

Derek POV

The valet brings my car and I make my way to my apartment. When I push the door open, I'm met with familiar voices. I roll my eyes, really wishing that I had stayed at the hotel. I walk the few feet to the living room and my mother, father, and a woman I've seen at some of the social events are sitting on my couch. "Derek, it's about time you got home. You have kept us waiting for over an hour" my mother says. "That's quite funny mother, because I don't remember agreeing to be here at a specific time or at all." She shoots me a glare before she plasters her fake smile back on. "Derek, this is Gwen Casterline." I nod at her. This is John Casterline's daughter. He is a wealthy man that made his money in restaurants. He is also an arrogant prick. "It's nice to see you again Gwen. I'm not really sure why my mother set this up without consulting me, but I'm rather tired. I plan on getting something to eat and turning in for the night. I have a busy day tomorrow." "Derek Coleman, you are being very rude" my mother hisses at me. "No mother, you are being rude by showing up unannounced and trying to set me up once again, after I have made it perfectly clear I don't need your help to find a woman that interests me." I swear if this was a cartoon steam would be coming out of her ears.

She turns to my father and huffs. "Stanley, say something to your son." My father stands up and walks over to pull me into a hug. "Have a goodnight son. Get some sleep. Mary and Gwen, it's time for us to leave," my father says walking toward the door. Gwen looks like she sucked on something sour but she at least gets up and follows my father. "You are twenty-seven years old Derek. It is time to settle down and find a wife with good breeding." "I'm not planning to marry a Great Dane mother. I love you, mother, but stay out of my love life. I won't tell you again." She gets to her feet and stomps out of my apartment. I walk behind her and lock the door before I head into the kitchen. I put my phone on the island and grab a plate that Monique left in the fridge for me. As I heat the plate, my phone dings. I grab it off the counter and smile when I read the message.

Briar: Thank you for the food and the delicious chocolate cake. Anything chocolate is my favorite. I really do appreciate all you did for me today.

Derek: You don't have to thank me. That's what friends do for each other, Briar. Try to get some sleep.

Briar: I will definitely try. I want to get an early start on house hunting tomorrow.

Derek: I will text you the name and number of my real estate broker. He is excellent, and I'm sure he can find exactly what you're looking for.

Briar: That would be great Derek. Thank you, goodnight.

Derek: Goodnight Briar

I put the phone back down and smile. I won't lie and say I was worried she wouldn't want to talk to me after I told her I wanted a shot with her. Once I finish eating, I make my way upstairs. I grab pajama bottoms and head into my bathroom. I step under the spray and the events of the day play over in my mind. I just can't wrap my head around what the f**k Calob was thinking. Briar is beautiful, intelligent, compassionate, and kind. I don't think the woman has a mean bone in her body. When they sat across from her in the conference room today, she kept her composure. I don't think most people would have been so calm. She is an amazing woman and I plan on doing everything I can to get to know her better. I just hope she gives me the chance.

Briar POV

I stretch and open my eyes. The bed is so soft, and I realize I'm not in my room. It takes me a minute to remember where I am. The events of yesterday come rushing back and the ache that was missing when I woke up is back with a vengeance. I force myself to get out of bed. The minute I'm on my feet a wave of dizziness hits me. I sit back down until I get my bearings. The dizziness subsides and I make my way into the bathroom. Once I'm showered, I head out to the room and grab a pair of jeans and a yellow blouse with white buttons. I pull my hair into a messy bun and slip on my ballet flats. I pick the phone up from my nightstand and I see it's already nine. I see the message that Derek said he would send with the contact information for his real estate agent, John. I dial his number, and he agrees to see me at noon today. That gives me enough time to go to the car dealership for a new car. A knock on the door to the room gets my attention. When I open the door, a young woman is standing there with a cart full of food. "There must be a mistake. I didn't order this" I say and she smiles. "Mr. Coleman ordered it for you. Enjoy your meal, miss," she says before she makes her way back to the elevator.

I pull the dome off the plate and my stomach rumbles. I smile and take the plate over to the couch. I begin to eat and my phone starts to ring. I expect it to be Lola, but it's not. I place the phone to my ear. "Hello" I say. "Oh, my sweet Briar. Are you alright" my mother-in-law coos at me. I love this woman like she was my own mother. "I'm alright mom." "We both know that's not true Briar, but you will be. You are so strong. I'm sorry for what my idiot of a son did to you." I can't help but chuckle. "Briar, we are here if you need us. I would never ask you to forgive him, but please don't shut us out. We love you like you were our own daughter." "I won't. I love you both too. I'll keep in touch." "Good, I love you, Briar." "I love you too." I wipe the stray tear away and finish my breakfast. I ate way too much. I grab my phone, purse, and the key card. Once I'm outside, the Uber I ordered pulls up. It doesn't take long to reach the car dealership. As I start to look around, I realize I want something different. Calob always picked out the cars we drove and this time I'm getting what I want. I walk toward the Jeeps. I find a dark blue one that I love. I review the stats and I manage to get a decent deal.

I drive off the lot and make my way to the real estate office. I pull into the parking lot ten minutes early. I pull out my phone and dial Lola. "Hey, where are you" she asks. "I'm getting ready to head into the real estate office to look at houses and I just bought a jeep." "That's great Briar. I'm so proud of you. You know I'm here if you need me to do anything to help you. Just so you know, Calob called me last night." The silence stretches between us. "I told him he didn't deserve you and I hoped you would get under Derek Coleman." "You didn't, Lola." "I absolutely did. He's an asshole and if there is any justice you will do just that." I debate whether to tell her about last night, but I finally decide I want her opinion of the conversation. "He told you he wants you, and you didn't take him up to your room and ride him until morning." "Lola, I'm still married, and it hasn't been a day since I left Calob." "Briar, I love you, but I think you should listen to this man. Give it time and let your heart heal. When it's healed and you're ready let that man show you exactly what he has been thinking about for the last three years." I can't help but laugh. "I'll think about it. I need to go so I'm not late. I love you, Lola." "I love you too, Briar."