

Chapter Five

Jules

Three days after my consultation with Dimitri, I'm moving into his chalet. I could easily fit everything I own into the back of my cleaning van, but Dimitri insisted on sending movers to pack up my one-bedroom apartment and ferry my stuff to his house.

My insides are a fluttery mess as I pull through the gate and park my van. I've spent the last few days second-guessing my decision to take the job as Dimitri's live-in maid.

As soon as I got home, I looked him up and realized why the name Dimitri Lazos sounded so familiar. The guy is the founder and CEO of Nesteg — the mega-successful cryptocurrency exchange platform that shot up right along with Bitcoin.

According to his bio, Dimitri founded the company straight out of college, and he's among the youngest self-made billionaires in the world. He's also been in the news *a lot*.

From what I gathered, Dimitri laid off a bunch of his top people a few months back, and the decision tanked his company's stock. It rebounded for a week or two as investors bought the bottom, but it's been on life support ever since.

I guess the guy has a good reason to be grouchy.

Deep down, I know it's crazy to stake my business's future on one eccentric billionaire, but I just couldn't bring myself to call Dimitri and quit. I keep telling myself that the money is just too good to pass up, but if I'm being honest, I'm more enthralled by a certain handsome slob than the paycheck itself.

Grabbing my purse, I climb out of the van and make my way to the front door. This time, Dimitri answers on the first knock, and my jaw drops.

The man standing before me bears almost no resemblance to the surly, unkempt billionaire who showed me around his house a few days before. Dimitri is clean-shaven today, and his hair is still damp, as though he just stepped out of the shower.

He's wearing a pair of low-slung designer jeans and a simple gray T-shirt that hugs each and every muscle. I swear, if it were possible for a garment to make love to its wearer, that's what it would be doing.

Dimitri's spicy cedar scent wafts toward me on the breeze, and I have to take a few breaths before I'm able to form a coherent sentence.

"Good afternoon." That's it. Those are the *only* words my brain offers up, but thankfully, they appear to be enough.

"Good afternoon," Dimitri rumbles back, blinking down at me with kind, soft eyes that look more hazel than amber today.

"Uh . . . Did the movers already get here with my stuff?"

He nods. "Everything is in your room."

"Great. Thanks again for arranging that." I still can't believe I agreed to shackle myself to a total stranger — albeit a drop-dead gorgeous one — and move into his house.

"It was no trouble."

I pull a tight smile, and Dimitri steps aside to let me pass. I feel his eyes on me as I walk through the door — into the house that will be my home for the next six months.

"I'll . . . show you to your room," he says, running a hand through his silky hair and looking oddly nervous. "Once you're settled, I can order us some dinner and have it delivered."

"Oh, you don't have to do that," I say quickly, hitching a thumb toward my van. "I stopped by the store on my way over and picked up some groceries. I'll cook all my own meals while I'm here. You don't have to worry about feeding me."

Dimitri blinks at me in surprise, and I cringe at my knee-jerk reaction to refuse his offer. I've always paid my own way, and I don't like it when people try to buy my lunch or even a coffee. I always end up feeling as though I owe them something, and I don't want to be in the business of owing Dimitri anything.

To his credit, he recovers quickly and nods as if this makes sense. "Of course." The corner of his mouth lifts in a small half smile that makes my knees go all wobbly. "Sorry. I'm not really sure how this is supposed to work."

"You've never had a live-in housekeeper before?"

His grin widens. "Is that surprising, given the state this place was in the last time you were here?"

I purse my lips and try, unsuccessfully, to conceal my smirk.

Dimitri leads me down the hall, and I glance back toward the living room. I stop.

The living room looks completely different from my first visit. Gone are the piles of clothing and the mess of dirty dishes. There are no wine glasses strewn about, no food wrappers, and no water rings on the glass coffee table. It even looks as though someone vacuumed.

“Did you hire another maid?” I ask with a nervous laugh as Dimitri turns to look at me. “Am I fired already?”

“No.” He shakes his head, and a sudden awkwardness comes over him. “I’m not normally that much of a slob. You just . . . caught me on a bad day.”

I swallow, thinking of the scathing news articles I read about his failed leadership, and nod.

Now that the living room isn’t covered in an inch of grime, I find myself appreciating the light streaming in through the huge windows, which lends an airy feel to the place despite the dark wood finishes. The modern furnishings are all the same subtle shade of cream, and earth-toned rugs cover the wide-plank hardwood floors. It feels . . . inviting.

Dimitri is quiet as he leads me up the sweeping staircase. He makes a right down a long hallway, leading me to the door at the very end. This must be my room.

He swings the door open, and my eyes go wide. A four-poster king bed dominates the room, draped in the softest-looking white linens I’ve ever seen in my life. There’s a stone hearth, an armoire, and a long dresser with a mirror. The bed faces two sets of French doors, which lead out onto a balcony.

At first I think Dimitri’s made a mistake, because this can’t possibly be where he wants me to stay. The balcony overlooks a snow-covered pond, which is sheltered by a stand of magnificent blue spruce trees. But then I spot a few of my personal items scattered around the room, and I realize the movers have already been here and put everything in its place.

“Will this be sufficient?” Dimitri asks.

The question is soft and comes out sounding oddly vulnerable, and I whip my head around to look at him. Dimitri is staring at me with an inquisitive expression, as though eagerly awaiting my assessment.

“You can also use the storage room in the basement for anything you don’t have room for,” he adds. “I know it’s probably not as large as what you’re used to —”

“I —” I break off, shaking my head. I can’t seem to find the words. “These *views*! This room is incredible! And —” I continue walking until I reach the en suite bathroom, which is furnished with a huge glass-encased shower and a giant soaking tub overlooking the forest. I come back out and gape at Dimitri. “I guess houses don’t come equipped with servants’ quarters anymore?”

He snorts. “This isn’t *Downton Abbey*. Besides, there’s no one here but me.” He glances around the room and shrugs. “If you weren’t going to be staying here, there’d be no one to appreciate the view.”

My heart stutters. Dimitri doesn’t wear a ring, and the news articles I read didn’t mention a wife. And yet hearing that he lives here alone still does funny things to my stomach.

Before I can say another word, Dimitri starts backing toward the door. “I’ll . . . leave you to it, then. Are you sure I can’t order you some food?”

As if on cue, my stomach gives a loud grumble. I ate a hasty bowl of cereal before the movers came, but that’s all I’ve had to eat today. Vegging out with takeout sounds amazing right now, but something in Dimitri’s eyes gives me pause.

There’s no question that I’m attracted to him, but he’s my employer, and I don’t mix business and pleasure. I need to start our relationship off on the right foot, with clear, healthy boundaries.

“No. Thank you,” I tell him. “You’ve done so much already. I’ll get to work on the house first thing tomorrow morning.”



Over the course of the next week, I learn a lot about Dimitri. When I pad downstairs at six fifteen, my new boss is already awake. I don’t see him, but he’s brewed himself a fresh pot of coffee, and I can hear him talking on the phone through the door of his study.

I learn that he’s been surviving on steak, barbecue ribs, roasted chicken, and Doritos. There’s always a pile of bones in the trash, but I don’t see evidence of a single fruit or vegetable. The man doesn’t watch TV, but he reads three newspapers over breakfast — steak and eggs — and has a study full of books.

In the morning, Dimitri has conference calls, and at four p.m. every day without fail, he strips down to a pair of shorts and goes for a run outside. I’m not sure if the eccentric CEO is a masochist or if the cold helps to clear his head, but he’s out there every day that first week — even the two days it snows.

Apart from his atrocious diet and extreme dedication to his exercise regimen, what strikes me most about Dimitri is that he seems lonely. The man doesn’t go out or have anyone over,

except for Beckett. The CEO and his head of security seem like two people who know each other well, but Beckett, like me, is Dimitri's employee.

Since I technically have every Saturday off, Sunday is my Monday. I spend the day deep-cleaning all the upstairs bathrooms, which, while gorgeous, have accumulated a lot of grime over the years. Dimitri might have only laid off his previous housekeeper a few weeks before I started, but from what I've seen of the filthy grout and the dust hiding in all the nooks and crannies, that woman was only doing the bare minimum to keep her job.

I attack the tile with a toothbrush and scrub the showers until they shine. When I'm finished, Dimitri's enormous Jacuzzi is squeaky clean, and the marble floors glisten.

By six o'clock, I'm sore and tired from a hard day's work. I wouldn't normally try to tackle five bathrooms in a row, but all week I've thrown myself into my work with an exhausting vigor.

I tell myself it's because Dimitri is way overpaying me, but if I'm being honest, my newfound dedication has a lot more to do with avoiding my gorgeous new boss who has a habit of running around shirtless.

Despite his generosity — or maybe *because* of it — I can't allow things to get personal with Dimitri. I'm here to collect a paycheck and earn a glowing reference. That's all.

Fantasizing about a certain tall, muscular recluse is absolutely off-limits. It's easier said than done, considering I haven't gotten any action in months, which is why I've tried to arrange my schedule so Dimitri and I rarely cross paths.

The house is unnervingly quiet when I finally come downstairs to eat some leftovers. The lights are off in the main areas, and the sun has already set.

I remember Dimitri mentioning that he had to return to Denver for some important meetings on Monday, and I realize that for the first time since I moved in, I have the house all to myself.

Muscles aching, I flip on a light in the kitchen and pour myself a giant glass of wine. I slide down the hallway *Risky Business*-style, opening the hall closet where the house's sound system is installed. It's so high tech that I can choose which rooms of the house I want to play my music in, and I carefully adjust the volume in my room and bathroom and put on some relaxing tunes.

Running up the stairs in my sock feet, I bound into my room and twirl around with my wine. I turn on the water for a bath and strip out of my sweaty work clothes. I haven't had a chance to try out the luxurious soaking tub in my bathroom, and just the thought of sliding into the hot water sounds like absolute heaven.

Once the steaming water is deep enough, I sink into the tub with a sigh. It's one of those modern cast-iron tubs, and the shape of it seems to cradle my back as the hot water loosens my overworked muscles.

Sipping my wine like a queen, I congratulate myself on taking the job with Dimitri. I'm getting paid a *lot* of money to do work I'd normally earn minimum wage for while living in a gorgeous chalet in the mountains.

I lay my head back against the cool tub, closing my eyes as the water sluices over me. Damn. The only thing that would make this better is if I had my book. I groan when I remember that I packed it away in a box that I stuck in Dimitri's storage room.

Determined to make my evening of relaxation perfect, I set down my wine and climb out of the tub, wrapping a towel around my middle without bothering to dry off properly.

I skitter downstairs as quickly as I can, trying not to leave too many water droplets behind me as I hurry down to the basement. The storage room is practically empty, apart from the four cardboard boxes of mine stacked near the door. I find my book in the second one I check and reshuffle the boxes into the same neat stack.

I slip out of the room and am about to head back up to my bath when the arched door to the wine cellar catches my eye. I've never been in a home that had its very own wine cellar before, and I haven't had a moment alone to explore down here.

Curious, I crack the door to the wine cellar and flip on the light, staring around in awe. The room is nearly as big as my suite upstairs — brick walls, polished concrete floor, and rows upon rows of wine racks carved from knotty pine. Lights beneath each shelf illuminate the bottles, and I run my fingers reverently along the labels — some of them yellow and faded with age.

Several bottles are fifty years old or more, and those are just the labels I read. As someone who buys bargain zin from Trader Joe's, I can't *imagine* what a fifty-year-old Bordeaux would taste like.

Resisting the urge to pilfer one of Dimitri's fancy wines for my night of relaxation, I flip off the light with a wistful sigh and turn to close the door. I pivot quickly and take a step — colliding with a hard muscular chest.

A loud yelp rips out of me as I drop my book, my heart nearly bursting out of my chest. I lunge to catch the book, but then my foot slides — slipping in the little trail of water I've left on the smooth concrete floor.

I throw out my arms to regain my balance and feel a soft tug around my middle. Cold air laps at my skin, and I stumble into Dimitri's warm, solid chest. He takes a step back, and we both go down — the floor rushing up to meet us.

I land splayed across Dimitri, and when I look down, horror surges through me. My bare breasts are smashed against Dimitri's torso, and my hands are splayed on his chest. His very hard, very *naked* chest.

I glance behind me to see my towel dangling from where it caught in the cellar door, and an excruciating flush heats my body.

Fuck!

This can't be happening. This can't be happening! I'm straddling my boss after he caught me snooping in his wine cellar, and I'm naked.

Double fuck!

Dimitri lifts his head to stare at me, blinking his amber eyes in surprise. He's not wearing a stitch of clothing either, apart from a thin pair of gym shorts. Every inch of me is squashed against him, and I think I feel . . .

"I'm sorry!" I yelp, pushing myself off Dimitri before remembering that he can see *everything*.

Feeling ridiculous, I flatten myself against him once again, but that only makes it worse. Dimitri's muscular leg is now wedged between my thighs, the top of his quad pressing into my hot, wet center.

"I'm so sorry!" I repeat, scrambling off him and covering my bare breasts with my arms. My face feels as though it's on fire, and it's all I can do to cover my pussy as I back toward the cellar door. "I thought you were in Denver! I just came down to get something out of storage. I took a peek at the wine cellar and —"

I turn and tug at my towel to dislodge it from the cellar door, well aware that I'm putting my ass on display. I guess that's better than my pussy. The stupid towel doesn't come loose on the first try, and I have to crack open the door and bend down to grab it.

My hands are shaking as I wrap it forcefully around my body, tears stinging my eyes. This is so fucking embarrassing. Dimitri just caught me snooping, and then I gave him a peep show.

I wheel around to face my boss, who's still sprawled on the basement floor. He doesn't look me in the eye, but the tops of his cheeks are red.

I swallow, and Dimitri rolls to his feet in one easy motion, clearing his throat as he stares at the ground. “I apologize,” he grits out, pressing his lips together. “I . . . didn’t mean to startle you.”

“You didn’t!” I blurt. Damn, why isn’t this towel longer? “I mean, you *did*, but it’s your house. I just thought you were gone, and —”

“I went for a run,” he says in a dazed voice, rubbing the back of his neck. “I was about to head out to the pond when I heard . . .” He shakes his head. “Nevermind.”

For some reason, that explanation gives me pause. “But it’s freezing outside,” I say, stating the obvious. “The pond is covered in ice.”

“I was about to take a cold plunge,” he explains, still not looking at me. “It . . . helps to clear my head.”

“Uh-huh.”

Dimitri bends down to retrieve my book, and I stiffen at the sudden movement. At first I think he’s going to hand it to me, but then he stops and meets my gaze, that luscious mouth forming a frown. “You didn’t get any wine.”

I blink. Is heserious?

“I didn’t — I mean, I *wouldn’t*. That’s your wine. I would never —”

“You are my guest,” he says simply, looking at me as though my objections are ridiculous. “Besides, I have more than I could drink in a lifetime.”

“No.” I shake my head, my skin still on fire.

It feels silly to refuse Dimitri’s wine out of fear of blurring the boundary between employer and employee when I just assaulted him in the nude, but a girl’s gotta draw the line somewhere.

“I insist,” he says, sliding past me into the wine cellar and turning on the light.

“You really don’t have to,” I huff, pivoting toward the room. I’m unjustifiably annoyed that he’s being so nice to me. I’m also annoyed that he’s offering me wine instead of just letting me flee to my room and locking myself in there for the rest of the night.

“What do you like to drink?” he asks, as if I’m a guest he invited over for dinner and not his recently naked maid.

I sigh, just wanting this conversation to be over. “I’m normally a zinfandel kind of girl.”

I hear the clink of bottles as Dimitri lifts a few out of the racks, hefting the two in his hands before finally selecting one with a classy cream label. “Try this. Trust me.”

I take the wine without looking at it too hard. I’m sure knowing how old and fancy it is would probably make me reluctant to drink my weight in it, which is what I’m going to have to do to scrub this incident from my memory.

“Thank you,” I say quietly, forcing myself to look directly at Dimitri and blushing even more furiously.

He swallows, and his eyes crinkle in a grimace as he hands over my book. “If it makes you feel better, I didn’t see anything.”

“You’re a liar,” I say. “But thank you. And thank you for the wine.”

“You’re welcome.”

Holding tight to my towel, I turn and start back up the stairs, pausing halfway up and twisting over my shoulder to look at him. “Do you really cold plunge in that frozen lake?”

Dimitri nods. “It’s exhilarating. I could show you sometime.”

The way he says it sends a weird little flutter through my chest, but I just nod and hurry back upstairs, wondering just how much of me Dimitri actually saw.