

Billionaire's Ex-wife : Craving You Chapter 21

Chapter 21

(FIVE YEARS AGO)

HAZEL

It's been three weeks now and I'm yet to hear from Mr. Ravel after that day at the restaurant, which I'm grateful for. Someone whom I know nothing about offering to write me an open cheque creeps me out, and I'd rather not see him again.

A part of me couldn't help but entertain the thought that he chickened out. Maybe he didn't understand the implication of an open cheque when he made that promise. Chuckling to myself, I scooped more ice cream into my mouth as I stared at the water fountain.

Suddenly, I felt someone touch me from behind and I screamed bloody murder, ripping the headset from my ear and jumping to my feet. The man whom I thought disappeared due to his inability to fulfill his promise stood in front of me with both hands raised in surrender. "What the hell?" I mumbled.

"Are you trying to send me into shock?"

"I'm sorry," he quickly apologized, slowly taking a few steps towards me. "I called you a few times, but you were lost in your own world."

Yeah, I was thinking about how I thought you vanished after realizing the weight of your promise. Thank heavens for the inability to read people's thoughts. "What are you doing here Mr. Ravel?" My eyes narrowed suspiciously. "Are you stalking me?"

Smiling, he slipped his hand into his pocket. "Be assured that I'm no stalker." He jerked his chin towards a gigantic skyscraper behind me. "I live there and I happened to notice you whilst I was about to go in."

"You live there?" I blurted out sheepishly which made him smile again.

Turning to the left, I stared at the building and then back at the spot where I was once seated before returning my skeptical gaze to Ravel. "You're trying to tell me that you saw me from that distance? How is that even possible?"

"When something captures my attention, even distance won't stop me from taking notice." Tilting my head, I stared at him scrutinizingly, that was when I took notice of his tired features and the almost invisible dark circles around his eyes. "You want to come in for a drink?"

What?! "No!" How I blurted the word out made him bite his lower lips, in an attempt not to laugh. "I mean..." I cleared my throat, "it isn't wise to follow a stranger into his house."

Slowly, his smiling face morphed into a frown. "Strangers?" Nodding slowly, he took a step back retreating. Instantly I regretted my words. "I just returned

from a business trip, so I can't take you out for lunch right now. What do you think about dinner?"

My conscience will not permit me to reject his offer. "Sure, Dinner will be great."

His smile returned. "Great. I already have your number, but I'm going to need your address so I can come pick you up myself."

My address? Hell no! "How about you send the address of the restaurant and I'll meet you there." I'm living with crazy females. Once they catch sight of his car and the fact that he has money, they'll be on him until he has sex with them.

"You want to meet me there?" He drawled out slowly. "Okay, if that's what you want." It's obvious that he has his reservations, but the fact that he respected what I wanted made me smile. "You have a lovely smile."

I blushed hard. "Thank you." A car honked from a distance, taking both our attention away from each other. "Is that for you?"

"Mhmm." He took a step closer to me, "I should be preparing for a meeting at the moment, but something more important seems to be stealing my time."

Something more important? 'Don't smile Hazel! Don't smile

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I smiled.

"Something important huh?"

"Mhmm." He closed in on me, his face a few inches away from mine. "I don't know what I'm more in love with, your smile

smile. or the wrinkles that form at the side of your eyes when you

How can one man's word and proximity leave me this breathless? "You gotta chose one mister." I teased, something I haven't done since I got out of rehab.

The car honked again and I found myself smiling, probably to ease the tension between us. "Your driver is impatient, maybe you should get going"

"I'm going to kiss you." He whispered, placing a hand on my neck, and before I could form a coherent response thanks to my failing brain, he placed his lips on mine and kissed me slowly.

Shocked at exactly what was going on, I stood still, frozen into stillness. Ravel pulled back. "I'm sorry," he apologized, "I shouldn't have done that without getting a response from you." He cleared his throat, his hand falling to his side.

Before he could pull away completely, I did something irrational. I stood on my tip-toe and kissed him, harder than he did. If he was shocked by my action, he didn't let it show; he simply kissed me back with the same fervor.

It took another honking from the driver to pull us about. Ravel placed his forehead on mine and chuckled. "I've never considered firing Raymond until

this moment.” He pecked my lips again before stepping away.

“Your driver?”

“My driver wouldn’t dare to interrupt me like that.” He pulled out his phone, glanced at the screen, and frowned. I’m guessing the Raymond guy just texted him. “I’ll get a reservation, then send you the time and address.”

“Sure.” He winked at me before walking away. Despite being late to the meeting he spoke about, Ravel practically strutted towards his car as though he was modeling on a runway and I shamelessly stared at his ass.

“You sure took your time Hazel!” Mr. Harrison bellowed from his desk. “You care to tell me why it took you four hours to make delivery?”

Because I decided to stare at the water fountain and ended up getting the best kiss of my life. “The client took his time during payment.”

He blinked slowly, clearly stupefied. “What the fuck did you just say?” I opened my mouth to spit more lies, but he beat me to it. “Payment reflected over two hours ago Hazel and you and I know that it takes only one hour to get here from your location and that’s when the traffic is seriously bad. What were you doing Hazel?!”

There is no way I’m telling this pervert what I was doing.

Harrison suddenly relaxed, his lips stretching into a knowing smile as he stood to his feet. He slowly rounded his desk and stopped right in front of me. “Who picked up the delivery? A man or a woman?”

My nose crinkled at his insinuation. “A man.”

“And what were you doing with this man that made you spend such a long time only on delivery?”

This is ridiculous. Uncomfortable with his proximity, I took a step back, creating enough space between. “Whatever that is going on in your head isn’t true sir. I only delivered the chicken and left.”

His eyes slowly trailed my body. “Did you?” He tried to close the distance between us but I ended up creating more. “How long will you make me suffer Hazel?” He groaned, “I know you want me too, I’ve seen the way you look at me, so why fight this?”

The only way I look away this man is nothing but pure disgust. “You are my boss, and I’ve never stared at you inappropriately.” Maybe it’s time I start looking for a new job.

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“Don’t fight this Hazel.”

“With all due respect sir,” I hissed, “do not cross the line. I am your employee and I ask you to maintain a level of professionalism.”

He paused and arched his brows. “And if I don’t?”

“Then we will be discussing a case of possible harassment.”

Lifting his hand in surrender, he took a step back. "There is no need for that." He gestured towards the door. "You may leave."

I bowed slightly before heading for the door. I grabbed the knob when another issue crossed my mind. "And about the delivery, taking orders to people's houses isn't part of my job, and if you want to add it, you'll have to increase my pay." I refuse to be anyone's pushover.

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Chapter 22

HAZEL

(PRESENT TIME)

When I received that text from Elenor, for the first few seconds, I panicked. Having dinner at my place entails seeing Daisy, and not only seeing her but also her pictures which decorates almost all the hallways of my house. It took five full minutes before my brain was able to come up with something useful. I sent her a text that I'll be working all night, so we should meet up at a restaurant close to my office to which she agreed.

I had to stay in the office still it's almost dinner time. Grabbing my bag and car key, I turned off the light in my office before walking out. I was almost close to the elevator when I ran into David. He looked equally surprised to see me at the office by the time. "What are you still doing here? I thought you'd left." He stepped into the elevator with me. "I didn't want to take work home, so I decided to finish up before leaving." He explained, his eyes quickly frisked me, lingering on my face a bit longer. "Going out?"

I nodded. "I have dinner plans."

"With who?"

Sighing, I fixed the strap of my purse before facing him. "About what happened earlier in my office," He slipped both hands into his pocket and stared at his shoe, "I'm going to assume it was a mistake that won't happen again."

David slowly lifted his head and, zeroed in his gaze on me with his hands still buried in his pocket. "It wasn't a mistake, at least not on my part, but I assure you that it won't happen again, not without your consent."

"David," I groaned, "don't complicate things between us." I love having him as a friend and I don't want to lose him, plus Daisy loves him too and he's practically the only male figure in her life. "I don't want to lose our friendship."

"Neither do I." He reached forward and grabbed my hand. "I'm not trying to force you into a relationship Hazel, all I'm saying is that you shouldn't be against the idea. Let's go with the flow and see what happens." I moved my gaze from him and he squeezed my hand. "If you're not feeling it, I promise I'll

stop.”

“David...”

“Please,” He pleaded, interrupting me. “Just keep an open mind.” Dating David has never crossed my mind and right now, he’s doing a very bad job in trying to convince me. “A month.” He blurted out, confusing me. My brows arched in question. “Give me a month to woo you, and if after a month you’re still not interested, I’ll let you be.”

Why is he setting himself up for failure? “I still don’t think it’s a very good idea, David. You’ll only end up getting hurt.” Then I’ll be left with trying everything possible to save our friendship.

“It’s my heart Hazel, let me worry about that.” He smiled at me, looking like the cheerful David I met in the art college hallway. “All I ask is one month. Give me one month to make you fall in love with me. One month to steal your heart away.” He placed his palm on his heart. “Please...”

The desperation in his eyes made it difficult to say no to him. Sighing with resignation, I forced a smile for him. “Fine.” His smile widened. “I’ll give you one month David, but if after one month this doesn’t work out, you’re gonna have to swear that you won’t be bringing this up again.”

With his right hand still on his chest, he lifted the other one. “I swear it.” The elevator pinged. “You don’t know how happy I am right now.” His cheeky smile says it all. “Can I give you a hug?” Before I could respond, he pulled me into a hug. “I promise you Hazel, you won’t regret it.”

I hope so too.

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I arrived at the dinner venue a little later than planned because I had to handle a business call in my car. Checking my appearance once more, I got down the car and walked into the restaurant. “Reservation under Hazel Blacks.”

The young lady smiled warmly at me. “This way ma’am.” She led me to a secluded corner where I found Elenor seated, engrossed in her phone with a glass of wine.

As if noticing my presence, she looked up and smiled widely. “Hello, stranger!” Laughing at her jovial attitude, I made myself comfortable on the plush sofa. “It’s nice to see you too Elenor.” I’ve not seen her physically ever since I left New York. “You look good,”

She giggled. “I feel good.” Waving down a waitress, she requested an extra wine glass. “Oh my gosh Hazel, you look amazing.” Nodding appreciatively, she snatched my finger that was lying lazily on the table. “Is that real Diamond?”

That was a birthday gift to myself last year. “Yes, it is,” I confirmed which made her grin widen. “As a model, I’m sure you have eyes for real things.” She can easily distinguish between fake and original. “Enough about me.” I

sna tched my hand away. "How is work."

"Crazy as ever." She muttered. "I decided to become a model out of fun, but it's stressing the f uck out of me." The extra glass arrived and we equally ordered dinner. "What about you? What is life like as a single, se xy art curator?"

My life has been chaotic. "Fun." That's the best word to describe my work, but not my personal life. "We're expanding soon, and when that happens, we're hoping to hold an exhibition."

Our dinner arrived and Elenor dived right in. "I'll be waiting for the invite and hopefully by then, you won't avoid taking me to your house."

The fork paused a few inches away from my mouth. "What?" I breathed out, surprised that she figured it out.

"I'm smarter than you think Hazel but I get the reason why you're trying to be careful." I held my breath and waited for her to explain further. "You don't want any Southwark close to your personal life, and I get it."

Well, she's partially right. "Thanks for understanding Elen." My phone lit up, showing a text from David. I simply ignored it. "I'd rather none of you know where I live."

She nodded. "Congratulations on your award," she mused, "I would have loved to be there to cheer you on, but work held me back."

My phone lit up again, yet another text from David which got ignored again. "It's fine, I totally understand."

My phone lit up again and Elenor stared at it then smiled. "Boyfriend?"

I shouldn't even classify David as that yet. "Something like that." I picked up the phone and quickly responded to his text. "Sorry about that, he's worried about me staying out late."

Waving off my apology, she returned to her food. "You don't need to apologize or explain things to me Hazel." She picked up her wine glass. "I'm just glad that you're moving on and that you are finally getting the happiness that you deserve, the happiness that my brother couldn't give to you."

Ravel. A past I can't regret because of Daisy. "So what exactly are you doing here in Seattle?" I asked, changing the topic. I'd rather not talk about Ravel at all.

"I'm here to shoot a commercial video." She responded. "This is a lovely city. If I wasn't addicted to the crazy life of a New Yorker, I would have actually loved moving here."

I'm glad she loves New York. I'd hate to move just because she relocated to Seattle. "I'm glad to see you Elen." Despite my fallout with Ravel, she's still my friend.

"Really?" She wagged her brows, "Even though I'm keeping you away from your boyfriend?" She chuckled at her own teasing and for whatever reason I

didn't bother correcting her about the imaginary boyfriend. "I would have loved to meet him but I'm leaving very early tomorrow morning."

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I shrugged, not sure how to respond to that.

"Well, I'll be back next month, maybe then I can meet him."

By then, I'll be certain if I'm dating him or not. "What will you be doing in Seattle next month? Another commercial video?"

"Nope." She lisped, "I'm hitting the runway." Finishing the salad on her plate, she dropped her fork and leaned forward. "This isn't public news yet, but Ravel is holding his next exhibition here in Seattle and I'm one of the models." I froze and stared at her with wide eyes. "You say what now?"

"Ravel is holding his next jewel exhibition here in Seattle."

Chapter 23

RAVEL

(PRESENT TIME)

go for Rose hastened behind me with her pointed heels just to keep up with me. I've hinted a few times that she should more comfortable heels, but she ignored my remarks and continued with the sharp pointed heels.

I will not to held accountable if she trips and fall, I've done my part by hinting at it. "We have all the models ready," she commented, updating me on the preparations for the exhibition, "Your sister Elenor agreed to open the show." I halted, which prompted Rose and Raymond to halt too. "How much did she charge?" I didn't think she'll agree to this, seeing that she is still upset with me over my divorce with Hazel.

Rose bit her lips, hesitating which made me more suspicious. My eyes squinted, urging her to speak up. "She charged double her usual fee."

Of course, she did! That crazy bi tch. "There are thousands of models out there, tell me why we had to pay her double just to have her model the jewels?"

"Because nobody pulls the crowd more than your sister Elenor." Roses responded matter-of-factly. I resumed walking. "Have you seen her Instagram account?" Why should I be checking Elenor's Instagram page? "She has over four hundred million followers. We need her for awareness."

"This shouldn't take much persuasion." Raymond mumbled, "She's your sister and you should be eager to work with her."

"Shut the f uck up Raymond," I hissed, "this isn't your jurisdiction." He muttered an apology that I'm certain he didn't really mean. "Move on to other things," I instructed Rose. Raymond opened the door and we all stepped into my office.

"As for the venue, we're yet to conclude on a particular venue." She pulled out

a flash drive from her purse and dropped it on my desk. "We've gathered a lot of prestigious spaces in Seattle, but we need you to make the final choice."

"Seattle?" Raymond queried, arching his brows. "The event is taking place in Seattle?" He blinked slowly at me. "Seriously? Of all places, Seattle?" When I remained mute, he scoffed. "Who made the choice? I'm guessing it's you."

"What's wrong with Seattle?" Roses demanded, her question directed at him. "Besides Mr. Southwark had nothing to do with the choice of city. He simply did a blind draw and picked out Seattle."

Raymond huffed. "I won't be surprised if all the choices in the box were all Seattle."

Choosing Seattle as the city for our next exhibition had nothing to do with me, but I won't lie that I wasn't excited when I picked out Seattle. "This is strictly business Raymond, you have nothing to be worried about."

"Business?" He crossed his arms. "Tell that to someone who doesn't know you, sir. With you and Hazel in the same city, nothing about it is going to be strictly business."

He's right, but I refuse to admit it. Ignoring his statement, I returned my attention to Rose. "Continue with the update." I glared at Raymond quickly, "And you better not interrupt again." He may be close to me more than any other male out there, but I'll not have him interrupt business matters.

Knowing his limit, he relaxed back. "Apologies boss, I'll keep my thought to myself."

Rose took that as her cue to continue with the updates. Raymond didn't utter any other word, he just watched us in silence as we discussed business. "How is Elenor's new product coming along?"

Raymond leaned forward, his interest perking at the mention of Elenor. If he wasn't so wary of Anne, I would have assumed there is something still going on between them.

"She isn't doing that great," Rose remarked. "I had a chat with Andrew as you instructed, and he told me that her sales level is very low."

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My sister is so da mn stubborn; that's the only reason she's not coming to me for help. "Despite the level of her Instagram followers?"

"Having such followers with an incompetent strategic team is as good as useless." Raymond listened with keen interest, "I asked for a sales report sheet but he refused to release it." She continued, "I believe Ms. Elenor needs to work on her strategic team."

Pinching my brows, I racked my brain for a remedy for her. "Promote the product on her behalf."

Rose's eyes bulged. "What?!" Her eyes bounced between me and Raymond, but the latter remained quiet

"Promote her product on our page. Have the strategic team take it up."

Sighing, I leaned back. "Purchase the product from the market and advertise on her behalf. I don't care how you do it, make sure you push the product into the international market."

Rose cleared her throat nervously. "I don't think that's a great idea, sir." My gaze shifted from the artifact next to the bookshelf and landed on her. "We make jewels, we have no business with the cosmetics world."

"Are you undermining my order?" Am I being too lenient with everyone around me? Is that why they dare to question me?

"No sir." She straightened her back, "I'm only giving a bit of business advice. Promoting another business whilst organizing an exhibition isn't a good idea either. Let me have a chat with Ms. Elenor, we can have our strategic team give them an insight on how to handle the situation."

"Fine," I breathed out, relenting in my decision. "Have a word with Elenor and get back to me." If I discuss this with her myself, she's never going to agree to it.

Rose stood and gathered her files. "I'll be on it ASAP." She bowed before walking out of my office. It didn't take up to three minutes before she walked out of my office, and the topic of discussion walked in.

Sashaying towards me, she glared at Raymond. "Of course, he's here with you, birds of the same feather they say flap together." Her lips thinned as she stopped right in front of me.

Rolling me at her sarcastic statement, I gestured for her to sit. "He's my personal security Elenor, of course, he'll always be around me." Unlike some people, it seems my existence bothers someone.

Raymond stood up and bowed. "I'll be right outside your office if you need me, sir." Without a single glance at Elenor, not that she cared, he stomped out of my office, banging the door behind him.

I didn't bother asking what was up with the two of them. I already have enough drama going on in my life as it "What are you doing here?" It's unlike her to just drop by, not unless she's on a mission.

Relaxing on her seat, she tilted her head and stretched her red-painted lips into a taunting smile. "I just got back from Seattle a few hours ago."

I tensed up instantly but tried not to let it show. "And? What business of mine is it if you decide to visit Seattle, Africa, or Mercury?"

She chuckled. "Wait till you hear what I have to say." My eyes narrowed as my mind pondered on what she could possibly have in mind. "You know," she started, leaning forward, "even after your divorce with Hazel, I always thought you still have the chance to amend things."

Withdrawing my fist from my desk, I rested it on the armrest and squeezed hard. "Did you come all the way just to say the same thing you've been saying for the past two years?"

She shook her head. "Today, I came to tell you what your cowardice has cost you." I stared past her head. "She moved on Ravel," My eyes snapped back to her face. "What's that look in your eyes?" She taunted.

Earnestly hoping that she was just being her silly self, my face twisted into a frown. "What the f uck did you just say to me?"

"I said Hazel moved on." She repeated. "She now has a boyfriend who not only loves her but also sees her worth because he kept beeping her all through our dinner together."

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"Who the f uck is he?!"

She blinked rapidly before bursting out a belly, eyes squinting laughter. "Are you seriously upset right now?" Shaking her head, she stood up and grabbed her purse. "You're angry that your ex-wife moved on years after you moved on? Need I remind you that you've been f ucking June and taking her to events?"

"Watch what you say to me!"

"Or what Ravel?" Placing both hands on my desk, she leaned forward, bringing her face closer to mine. "If you seriously want to find out who her boyfriend is, then you have to get on the next available flight to Seattle."

My jaw clenched.

"You can't eat your cake and have it back brother."

Chapter 24

(FIVE YEARS AGO)

RAVEL

Stepping out of my room, dressed in black pants and a black shirt, I grabbed the key to the Lamborghini before making my way to the living room.

Raymond jumped to his feet and righted his cloth the moment he saw me.

He grinned happily at me. "I think it's safe to say Friday is my favorite day of the week." Confused with his train of reasoning, I lifted a brow. "No offense boss, but you hardly tell your chef to fix something because you're hardly at home to eat, but every Friday, I get to eat a variety of food at your mum's, thanks to the Friday dinner family ritual.

"You'll either sk ip today's dinner or you go without me." I rasped, bursting his happy bubble. "I have plans for tonight and I'll be driving myself."

He frowned. "Your mum is going to lose it if you miss the family ritual."

Crossing his hands, he slowly took in my dress code. "Where exactly are you headed?"

“None of your f ucking business.” I strolled past him towards the indoor garage. “I know you’re happy to attend the dinner without me, that way, you get to spend more time with Elenor without me breathing down your neck.”

Raymond sighed exasperatedly. “Nothing is going on between me and Elenor.” I’m not stu pid. He stopped next to the Lamborghini. “I mean it, sir, there is nothing going on between me and your sister.”

Elenor is a grown woman, and he’s a somewhat responsible man. I opened the door. “Don’t just get her pregnant or I’ll be forced to castrate you.” Getting into the car, I slammed the door and drove out of the garage.

After a few minutes of driving, I placed a call to Elenor and she picked up instantly. “Hello, Ravel. Please tell me you’re on your way. I don’t want to be alone with Mum.”

I chuckled. “Why? Because she’s going to talk about you getting married?” I’m the only one who can put Anne on a leash.

“That’s not funny Ravel.” She retorted. “How far away are you? I need to know if I should wait a bit before leaving my house.”

“Sorry sweetheart,” I apologized sincerely, “but I won’t be showing up for today’s dinner.” She went awfully quiet. “I have plans for tonight that I can’t cancel.”

Elenor sighed. “Why did you fix your plan on a Friday night when you already know what Friday is about.” I heard a ruffle of a sofa in the background. “Well, if you aren’t showing up, there is no need for me to show up too.”

“Oh, I think there is.” I teased lightly. “Raymond is free for the rest of the night and he’s showing up for the dinner. I’m sure you know what that means.” She gets to spend more than enough time with Raymond without interruption from work. “Milk the opportunity now Elenor.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” She lied, feigning ignorance.

“I know you do.” H o nking at the careless driver behind me, I gave room for him to zoom past. “I have to focus on driving Elenor, I’ll call you later. I love you.”

“I love you foo bluely.” More often than I can remember, I have warned her not to refer to me by the color of my eyes, but then those org ans on both sides of her head are just for decoration. Before I could reprimand her again, she dropped the call. Shaking my head with a smile, I stepped on the accelerator, driving myself to Hazel’s apartment.

Parked outside her apartment, I gave her a quick call, instructing her to step out. We’ve been officially dating for a month and a few weeks now, but this is my first time pulling over outside her apartment.

Putting my phone vibration, I kept the car running to keep it warm, my focus on the beautiful woman walking down the stairs. Dressed in a simple black turtleneck and blue jeans with black boots, I can proudly say my girl looks

breathhtaking.

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The moment she advanced closer to the car, I got down, leaned on the car, and waited for her to be within earshot. "I can stare at you all night and not get bored."

She halted her steps, glanced at my car, then back at me. "What are you doing here Ravel?"

Closing in the space between us, I pulled her into my embrace and kissed her gently. "I'm here to pick you up for our date, what else."

Wriggling out of my embrace, she stared at me with a slight frown. "I agreed to the date, so I know that. What I'm curious to know is how you found out where I live and why you came to pick me up."

Raymond takes the credit for finding out where she lives. "I've been dating you for a month now, been on countless dates with you, yet you are uneasy about me finding out where you stay. Why?" Is she ashamed or does she think I'll judge her?

"This neighborhood isn't for you Ravel." She argued as she rounded the car. Baffled by her words, I allowed her to get the door herself. She waited for me to get in before continuing to spill out ridiculously annoying words from her mouth. "Do you realize that you can easily get robbed around here?"

Turning on the engine, I stepped on the accelerator. "Are you trying to say that I cannot defend myself against petty thugs?"

"That's not what I meant." She quickly asserted. "All I'm saying is that you shouldn't be here."

"Then move out," I suggested causing her to tense up instantly. Glancing quickly at her, I offered her a smile to make my offer even more appealing. "If you really do not want to see me in this neighborhood, then let me get you another house."

"That's ridiculous." She scoffed.

"What is ridiculous is my girlfriend expecting me not to drop her home after every date." It annoys and frustrates me anytime she gets into a taxi after our date. "Let me get you a house, it won't cost me much."

Suddenly smiling, she leaned forward and kissed me. "I love you for wanting to take me to a safer place, but I'm fine." I opened my mouth, ready to argue more but she shook her head. "I'm going to allow you to drop me home after every date, but you'll have to bring Raymond along any time you're dropping by."

I don't need to bring Raymond along any time I want to see my woman. Ignoring her, I focused on driving.

Stepping down from the car, I rounded the car, opened the door for Hazel, placed a hand on her waist protectively, and led her into the restaurant where I made a reservation for us. The moment we stepped into the building, one of the stewards approached us with a smile.

"Welcome Mr. Southwark, I'll lead you to your designated table." He turned his gaze briefly at Hazel and his brows twitched as he slowly took in her dressing. Jaw clenching in anger at his condescending gaze, I took a step forward, ready to knock him out if he dares make my woman uncomfortable. "Is there a problem?"

He quickly tore his gaze away from her. "No sir." Gesturing with his hand, he tried to offer another smile. "This way sir."

We followed closely behind as he led us down the hallway into a private room with a private table. Halting abruptly, I glared at the unnecessary arrangement at the table. Hazel on the other hand cooed at it. She let go of my hand and sashayed towards the table.

"Did you request this?" She asked, her back to me as she picked up the Daisy flowers. My nose slowly began itching. "How did you know they're my favorite?"

Glaring at the steward, I pinched my nose. "I've always known," she turned around and blinked at me whilst still clutching the daisies, "but I never requested them."

"Really?" She turned her gaze to the steward.

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"It's a compliment from the house." The young man responded, daring to smile at me.

"Do I look like someone who needs a compliment from the house?" I deadpanned. The young man tensed suddenly, his annoying smile slowly vanishing.

"It's fine Ravel." Hazel chimed. "It's not so bad after all, it's just flowers, and besides they are my favorite."

Pulling out my handkerchief, I sneezed into it and at the same time tried to case my itching nose. "They are not just flowers Hazel, I'm allergic to them." I sneezed again into my handkerchief. "I'm allergic to flowers love and the flower I'm more allergic to are daisies which is why I detest them, no offense to you love."

Browse slightly tucked together, she stared down at the flowers in her grasp.

"So you hate anything Daisy?"

"I fucking detest them."

Chapter 25

HAZEL

(PRESENT TIME)

The extension of the gallery began the instant payment was finalized with the old man. I paid contractors to pull down the coffee shop and attach the building to the gallery before knocking down the walls of the gallery. If we decide to pull the walls down now, we will be risking the safety of the artworks and I can't have that.

Safety helmet in place, I walked into the fragment of the coffee shop with Agatha closely behind me to inspect the work in progress. Whilst discussing with the contractor on how long this will take, I took notice of how distracted Agatha is with her phone.

Rounding up the discussion with Riggs, I turned to Agatha and cleared my throat. She looked up, slipping her phone into her jacket. "Did something happen?" I questioned out of genuine concern. "You've been staring at your phone ever since we stepped out of the office."

She smiled tightly at me. "Everything is fine ma'am."

Her clipped tone made my eyes squint. She's either hiding something from me, or she's lying. "What's going on Agatha?" She opened her mouth, only to close it without uttering a word. "Agatha," I hissed through clenched teeth, "What's going on? Did something happen in the office?"

Exhaling heavily, she straightened her back. "I just read a news online," I arched my brows, "the venue for Mr. Southwark's exhibition has been confirmed."

Is that what this is about? "And?" I asked Aloofly, deciding to play it cool.

"He's holding it here in Seattle." She continued, feeling uneasy to reveal that.

Licking her lips, she balanced from one foot to another. "The hall which is to be used is a stone's throw from here and that means you'll be running into him more often than not."

I'm not scared of running into him; I'm more worried about him running into Daisy. "And?" I asked again with an indifferent tone. "Why do you look so worried about Southwark holding his event in Seattle? We don't own the whole of Seattle, do we?"

She gauged my reaction closely. "You're not worried about that?"

"About what?" My fingers tightened around the strap of my purse. "Why should I be worried about Southwark?" She opened her mouth to respond but I lifted a finger, silencing her. "That you know few things about my personal life doesn't mean you should bring it up when we should be working."

Agatha looked down at her shoes. "I'm sorry ma'am."

Exhaling, I tore my gaze away from her and focused it on the workers behind her. "You should be." I winced inwardly when one of the workers bumped into a wall. "Instead of focusing on my personal life, how about you go and

approve the request from those artists that want us to exhibit their works.”

This place should be ready in two weeks.

“Yes ma’am.” She quickly scurried away and I watched her closely, not slightly surprised when she almost fell due to how fast she was walking. My phone vibrated in my purse, taking my attention away from Agatha.

It was almost lunchtime when David walked into my office with three plastic bags. He grinned widely as he approached me. “How about you spare me some of your time?” He requested as he dropped the bag on the desk. “I’m hungry and I want to eat whilst staring at your face.”

I’m equally hungry. Standing, I gestured we use the sofa instead. He transferred the bag to the center table, pulled out the take-outs, and passed me a fork. I muttered appreciation before digging in.

Chapter 25

“Are you okay?” David asked out of the blue. Pausing with the fork in my plate, I blinked at him, silently waiting for him to elaborate. “The news is all over the internet,” he continued, “his advertising crew is doing a very good job.”

Frustrated with his evasiveness, I dropped the plate on the table. “Do you care to explain what you’re talking about?”

“Southwark.” He mused and I rolled my eyes. “The news says he’s going to be here for a while, are you cool with that?”

“Why do you all think I’m not going to be cool with that?” I queried, my annoyance seeping through my voice. “All I need to do is keep Daisy away from my office environment until he leaves Seattle.”

“So you’re cool with seeing him or running into him?” David asked skeptically.

“What the f u c k is your problem?” I snapped angrily prompting him to frown.

“Shouldn’t you be working towards making me fall for you? Why exactly are we discussing my ex-husband while having lunch?”

David blinked slowly at me for a few seconds before chuckling. “You’re bothered about it.” Dropping his empty plate, he picked up a bottle of water.

“You always get defensive when you don’t want to talk about what’s bothering you.”

I will not discuss this further. Opting for silence, I picked up my plate and resumed eating.

“What do you think about two weeks’ holiday to Miami, just the three of us.” I almost choked on my food from his ridiculous offer. “You, me, and Daisy can stay in Miami for two weeks until his show is over.”

“Are you high or something?” That’s the only reasonable explanation for his absurd reasoning. “You know I can get fined for pulling Daisy out of school during school sessions just to go on vacation, right?”

"You wanted to homeschool her."

I glared at him. "Homeschooling and vacation aren't the same thing," I stressed, hoping he'll get the point and drop the topic.

"Yes, I know, but that shouldn't _"

"Drop it." I hissed, holding his gaze. "I'm not going for any vacation just because Ravel decided to host an event in Seattle." I'm not a criminal, so why should I be running? "Keeping Daisy away from the office is the best option." It's not like he's going to force himself into my home.

David exhaled heavily, his grip on the plastic bottle tightening. "Let's not fight over this or panic, there is still enough time for him to change his mind about Seattle."

I chortled. "Are you saying that to make yourself feel better or make me feel better?" He noticed the smile tugging my lips which equally made him smile.

"You and I know it's too late to change the venue for the event, He has two weeks left."

Waving my words off, he leaned back and slowly raked me with his gaze. "I have two tickets for a concert, and I'll love to take you with me."

Just to maintain the light mood in the room, I grinned. "Are you asking me out on a date David?"

He smirked, matching my playful demeanor. "You bet your ass, I am." Licking his lips, he continued to stare at me through a hooded gaze. "The perfect way to enjoy a concert is to go with a beautiful woman."

"No need for the flattery David." Grabbing the napkin on the table, I carefully wiped my lips. "I'll go with you." He grinned with excitement, looking even more handsome with his dimples. "Stop smiling like that," I teased, "You might make a lady lose her focus."

Amused, he shook his head. "That's the plan."

That moment, a thought crossed my mind, a very selfish thought. One of the ways to keep Ravel away is to make him believe that I've moved on. Elenor already thinks I have a boyfriend, why not let Ravel think the same too?

"Why are you grinning like that?" David asked, narrowing his eyes with a smile tugging his lips. "You look like an evil witch right now."

Chapter 25

I blurted out a short laugh. "I know right." I'm thinking like an evil witch right now. "I'm looking forward to the concert date."

He bit his lips. "Me too."

My phone chimed from my desk and I stood up, strolled over, and grabbed it. Clicking on the message icon, my brows furrowed into a frown as I read the message.

I MISS YOU HAZEL. I'LL BE IN SEATTLE SOON AND I CAN'T WAIT TO

SEE YOU. I LOVE YOU.

What the actual fuck is wrong with this man?

Chapter 26

RAVEL

(PRESENT TIME)

The moment I stepped out of the board room, Rose fell into step with Raymond a few paces behind. "Sir, all the changes have been made in the hall per your request, do you wish to fly down to Seattle and take a look? Raymond's voice screamed in my head, telling me to refuse the suggestion, "Get the jet ready, I'll leave after I meet with the model managers." Raymond withheld his objections. My phone vibrated in my pocket and I pulled it out and stared briefly at the caller's ID before shoving it back into my pocket.

Raymond chuckled behind me. "If that's your mother, I suggest you pick it up because she's already waiting in your office."

Halting abruptly, I glared at Rose who quickly explained in her defense. "I couldn't stop her sir, she's your mother."

She's my mother and not a part of the board. "What stopped you from informing me that she's in my office?" I drawled out slowly, waiting for an excuse for her tardiness.

"I'm sorry sir." Rose quickly apologized, acknowledging her shortcomings. "I was going to inform you after discussing the hall with you."

This is ten in the damn morning, I'm in no mood to deal with Anne. "Next time, do not let her into my office without prior notice from me."

She nodded sharply, hurrying behind me as I resumed walking. "Does the rule apply to other members of your family or just Mrs. Anne Southwark alone?"

I contemplated my response. "Eleanor is exempted." At least she gives me an update on what's happening in Hazel's life. The news Raymond intentionally omit to share with me, I get them from Hazel. "Give the pilot a call and inform him I'll be leaving for Seattle by noon." I glanced at my wristwatch. "That's in the next two hours."

"Yes sir." She pulled out her phone, ready to make the phone call.

"Also give the chopper dude a call," I added, interrupting her movement, "I do not want to get stuck in traffic on my way to the airport." She gave me a nod before distancing herself to make the calls whilst I stepped into my office to face my mother.

Anne stood at the end of my office, staring at the only artwork on the wall. "I'm yet to see what you see in this work." She muttered, slowly turning to face me. "How much did you get this? Maybe I can convince you to get rid of it."

The painting in question is a garden, filled with flowers, more of daisies than roses, Hazel's first artwork. I cherish that painting more than anything, in other

words, it is priceless. "What are you doing here Anne?"

"What do you think I'm doing here?" She countered back as she slowly made her way toward my desk. Dressed in a black gown with feathery sleeves and comfortable red heels that match the color of her lips, anyone can see that Anne Southwark isn't just a beautiful woman, but a sophisticated one. "You've been avoiding me." She pointed out.

"The more reason why you shouldn't show up."

Dangling her index finger in disagreement, she settled down on the plush leather seat and crossed her ankle. "Ever heard of the saying that if the mountain refuses to come to Mohammed, then Mohammed will have to go to the mountain? You've refused to see me, so I decided to show up."

I'm sure her visit is anything but peaceful. "What exactly are you doing here Anne?" I ran my finger through my stubble. "I'm a very busy man who should be in a meeting in the next thirty minutes."

"What's this I've been seeing online?" She asked, going straight to the point. Massaging my temple, I thought of one thousand ways to put an end to this conversation. "If you're going to butt into my business, can you be more specific?" I know exactly what she's talking about, and she won't be Anne Southwark if she doesn't cause problems about this too.

"I think you know what I'm talking about son." She snarled. Uninterested in whatever she wants to talk about, I just blinked at her. "That gold-digging whore you've been flaunting all over the place!"

My jaw clenched at her insult. "It seems all females are gold-digging whores to you, Anne." Tilting my head to the left, I continued staring at her. "Correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm certain you used the same words for Hazel."

"That's because I'm able to identify a gold digger when I see one." She snapped. Apathetic to her words, I shrugged. "There are a lot of ladies who meet your social class, why do you always have to go for the lowest of them all?"

Couldn't the reason be more clearer to her? "Because it's my life and my choice." I deadpanned when she failed to see the picture. "If that is all you came to talk about, then I'm going to have to ask you to leave my office." She frowned, her face tightening with anger. "You're going to kick your mother out of your office because of that bitch?!"

Hazel might have suffered verbal abuse a few times in my absence from her, but I will not let June face the same fate. "I will not be the one doing the kicking, my security will." I gestured towards the door. "Just leave before you end up disgracing yourself."

"I

Scraping the chair backward, she stood up, splayed out her ten red-painted

fingers on the table, and leaned towards me. was ecstatic when you got rid of that drug addict in your life and I was hoping that you'll get it right this time, but obviously, you can't, which is why I'm going you have to step in and help you out."

"What the heck are you talking about Anne?"

"June," She hissed out, "your domestic staff. It will be over my dead body will you get married to her." Tightening her lips, she leaned down further. "I am Anne Southwark and I get what I want, and what I want right now is to get that wh ore out of your life, and I will not stop until it happens."

"This is your last chance to leave before I call security on you," I warned sternly. Anne glared at me, grabbed her Valentino bag, and stomped out of my office.

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The meeting with the model agencies lasted longer than I expected, which made me arrive in Seattle later than planned. From the airport, I headed straight to the venue of my event to check out everything that has been done so far.

"We're not spending the night in this city, right?" Raymond asked.

Scrolling through the news on my tablet, I zoomed in on a picture. "I'm a busy man, do I look like someone who has time for an impromptu vacation?"

"Yes." I lifted my eyes and glared at him. "What?! I really hope you don't change your mind when you run into her."

I scoffed, ridiculing his statement. "How small is this city?"

"Not when the event hall is a stone's throw from her art gallery." Raymond deadpanned. "Don't act surprised by the news sir, I'm very much aware that was the reason you chose the hall."

Sue me for wanting to get a glimpse of her face. Ignoring his remark, I refocused my attention on the tablet in my grasp.

It took us an hour to get to the venue. Raymond got off the car first, rounded it, and opened mine. The moment I stepped. out, I was greeted with a smiley face from Mr. Hems, the man in charge of the venue. He led us into the building and pointed out notable changes that has been made to suit my taste. My phone vibrates in my pocket, demanding my attention. Since we are on the second floor, I opted to use the balcony for more privacy.

"What is it Elenor?" I questioned the moment I swiped the answer button. "Is someone dying?"

"Very funny." She responded with a flat sarcastic tone. "I dropped by the office and Rose told me you went to Seattle. Have you finally come to your senses?"

The sight here is incredible. I can literally see the shops down the road. "What

exactly is your purpose for calling?”

“To wish you good luck.”

Rolling my eyes, I dipped my left hand into my pocket. “I’m here for business Elenor, and I’ll like to get back to it if you don’t mind. Stay safe.” Disconnecting the call that instant, I remained standing on the balcony, needing a minute to collect my thoughts.

My gaze leisurely swiped to the coffee shop at a distance and the least person I expected to see emerged from the confines of the coffee shop.

Hazel.

For a moment, I was delighted to get a glimpse of her from afar, but that moment of joy was snatched off abruptly when the dude from the last time equally walked out of the coffee shop and grabbed her hand.

She stared at their connected hands for a split second and I hoped with everything in me that she’ll pull away from his grasp, but she smile at him instead.

The bastard whispered something in her ear and she laughed genuinely.

Is he the guy Elenor says Hazel is dating?

“Bossman?” Raymond called out.

I shifted my gaze from them as they disappeared into one of the streets.

“Yes.”

“We’ve been waiting for your inside.”

“Book an emergency room

for us in any hotel,” I instructed him without turning to face him.

“I thought we were leaving immediately after inspecting the place?” He asked in a slightly confused tone.

“I change my mind, we are spending the night in Seattle.” I don’t know what I wish to achieve by spending the night, but I know I have to see Hazel.

Chapter 27

HAZEL

(FIVE YEARS AGO)

I’ve never been to the club ever since I left rehab, mostly because I want to stay away from anything that will lead to my relapse. Seeing drugs, or watching someone take it might be a trigger to me, and I don’t take any chances, not even the slightest one.

I’ve been able to avoid it, right until Harrison told me to make some delivery to a clubhouse. At first, I thought it was ridiculous that someone in a club ordered fried chicken, but he corrected that confusion by explaining that I was delivering it to the club manager.

Pulling over with the delivery bike, I got down and balanced the three cartons on my arm before approaching the security man. He stared down at me with

indifference, as if I'm a headache he'd rather not deal with.

"I'm here to make a delivery to one Mr. Blue," I informed him, trying hard to let him know that I can very well see the condescending look that he was trying so hard to hide.

The dude spoke into his mic before addressing me again. "Take the back door, and tell the security man there CODE RED, he will let you through without any hassle, and point you towards the right direction.

I forced a smile. "Thank you." Balancing the cartons properly, I headed for the back door and did as instructed. The second security man instructed me to take the long hallway and then take the elevator, it will take me straight to Mr. Blue's office.

Finding my way wasn't difficult. I did my delivery, confirmed the payment, and made my way back up. Oh... did I fail to mention that the office was actually underground? That the elevator took me down instead of taking me up? I almost panicked.

Walking down the familiar hallway, I ignored all the couples making out. I did mind my business, or at least, I tried to, right until I saw a lady being dragged into a room.

'Mind your business Hazel' I warned myself inwardly, urging my feet to keep moving. 'You came here to make deliveries, and you've done just that.'

I almost listened to that voice until I heard the lady scream... or at least I think I did. My feet changed its direction, hurriedly stomping into the room that the young lady just got dragged into. Pulling out my phone, I clicked on the video recorder and activated it before stepping into the room.

"I just told you I like you!" The man growled, holding the lady's hand way too tight for her comfort. "I know you like me too! I saw the way you were staring at me from the dance floor."

"I don't know what you're talking about!" The lady cried. "I was only dancing to the rhythm of the song!"

Clearing my throat to announce my presence to the oblivious individuals, I stepped further into the room. "Sorry to interrupt, but can you please turn around and say hello to the camera?"

The man slowly turned towards me, his jaw tightening with anger when he noticed my camera recording him. "What do you think you are fucking doing?!" He bellowed, the veins in his neck threatening to burst.

Shrugging, I continued recording, "What do you think I'm doing?" I retorted, angry that he dared manhandle this woman, The fool stood taller and took a step forward. "Another step forward and I'm going to upload this video."

He halted instantly, "Who the fuck are you?" He spat, spittle escaping his mouth, "Her sister?"

I smiled cheekily at him. "Don't we look alike?" I teased him, my eyes

scanning the room for anything that can serve as a weapon just in case he decides to come at me. "Hey," the lady blinked at me. "Do you want him here?"

"No," She blurted out, "I don't want him here."

Returning my attention to the man, I cocked my head. "You heard the young lady, bounce!"

"Bounce?!" He scoffed as he slowly prowled towards me. "Do you have a death wish?" He spat angrily, his hand clenching into a tight fist. "You do realize I can easily take out the two of you, right?"

The other lady is clearly intoxicated, which means I'm left to face this man alone. 'You should have minded your business, Hazel!' Trying not to let not my fear show, I widened my smile, looking like a deranged psycho. "I've been in a psychiatric ward, and while I was there, I was diagnosed with a twitching finger."

His face contorted into a frown. "What the fuck does that have to do with me?"

"It means if you provoke me further, I might mistakenly upload this video to the internet. Going to jail for attempted rape is a pretty fucked up thing."

He stared at me for a moment, then at the young lady splayed out on the sofa, then back at me. "This bitch isn't worth the drama." He retorted before stomping out of the room. I watched him disappear into the hallway before approaching the young lady.

I cradled her head, trying to bring her into a more conscious state. "What's your name?"

She giggled, tempting me to slap the drunkenness out of her eyes. "I'm Elenor." She slurred. "You know me right?"

Nope, I don't. "Do you have any means of getting home?" Where the heck is her purse? I don't have any cash to send her home. "What's your home address?"

"My brother." She mumbled. "He's coming to pick me up."

"Your brother?" I can't be here waiting for her brother... Harrison will kill me.

"How long do you think it will take him to get here?" She giggled in response.

I was about to probe her for more response when the door opened and a very familiar face raced in. "Elenor?" Surprised to see him, I took a step back, giving him space to cater to her. "What happened to her?"

I shrugged. "I guess she's drunk. I found her like this." Staring at the lady, my brows furrowed together as I tried to figure her out. "Is she Ravel's sister?"

Before Raymond could respond, the man in question walked into the room.

He took a double step when he saw me, his brows arching. "Hazel?" He glanced at his sister. "What are you doing here?"

"I noticed a man dragging a drunk woman into a room, so I decided to help."

He approached me and pulled me into his embrace. "Thank you for helping my sister. She's always up to something silly." He leaned down and kissed my cheek. "Take her home, Raymond, I'll drive Hazel home."

"That won't be necessary." I blurted out, prompting both men to stare at me. "I mean Ravel don't have to drive me home. I came here for delivery, and I came with the delivery bike."

He squeezed my palm gently. "That shouldn't be an issue, we can put it away in the trunk." He returned his attention to Raymond. "Take her to my apartment, Anne will have a heart attack if she sees her like that."

"Yes, boss."

Ravel kissed my lips chastely, "And you, come on, let's get you home." He led me out of the building. "Why exactly are you doing such late delivery?"

"That's the last one before I get off work."

Ravel frowned, "I can't have my woman working so late at night." He flicked two bouncers over to help him put the bike into the trunk. "I'll need to have a long chat with your boss."

"I'm fine Ravel."

"What do I have to do to get you to stop working there?"

I giggled. "Nothing." I kissed his lips. Until I get a degree, I'm not leaving Harrison's restaurant.

"Don't think I'm going to let this go until I change your mind, and as for your boss, we'll have an overdue discussion on your working schedule."

"Ravel..." I groaned... "Can't you just let this go?"

"Harrison?" He shook his head. "I can't let him tire out my woman like this." He winked at me. "I need your energy for something more fun."

Pe rvert.

Chapter 28

HAZEL

(PRESENT TIME)

The day had been nothing short of chaotic, especially with the task of transferring newly arrived artworks into the vast storage room. Agatha and I were on a mission to get everything organized swiftly. I had delegated her to concentrate solely on the reconstruction, while I took charge of handling the company's paperwork.

David was diligently overseeing the receipt of the artwork, ensuring everything was accounted for and handled with care.

With my hair neatly tucked behind my ear, I meticulously read through each document, making sure to sign them promptly. As I was working my way through the fifth document, my phone suddenly buzzed, diverting my attention.

Glancing at the phone screen, I quickly recognized the caller as Presley, Daisy's nanny. My heart skipped a beat, fearing something was wrong. Without hesitation, I answered the call, my voice filled with concern. "Presley, is everything okay?" I could hear my daughter's distressed cries in the background. "What's happening? Why is Daisy crying like that?"

"That was why I called ma'am," she responded, "she has been crying that she wants to see you, and I've tried everything to get her to calm down, but it's not working."

My heart ached as I listened to Daisy's desperate cries through the phone. I could feel the weight of my remaining workload, but my daughter's distress took precedence over everything else. I firmly pushed the files away, determined to address her needs.

"Put her on the line," I instructed Presley, my voice filled with compassion. I heard some shuffling before Daisy's tearful voice filled my ears, and it broke my heart even more. "Hey, princess," I said soothingly, hoping to offer her some comfort. Surprisingly, her cries lessened a bit at the sound of my voice. "What's wrong, princess?" I asked gently, wanting to understand what was troubling her so deeply.

"Mummy..." she sobbed, "I want mummy..."

My resolve to finish my work wavered as I knew I couldn't leave my daughter feeling this upset. "Shh, my darling," I tried to console her, "how about we go get some ice cream together? Mummy will be right there with you."

But my words seemed to have little effect, and her cries only intensified.

Presley attempted to calm her down, but it only seemed to upset Daisy further. "I want my mummy!" she wailed, her little voice full of longing.

Despite my attempts to comfort Daisy, her crying persisted, and it seemed like my words were falling on deaf ears. Determined to break through to her, I raised my voice a little, calling out her name firmly, and finally, it seemed to get her attention. "Daisy!"

She sniffled, responding to my stern tone. "Mummy is on her way home," I reassured her.

The relief in her voice was evident as she asked, "Mummy is coming home?"

My heart swelled with love and joy at the sound of her voice. "Yes, baby, mummy is coming home," I confirmed, a genuine smile spreading across my face. I couldn't help but reflect on how fortunate I was to have Daisy in my life, and how much she meant to me.

With her reassurance, I could feel the warmth of her affection even through the phone. "I love you, baby girl," I said, my voice full of tenderness.

Her response melted my heart. "I love you too, mummy."

"See you soon, princess," I said before disconnecting the call. My focus shifted entirely to the task at hand – getting home to my daughter as quickly

as possible.

With the files now neatly packed into a larger folder, I grabbed my coat and purse, ready to make my way out of the office.

Chapter 28

But before leaving, I made a quick stop at David's office to inform him of my early departure. He looked up from his laptop, offering a warm smile as he greeted me.

"I'm going to head home early today," I explained, knowing that he and Agatha would handle things efficiently in my absence.

His brows furrowed out of concern. "Is everything okay? Are you feeling sick?" He got off the seat and rounded his desk to meet me. "Did something happen at home?"

Waving off his concern with a smile, I waved the files. "Everything is fine. I just have to take work home because my baby misses me."

David exhaled with relief. "I imagined the worst scenery when you walked in and told me you'll be clocking out early."

"Why?" I questioned with a teasing while. "It could be good news you know."

Scotting, he slipped both hands into his pockets. "You never leave work early, unless it is an emergency with Daisy." He glanced at the pile of work on his desk. "You want me to walk you to the parking lot?"

"It's fine." I took a step back. "You should go back to work, I only stopped by to inform you that I'm leaving." He took a step forward, probably to hug me and I involuntarily took one step back. He halted and stared at my feet. "I'm sorry." He lifted his gaze. "You don't have to apologize Hazel." He smiled weakly at me. "Slow and steady right?"

Right. I cleared my throat. "I should get going." Not sure how to handle the tension in the room, I quietly walked out of the office. Suddenly tired, I dragged my feet into the elevator. Whilst in the elevator, my phone chimed, indicating a chat from Agatha. Engrossed in responding to the text from Agatha, I got off the elevator and blindly headed for my car.

"You should pay more attention to your environment while walking."

Yelping loudly, I loosed hold of my purse and file, placing a hand on my chest to calm my erratic beating heart. "Christ! Are you trying to make my heart stop Ravel?!" What is he even doing here?!

The bastard had the audacity to smile. "It wasn't my intention to scare you." He slowly made his way towards me. "You know you can always respond to that text when you get into your car right."

Staring at him for a moment, I made a prompt decision; he was not worth my time. Ignoring him, I picked up my purse file, fished out my car key, and hastily ambled toward my car. I don't know what he's doing here, and I don't care to

know.

and

“Are you ignoring me?” His silly question went unanswered and when it dawned on him that I was making an escape to my car, he raced towards me and slammed my door shut the moment I opened it. “Hazel?”

Closing my eyes, I took deep long breaths before opening it. Dropping my purse and file on the roof of my car, I glared at him. “What is this Ravel? Are you stalking me?”

He licked his lips. “Don’t flatter yourself, Hazel.”

Don’t flatter myself? Is he kidding me right now?! Blinking rapidly, I folded my hands. “If this isn’t stalking, then tell me what it is Mr. Southwark. You are in my company’s parking lot, can you tell me what exactly it is that you’re doing here.”

He tried to take a step closer to me. “Don’t you dare!” I snapped, “Don’t you fucking dare!”

Lifting his hands, he took a step back. “I’m sorry if I’m making you uncomfortable,” He apologized, “I was just in the city and I thought to see you before I leave tomorrow.”

“Why?” I challenged. “What reason do you have visiting me?”

He bit his lower lips. “We don’t have to be enemies just because we are divorced, Hazel.”

“We don’t have to be friends either.” I retorted. He winced at my words but I remained indifferent to his emotions. Once upon a time, I would have cared, but not anymore. “I heard you are holding your next exhibition here in Seattle.” me, Hazel?”

Irritated by his audacity, I scoffed. “You wish. I had dinner with your sister a few weeks ago and she mentioned it.”

“I’ll be sending you an invite.”

“That won’t be necessary.” I countered, declining his invitation. “The reason I mentioned this exhibition is to confirm from you if I’ll be needing a restraining order placed on you.” His smile slowly morphed into a frown. “I do not like the fact that we run into each other more often.”

“You want to place a restraining order on me, so I won’t be anywhere close to you during my stay here in Seattle throughout the exhibition?”

I jutted my chin out. “I’m glad you get the picture.”

Boring his gaze on me, Ravel took a step forward. “You honestly think a restraining order can keep me away?”

“That’s a psychopathic thing to say.” I retorted angrily. “If you make me feel unsafe, I’m reporting you to the cops.”

“Feel unsafe?” His eyes narrowed with disbelief. “If anyone is making you feel unsafe, it’s that silly boyfriend of yours who allowed you to walk into a parking

lot all alone.”

I really should get back to Daisy. “You’ll stop speaking about my boyfriend that way, and just so you know, I’m getting that restraining order on you.

“It won’t be able to keep me away,” He argued, “You know why? Because I fucking miss you.”

J

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RAVEL

(PRESENT TIME)

To say my day went from good to bad will be an understatement. Hazel telling me that I make her feel unsafe in a blow in my guts that I don’t think I’ll recover from any time soon. All I’ve been doing is trying to protect her, protect her from things she’s privy to and what do I get at the end? A restraining order threat.

Like fuck if I’m going to stay away from her; I’d love to see her try and fail.

What more could be done if I’m arrested? A couple of fines that my bank account won’t even notice.

Still standing in the same spot where I’ve been rooted ever since Hazel drove away. I felt my eyes sting. When was the last time I cried? That was probably a year after our wedding.

A screeching car pulled over next to me, and I didn’t even bother turning to acknowledge the driver. The door opened and Raymond got down. “When I didn’t find you anywhere around. I figured you went to see her Ignoring him, my jaw clenched as I brooded over Hazel’s words. “With the look on your face. I’m judging it didn’t go well.”

Letting out a huffy sigh, I turned and got into the car. Raymond quietly joined me. As he started the engine, we were about to leave the parking lot when an unexpected sight caught our attention. David, acting like a man possessed, came charging towards our car in a crazed manner. Although Raymond could have easily driven away, my curiosity got the better of me, and I wanted to know what this fool was up to.

“Don’t drive off,” I told Raymond, my eyes fixed on the unhinged man outside the car window.

“I never even considered it,” Raymond grumbled, his gaze also locked on the man outside. “My thoughts were more along the lines of running him over. Chuckling at Raymond’s dark humor, I warned, “Well, I’m not going to pay my lawyer a single dime for your case if you end up murdering someone.”

Eventually, David reached our car, and he tapped on my window. Still intrigued. I decided to roll it down and see what he wanted to say. “You were running so relentlessly. I momentarily mistook you for a rabid dog,” I quipped,

trying to get a reaction from him.

He glared angrily at me. "I need to talk with you, Mr. Southwark."

His angry glare intensified, but I maintained a cool composure, crossing my hands over my chest. "Well, isn't that what we're doing right now, Mr. Ellison? Conversing?" I couldn't help but feel utterly bored, wondering why I was even entertaining this conversation with him.

He leaned in closer, directing his attention briefly to Raymond before focusing on me again. "I want to talk to you alone," he emphasized, his voice dripping with disdain. "I'm sure you don't want your lapdog to hear me insult you."

Raymond, taken aback by the sudden insult, blinked in disbelief. "Lapdog?" he retorted, his tone tinged with offense. "This lapdog' of his was actually contemplating running you over just a few seconds ago. Don't give me reasons to turn it into reality."

I couldn't help but be amused by the man's audacity. "You race towards my car, insult my friend, and then have the nerve to demand that I get out of my car just because you said so. Do you even realize how ridiculous you sound?" I retorted with a hint of sarcasm.

However, David seemed undeterred by my words, and he defiantly placed his hands in his pockets while puffing out his chest. "I'm going to say what I want to say, regardless of whether you get down or not," he asserted boldly.

I couldn't muster much interest in his posturing, so I simply shrugged apathetically. But then, he dropped a bombshell that left me dumbfounded, "I want you to stay away from my woman."

My eyes widened in disbelief, and I couldn't believe what I had just heard.

"What the heck did you just say to me?" My voice

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trembled with a mixture of anger and incredulity. The audacity of this man was beyond comprehension.

"You heard me right," he spat, his voice seething with anger. "I saw everything on the surveillance footage, and it's time someone set things straight." He leaned in, pressing both hands against the door, eyes locked on mine. "You had your shot with Hazel, but you blew it. Now it's my turn, and I won't let you mess it up for me too!"

Suppressing my frustration, I swung the car door open and stepped out. "Well, well, this is getting interesting," I remarked, leaning casually against the bonnet, arms crossed and legs crossed. "You're feeling threatened by me, aren't you?" I taunted with a smirk. "No need to hide it; your eyes say it all." He sniffed loudly, standing defiantly with his arms akimbo. "How on earth did you come to that ridiculous conclusion?" he scoffed, taking a step closer to me.

I chuckled bitterly, maintaining my composure. "Oh, it's pretty clear."

Laughing humourlessly, he took a step closer to me. "The way Hazel is warming up to me, it won't be long before she's in my bed," He declared confidently. The tension between us intensified as we locked eyes, neither willing to back down.

Fucking bastard! My anger boiled over as I tightened my fist and swung it hard, connecting with his jaw. He staggered back, but I didn't give him a chance to recover. I leaped on him, landing blow after blow. The satisfaction of seeing him lying there, taking the beating, fueled my rage even more. Raymond finally intervened, pulling me away from the confrontation. I struggled against his grasp, seething with fury as I watched David stagger to his feet, seemingly unfazed. Through gritted teeth, I warned, "The next time you

by the o dare mention my wife in that way, I'll make sure you end up in the damn morgue!"

His bloody smile only fueled my rage further. "You mean your ex-wife?" he taunted, relishing the pain he caused me. I lunged at him again, but Raymond's firm hold kept me at bay. "You signed the divorce papers, Southwark," David taunted, his voice dripping with malice. "You let her go, and now you'll have to live with the consequences."

As Raymond whispered urgently in my ear, his words served as a much-needed reality check. The last thing we needed was a public spectacle that could tarnish the exhibition's reputation. He positioned himself between David and me, gently placing his hands on my chest, trying to soothe the raging storm within me. "Boss, we should leave. This drama won't do any good for the exhibition," he implored.

Though my anger still smoldered, I realized he was right. I took a deep breath, straightening my disheveled shirt, trying to regain my composure. But before I could leave, I needed to make one thing clear to David. "If your intentions toward Hazel are merely about conquering her, then you better back off before things get ugly. I won't be held accountable for my actions," I warned, my voice firm.

David's retort was filled with defiance, but there was something deeper there, something vulnerable. "I love Hazel," he asserted, spitting out blood defiantly. "I don't need your approval or belief; my feelings are none of your damn business. I've said what I needed to say, so stay away from her."

"Or what?" I challenged with a smirk, "What can you possibly do if I choose not to stay away from her?" David always liked to act tough, but deep down, I knew he was just bluffing. "And if you truly believe that Hazel shares your silly feelings, why bother warning me to back off?" He knows I have a chance with her.

His jaw clenched, and he took a step closer, still trying to appear intimidating

after our recent scuffle. "You might have the money, but I'm not afraid to play dirty. Don't push me, Southwark."

Raymond urged me with his eyes not to engage again. I took a deep breath, trying to control my frustration. I could feel my temper flaring, but I had to remain composed. I licked my lips, buying myself a moment before speaking again. "Go ahead, David, try everything in your arsenal to win her heart. But mark my words, when the time is right, I will come back for her, and no one, not even you, will stand in my way,"

With that, I turned away, refusing to give him the satisfaction of seeing me lose control again.

David scoffed. "You talk as though she's a possession."

"You really don't get it, do you?" Raymond retorted sharply, his voice tinged with a mix of disbelief and frustration. "What's gotten into you? Learn when to hold your tongue, man!"

"You say I talk as though she's my possession." I rasped, addressing his earlier statement. "That's because she is." He frowned with confusion when I suddenly smiled widely at him. "She is my priceless possession, so don't think I'll sit back and watch someone steal it."

Chapter 30

HAZEL

(FIVE YEARS AGO)

Stacking up fried chicken into a carton can be a very delightful thing to do. I prefer doing this to serving customers or taking the packed chicken for delivery. Stacking up the last piece, I stood up and stretched my back to relieve some ache from having to squat for so long.

"Hazel?" Oscar called from the doorway, I turned to him. "A lady is asking for you out front."

Crinkling my nose, I walked over to the sink to take off the gloves and wash my hands. "Did you get a name?" I'm in no mood to see a stranger.

"Elenor." He responded. "She said her name is Elenor."

Ravel's sister? How did she find me? "I'll be there shortly." Wiping my hands with a towel, I got rid of the apron before walking out to meet her. Honestly, this isn't how I hoped to see any of Ravel's family. I'm no fool, I'm sure his mother will want someone better for him.

I found her seated at the corner of the restaurant. Suddenly nervous, I dragged myself over to her table and sat down. "Hi."

Elenor looked up from her phone and the moment she saw me, her face brightened with a warm smile. "Hazel!" How does she know my name? That's interesting. "I'm sorry for intruding on your work." She pointed at a car parked outside through the window. "I've been sitting in there for ages, waiting for you

to get off work.”

“Oh...” Still confused, I relaxed back. “How did you find me?”

Dropping her phone, she leaned forward. “Raymond told me.” She bit her lower lips. “I’m sorry if you’re uncomfortable with that, I just wanted to meet you and thank you for what you did last night.”

“It’s fine, you don’t have to.” Imagine my surprise when Oscar served me a soft drink and chicken wings. I arched a brow at him and he shrugged.

“I ordered that,” Elenor announced. “I didn’t think it was right to leave your side of the table empty while I eat.”

Glancing at the order on the table, I slowly lifted my gaze to Elenor. “I’m sorry, but I really have to get back to work I’m still on duty, so I shouldn’t be relaxing around eating.”

“Your boss said it was okay.” She pointed out. “He said you can go off work if you want.”

I blinked rapidly. “You met with Harrison?” She nodded. I was instantly reminded of Ravel. He did the same thing the first time he met with me. “What did you offer him?”

Flipping a shoulder, she picked a chicken and dipped it into a sauce. “I offered to buy all the chicken you were packing in there.” I’m not surprised. I find it rather annoying that people think they can buy my time. “I’m sorry.” She apologized abruptly, seemingly noticing my displeasure over her action. “I didn’t mean to upset you.”

“It’s fine.” She’s Ravel’s family, and what his family will think about me matters a lot to me. Not sure what to say, I picked up the chicken/wings and dipped them into a sauce.

“Why exactly did you help me?” Elenor asked, watching me closely. “Did you do that because you know I’m Ravel’s sister?”

Chuckling, I took my time swallowing. “If you’re asking whether I did what I did to gain some brownie points from you, the answer is no. I didn’t even know you were his sister until Raymond and Ravel walked in.”

She tilted her head, her brows furrowing, “Then why did you help me? I watched the footage and that man would have easily beaten you up, or probably raped you too, yet you chose to stick around. Why?”

That’s quite simple. “Because I still have a functioning conscience.” Every normal human would have done what I did.

Maybe they wouldn’t have charged in there themselves, but they’ll definitely call for help. “Besides I’ve seen a lot of douc hebags in my life.”

Staring at me unblinkingly, Elenor suddenly smiled. “I like you.” She waggled her brows at me teasing. “I have a feeling we’re going to be great friends and I also owe you one.”

Oh... I doubt she’ll say that if she finds out the same secret I’m keeping from

her brother. "Don't judge my character just because I helped you." She needs to be smarter than that. "What if I'm the one who sent that dude to try molesting you, just so I could save you and earn your trust."

Laughing shortly, she shook her head in disagreement. "Why would you want to gain my trust when already have my brother's trust?"

Is she for real? "You're his family," I stated matter-of-factly, "gaining your trust and that of your mother should be important to any woman who claims to love Ravel."

Her grin widened. "A lady who understands the concept of family." She winked at me. "I like you." Well, I'm glad she does. "Don't bother winning my mother's trust," she added, "she's a lost cause."

I winced involuntarily. I'd give anything to have my parents back. "Don't you think it's rather a harsh thing to say about your mother?"

Scoffing, she wiped her hands, her lips curling. "She's my mother, and I know her very well. Don't ruin your relationship with Ravel just because of my mum, she's not worth it. I love her, but she can be a royal witch sometimes."

Now I'm getting more nervous about meeting her someday. "With what you just said, I can't say I'm looking forward to seeing her."

She giggled. "You shouldn't." Her phone vibrated on the table but she simply ignored it. "What are you doing on Saturday night?"

Hunting for jobs online. "Nothing." I tried not to glare at Harrison who just walked past our table. "Why do you ask?"

"I'm hosting a party on Saturday, and I'll love to see you." The glint in her eyes reflected just how excited she is about the party. "It will be fun, I promise, plus I can't wait to lavish Ravel's debit card."

"No offense to you Elenor," she nodded, an indication that I should go on, "judging from the fact that you almost got raped last night, should you really be thinking about partying?"

She laughed at my comment as though I said something hilarious. "That I almost got raped isn't an excuse not to party, besides I'm not always that drunk." I scoffed under my breath, but somehow, she managed to hear it.

"Really, I don't drink in a stupor. I had a huge fight with my _" She paused and tilted her head.

Confusing her sudden silence as hesitation, I intervened. "You don't have to talk about your relationship problem with me if you don't to."

"Relationship problem?" She scoffed, "he's not my boyfriend just someone I'm seeing. I was actually looking for the best term to classify him hence the reason for my silence." Smacking her lips together, she resumed her explanation. "So yeah, I got drunk because of him and I can assure you it will never happen again."

She got drunk for someone who isn't her boyfriend but someone she was

seeing; and here I was, thinking my love life is complicated. "You don't have to explain things to me. If you feel you can handle another party, then that's cool too."

"Great!" She clapped her hands. "So you'll be coming right?"

She went out of her way to invite me, why shouldn't I? "There won't be any drugs at the party right?"

She arched her brows. "I didn't take you as one to judge."

I shrugged nonchalantly. "I don't like being around drugs Elenor." I'm afraid of relapse even though I don't say it out aloud to anyone. "So if there are drugs at the party, I'll have to decline."

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She stared at me for a beat moment before responding. "You don't have to worry about that. I don't do drugs, and nobody is bringing that sh it into my house."

"A house party?"

"Mhmm. So you're going right?" I nodded which made her squeal with excitement. "I'm going to pick you up tomorrow afternoon so we can spend Ravel's money!"

"I have work."

She waved me off. "Don't worry about that, Ravel will handle it." She placed both hands on the table and squirmed with excitement. "Your boyfriend gave me his black card, Do you know what that means?"

I shook my head.

"It means we should spare no expense at making you look breathtaking on Saturday!" She winked at me. "He's your very own sugar daddy."