

## Chapter 3

**Leo**

The next morning was the longest damn morning of the whole year. Lunch just wouldn't arrive.

"If none of the employees are promoted, then we'll have to hire," the human resources head said, rubbing her temple.

"Well, if we hire, we'll have to do it quietly. The last thing we want is the press getting wind of what happened," another employee retorted as he tapped on the meeting table, staring at Suzannah.

I sighed and decided to put a stop to this fool show that had been going on for a couple of hours now. Finding a replacement for the head of the financial department of an international corporation was not as difficult as these idiots made it be. They just loved making things complicated, so it looked like they were actually doing something useful when all they'd done was reiterate the same shit with different and more eloquent words.

"If you think the press won't get wind of it, you must be completely out of your damn minds," I said, standing up and buttoning my suit. "The question is not if they'll find out or not. The question is when. And I want to be ready when they do. I want a statement ready at my desk by the end of the day to hand to the press," I said, looking at every single one of their faces as I walked around the table, my hands in my pockets.

"After I approve it, I want it communicated to every media we own and every media we have connections in.

"I don't want the finance employees to go around running their mouths with unnecessary rumors," I said, looking pointedly at the temporary appointed head of finance. He gulped, then nodded.

"Starting next week, the new head of the department will be appointed, and I want the finance department to prepare for an audit."

The finance employees that were present in the meeting all exchanged weary glances. This week would be a very tough one for them. But everything I had ordered needed to be done as soon as possible. I would not have a petty scandal ruin what my father and grandfather had built.

"But who will we be appointed to the position, sir?" Suzannah asked, her green eyes full of questions.

"I have an idea," I said, scratching my bearded chin as I thought about the perfect person for the job. He was a pain in the ass, but he was good.

"Any questions?" I asked, looking around. They all shook their heads as a chorus of 'no, sir' echoed around the room. "If there's something, go through Brandon. Dismissed," I said, walking out of the room.

I didn't get far before the sound of heels echoed behind me as Suzannah's voice called, "Sir."

I resisted the urge to roll my eyes and reluctantly turned. "Yes. Is there something else?"

"No, sir," she said, stopping in front of me, smiling and running her hand through her dark hair. "I was just wondering about the replacement. Should I have something ready for you?"

"No. We'll talk about it later, Suzannah," I said, glancing at my watch. "Anything else?"

"Right," she said, avoiding my deepening scowl. She was keeping me from lunch. "I'll talk to you later if there's something else. Have a nice lunch," she smiled. I nodded and turned, walking my way to the office where my lunch was already waiting for me, and it was still warm.

How Brandon managed to get it when he was in the meeting with me was beyond me, but there was a reason he kept his job for as long as he had. I would never admit it to his face, but he was the best I've seen so far. He was due for a promotion.

I grabbed my lunch and headed for the rooftop. I was not late since just as I opened the door to the rooftop, I could see her climbing the last step of the ladder.

I was surprised at my shift in the mood. I could literally feel the scowl as it slid off my face the moment I saw her.

I walked to the ladder and realized that I had actually been worried she wouldn't be there. She had said she liked this spot because it wasn't crowded, so I was immensely relieved that she still showed up knowing I could be here.

I climbed up the ladder. She was sitting in yesterday's spot. Her eyes, which were focused on the notebook on her lap, snapped up to meet mine as I dragged myself up and sat catty-corner to her again. I saw something close to a surprise flash in her eyes.

"Hi," I called, feeling my lips twitch up on their own. It was amazing how natural it felt.

She smiled and waved, then flipped to a new page. 'Hi, you're early.'

"Yeah," I settled for saying. What should I have said? That I had been waiting for one o'clock like a kid waiting for holidays?

I unwrapped my sandwich. She did the same. This time it was a plain bologna sandwich. I felt a frown tug at my features. She seriously needed to eat more.

The diner had my schedule of the whole week's meals, so that when Brandon or I or whoever we sent went there it would be ready accordingly. As I unpacked my lunch now, I realized that today was one of the days I had dessert after my lunch. Her eyes zeroed on the boxed piece of strawberry cheesecake. As soon as I looked at her, her wide eyes looked ahead again, as she squirmed awkwardly in her seat as her cheeks turned pink. She was so easy to read and her reactions were so genuine, that it was entertaining.

I bit into my shrimp sandwich, fighting back the urge to smile. She was too cute. She finished her lunch as I began eating the cheesecake.

I waved one of my hands in her line of sight to get her attention. She was keeping her eyes scrupulously away from the piece of dessert.

"Do you want some?" I said, pointing to the cheesecake. Her brows raised. She shook her head and her hands no. Her hair moved with her head, a silky fountain of jet.

"Are you sure?"

She nodded eagerly.

I shrugged and ate my dessert. She never looked my way again, but a few times when she thought I wasn't looking, she would sneak glances at me as I put a strawberry in my mouth. Her actions were too adorable, and I couldn't resist teasing her. So as soon as she thought I wasn't looking and she peeked at me, I would snap my eyes to her, her eyes would go wide like a kid caught with his hand down the cookie jar, and she would hurriedly look away.

It was endearing, but after two times she caught on my little game and forced her eyes to stay trained on the dull buildings surrounding us. By then her cheeks were tinged a strokable pink.

I finished half of the cheesecake, then sighed and closed the little box.

"Are you sure you don't want any?" I asked as she looked at me. She blinked at the box, then at me, then slowly nodded.

I shrugged and held the box in my hand, pulling my arm back like I was about to throw it out the building. In an instant, she was on her knees in front of me, holding her arms up to stop me.

Her eyes were wide, and her lips slightly agape. She looked at me like I was about to commit a horrible crime.

When I stopped my movement, she held up one hand for me to wait while her other hand grabbed the notebook.

"You can't just throw food away!" she held up the notebook in my face. She looked really angry, but I couldn't help but think her scowl was adorable.

"You said you didn't want it." I shrugged, finding it difficult to keep the smile off my face. "And I'm full."

Her eyes narrowed before she sighed and crawled on her feet close to me. She held her hand to my palm up and gestured to the box with her other hand.

"Would you look at that? you do want it after all." I said with an arched brow. Her eyes narrowed further as I put the box in her hand.

She quickly took it out of my grasp, holding it like a newborn baby as she sat down in front of me before reaching for her notebook again. She wrote and then held the page up for me to read without meeting my gaze.

'You shouldn't throw food away!!! There are people who are starving out there!'

She looked genuinely bothered by it. I wasn't actually going to throw it away. But I knew that if I threatened to do it, she would want to take the dessert. And I had been right about her.

"Hey," I said so lightly, dipping my head so she would see me. She looked up at me, and her eyes were even more entrancing from up close, her lashes like wings of black surrounding two dark brown orbs with specks of dark gold. "Sorry, I won't do it again".

She blinked at me before nodding with a smile.

'Can I have it?' She wrote and looked up at me with hopeful eyes. I couldn't help but smile at her.

"Yes, you can have it."

She smiled even wider as she wrote. "Thank you!"

It felt odd. It was like I was saying yes to her having more than just my dessert.

Then she dug in. Her eyes twinkled as she ate the strawberries on top before diving into the cheesecake itself.

I felt like I would be full just watching her eat. My eyes caught everything from the way her brows raised at the good flavour when she took the first bite, to how she licked her lip as she nodded to herself happily approving of the taste, and how she didn't mind using the same fork I had eaten with.

I was smiling again like an idiot as I watched her eat. But I didn't mind, I didn't mind at all. I couldn't remember when the last time was I actually smiled this much, with no reason but that I wanted to.

She looked up at me after taking the last bite, one of her cheeks still bloated with food. She reached for her notebook.

'Thank you! It was delicious.'

"You're welcome," I replied, then pointed out some crumbs on the corner of her mouth. My hand twitched, wanting to brush it off. She wiped her lips. Heart-shaped, pink lips that glistened under the sun.

"You like strawberries?" I asked, and she nodded vigorously.

'I love them. My brother used to tease me about it when we were kids. He would tell me I would someday turn red because of how much I ate.'

"You have a brother?" I asked, and she nodded. Her smile faltered a little.

'A younger brother. He's 15.'

I nodded. "I have a younger sister, too. She's twenty-six".

She nodded then frowned a little.

'How old are you then?' She wrote.

"Thirty-two," I replied. She narrowed her eyes on my lips then nodded. "What about you?"

'22.'

My eyes widened for a fraction of a second. She was really young. I was in college when I was her age.

After a few minutes, she leaned me again with the memory of her radiant smile and my swirling thoughts.

I wondered why she didn't go to college. How did she end up working as a cleaning staff? Was it because of her deafness?

And how bad was her hearing anyway? My knowledge on this topic was very limited, but I knew that there was a certain limit beyond which the hearing aids couldn't help. Was it so severe that the hearing aids didn't work for her? Was that why she didn't have them?

All these questions made me feel frustrated with myself. I was annoyed that there was still a lot I didn't know about her.

Chill thought to myself as I headed back to my office, it's literally been a day since I met her.

I passed by Brandon's desk, who nodded at me. I stopped and looked over my shoulder. He stood up quickly and looked at me, expecting a question.

"How long is the contract with the cleaning company we're currently employing?"

He frowned, then blinked at me for a second, no doubt wondering why the hell would I be interested in the cleaning company.

"Uh, the cleaning company... two years, I think, sir."

"You think?" I asked with an arched brow.

"Two years, sir," he replied firmly, straightening up more. I nodded.

"And how long is left for the contract extension?"

"I'll find out in three minutes, sir," he said, and I nodded, walking into my office.

I had just taken off my jacket when there was a knock on the door.

"Come in."

Brandon walked in and stopped in front of my desk. I stood on the other side, unbuttoning my sleeves.

"It's been almost a decade since we've started working with this company, sir. But the last contract would last for another year. The extension will be decided in four months".

"Good," I said, rolling up my sleeves. "Thank you. You can go."

Brandon nodded and turned to walk away but stopped when I called.

"And Brandon?"

"Yes, sir?"

"Make sure to relay adjustments to my meal schedule to the diner."

"Adjustments, sir?" He said, producing a notepad and a pen out of his pockets. It reminded me of her.

"Yes. Have them make me a dessert every day instead of the current arrangement," I said, making Brandon look up at me with wide eyes.

"Every day?"

"Do I have to repeat myself, Brandon?" I asked, sitting down on my chair.

"No, sir. Every day, sir."

"You can go."

"Yes, sir." He nodded before walking out the door, closing it behind him. The thought that prevailed in my mind after he made me shake my head at my uncharacteristic forgetfulness.

Shit, I forgot to ask for her name again.