

## Chapter Five

### Alex

My ass is still stinging as I follow Rafael into his meeting with the head of product development, the VP of healthcare sales, the chief communications officer, and two men I don't recognize. I fixed my shoe with some superglue I found in the back of my predecessor's drawer, but the wobbly heel is the least of my problems.

I just got finger-fucked by my boss — finger-fucked and whipped.

The worst part is that I fucking liked it, and Rafael knows it. The man had the evidence of my lust all over him.

I don't know how I'm ever going to be able to look my new fake boss in the eye after he had his fingers inside me. Fuck. Just the memory is enough to make me hot all over, and I'm supposed to be sitting in on this emergency meeting.

Luckily, I had a dry pair of underwear in my bag for period-related emergencies, but within five minutes of being stuck in the same conference room as Rafael, my new panties are totally soaked.

A long glass table dominates the room, which has an entire wall of floor-to-ceiling windows. The sky is a steely overcast gray, and snow is falling lightly outside. Rafael takes his place at the head of the table, gesturing for me to sit beside him.

I hesitate as the other board members file in to their seats. It seems inappropriate to sit next to the CEO when all these other people outrank me, but Rafael's eyes smolder in that commanding way of his, and I sink down gingerly into my chair. I wince as my raw ass makes contact with the seat, and I swear I catch a flicker of a smirk out of the corner of my eye.

Evil bastard.

I hate that his arrogance turns me on. I hate that I basically asked him to spank me.

Rafael gave me a clear out, but I let him do whatever he wanted — which, as it turns out, was to make me come all over his desk until I was a wet, quivering mess.

I wonder if he ate the vegan bolognese.

The meeting commences, and a severe-looking blond woman in a pantsuit is the first to speak. "We have a problem. I have just been informed by one of our HealthyU clients that a

patient has died after a provider followed the treatment protocol recommended by the software.”

Rafael’s eyebrows shoot up, and he turns to a clean-cut man in a gingham button-down who looks like the tech guy in the room. “What happened?”

“Uh, well,” Tech Guy stammers, looking very nervous at being addressed directly. “The patient in question was a thirty-two-year-old female undergoing treatment for stage-three breast cancer. The software recommended chemotherapy, as well as a host of medications. One of those medications was an opioid for pain management.”

There’s a long pause, and Rafael shakes his head in confusion. “So what happened?”

“Well, uh —” Tech Guy breaks off, and the man I don’t recognize takes the floor.

“Apparently, the patient failed to report that she was taking a certain serotonergic medication when she was given the intake questionnaire.”

“English, please,” Rafael grumbles.

“She was taking a drug for depression,” the man clarifies. “The patient developed serotonin syndrome — a rare but sometimes fatal complication.”

Rafael stares at the second man who spoke. “I’m sorry . . . you are?”

“This is Dr. Carson,” the blond woman interjects. “He is one of our medical consultants.”

“I see,” says Rafael. “Did the questionnaire ask about those specific types of medications?”

“Yes, of course,” says Tech Guy emphatically.

Another long silence. Rafael leans back in his seat, chewing on his bottom lip. “So it’s not a problem with the algorithm or the app, but rather that the patient failed to provide a complete medical history.”

“With all due respect, sir,” says the blond woman, “it’s unlikely the patient’s family — or the press — will see it that way.”

A low growl of agreement rumbles up Rafael’s throat. “People will just see it as further evidence that AI is no substitute for human decision-making, despite the fact that it can analyze the data of millions of patients the way no human physician can.”

“Sir, it’s vital that we get out ahead of this story before the press gets ahold of it,” says the woman.

Rafael nods and turns to the head of product development — a dark-haired man in his early fifties with a severe mustache. “Do you see any need to change the way we do patient intake questionnaires?”

Mustache shakes his head. “The onboarding process is completely seamless, and we require the patient’s provider to review the entire questionnaire before the app gives its recommended treatment protocol. I’m not sure what other steps we could have put in place to prevent this.”

“So it’s a simple case of human error,” says Rafael, throwing up his hands. “We issue a statement expressing sympathy for the patient and her family but reiterate that we stand behind the safety and efficacy of our app.”

“That’s not going to play well,” says the blond woman.

“Then what do you suggest?”

“You hold a press conference to let the public know that the issue has been brought to your attention, emphasize the need for human discretion and oversight when using the technology, and express that your team is working around the clock to resolve any potential issues with the patient intake questionnaire.”

“I disagree,” says a serious-looking man who I know is the VP of healthcare sales. “Any hint that HealthyU is not yet perfect, and the companies waiting to implement our app are going to back out.”

“The company’s overall reputation is more important than any short-term losses,” the blond woman argues.

Rafael lets out a heavy sigh and gets to his feet. He crosses to the window, staring out at the snow as his two underlings continue to bicker.

“Sir?” It’s Mustache who spoke, but Rafael doesn’t turn to look at him. “What’s your decision?”

Rafael is silent for such a long time that the others start to shift in their seats. He rakes a hand through his hair, shakes his head, and sighs. “The woman just died. Anything we say now is going to make us look as though we’re covering our asses.”

“But sir —”

“I won’t be making any final decision today,” he says, finally turning to address the others. “Tomorrow is Thanksgiving.” Rafael’s gaze flickers to me, and I stiffen in my seat. “If anybody needs me, I’ll be in Aspen. I’ll be back by eight o’clock Monday, ready to face the press.”