrong shade of brown. They were too light. And her hair wasn't as black as I would have liked. Her skin was also too tan. Then I realized with a frown who I was comparing her to. I didn't have time to dwell on my thoughts because her hand found my knee as we were sitting side by side by the bar. "How about we go somewhere else?" she whispered in my ear. "You don't seem like a crowd person." "I'm not," I took a sip of my water and avoided her eyes. I hoped she could tell I wasn't enjoying her wandering hands too much, because I didn't want to tell her o and be rude. Not that I cared about her feelings, but the last thing I wanted was Lydia throwing a fit because I 'hurt' one of her friends. Although her choice of friends was in serious need of reconsideration. "Well, my apartment isn't so far from here," she said, her hand trailing up my thigh. I clamped my hand on hers, stopping its movement. "Your guests wouldn't appreciate it if you just disappeared," I said, pushing her hand away, still not meeting her eyes. Damn you Lydial thought as the dimwitted girl who didn't take a

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hint turned towards me in her seat. breath tickling my ear. I sighed and turned towards her, my face inches from hers. "I'm not interested, why don't you find some other gentleman who

"They wouldn't mind, I'm sure," she purred so close to my ear, her hot is," I said in an even tone. But my glare must have betrayed my annoyance. Her eyes flickered away, uncertain. She quickly retreated back, then hurriedly made an excuse and made herself scarce. Ah, finally, some quiet. Well, not so much because I was in the middle of a damn party in the middle of a damn club. "Hey, I think she's done," Jayden said as he scooped up my passed out sister. I sighed and stood up, walking next to him to the door. "You scared the shit out of that girl," Jayden said as we walked down the stairs, my sister sleeping soundly in his arms. "Scared her? All I did was politely refuse her advances," I replied o handedly. "Right," he snorted, "that glare of yours can make meshit my pants sometimes. I'm telling you, she must have peed a little." I shook my head as I took both our keys from the valet guy. I opened the passenger door to Jayden's car so he could put Lydia in. His house was closer to my parents' where Lydia still lived, so he would drop her there. "Thanks. Make sure my parents don't see you because if they do, my mom will start planning your wedding, and dad will 'accidentally' trip you down the stairs," I said as he closed the door with a grin. "Maybe I should let your mom see us. I like the sound of what she'll do," he said, looking thoughtful. I rolled my eyes and slapped him on the back as I passed him by. "You won't like it so much if Lydia found out," I called over my shoulder as I walked to my own car. Lydia was oblivious to Jayden's feelings. She considered him a brother, since he was practically raised with us. I couldn't blame her, really. Jayden didn't help his case very much since he had always been sleeping around. Although he did take it down a notch these

last few years. Especially a er Lydia had a stable relationship that lasted for more than the usual couple of months. I still didn't know what the hell he was waiting for. I parked my car in its spot in the underground parking of my apartment building. Then headed for the penthouse.

expression was a scowl. We didn't do it on purpose, it just came to us.

The only time we ever smiled was when we were with our family. Showing our emotions was sort of an oddity for both my father and

Maybe part of it was running the business. It hardened the heart to a

I had never been an overly friendly or chatty person, even before I took over my dad. But a er years of this line of work, I learned that

I slipped on a pair of boxers from my closet and then headed to bed.

The smiling face of a certain brunette a fresh, joyful memory in my

Continue reading next part □

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My sister always teased me about premature wrinkles.

certain extent.

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words weighed heavy.

Almost instantly, sleep took over me.

đ a a a ď It was dark as usual when I came in. A er years of living alone in this place, I could easily move with no lights on. a I had moved here right out of college, before I took over my father. I worked under him for about five years before he retired, he still came around to the headquarters from time to time just to see how things were going, and I still headed to him for advice plenty of times. I was grateful for my family. Even though my parents were both busy, they always had time for us. That was mainly thanks to my mother. She was big on family, and she would roast my father's ass any time he thought about skipping a family occasion or being late for something that involved us. a Lydia was very much like my mother. That was why she didn't leave the house yet. She loved living with our parents, especially a er my dad had retired. They spent even more time together. I jumped in the shower, the hot water fogging up the glass and running down the dark tiles to the drain. Memories of my lunch break flashed in my mind. She was... sweet. She was also one of those people who radiated calm and had a natural poise. I had only been in her presence for minutes, maybe half an hour. But my instincts never steered me wrong when it comes to people. It helped that she was cute. å As I wrapped a towel around my waist, I swiped my hand on the foggy mirror and saw something I hadn't seen in a while. My smiling face stared back at me. I hadn't even realized I was smiling. I remembered hersmile and mine widened even more. ₫¹ My mother always told me I was a lot like my dad. Not just her, a lot of people did. It was true, to a certain extent. Our natural, everyday