

## Proximity

\*Domenic\*

I hopped into my car and quickly drove away. Just then, my phone started ringing – it was Knox. I answered the call using the car's speaker system.

"Dom, Nic's teacher mentioned that the same white car picked him up that day, just like it did every other day. But she didn't catch the number plate or get a glimpse of anyone inside," Knox informed me.

"That's absurd, Knox. Something doesn't add up," I groaned.

"I know, which is why I've had my guy keeping an eye on the teacher," Knox replied. "You've stopped me from doing things my way, or else I would've squeezed out every detail, one way or another," he growled.

"No, Knox, we need to handle this covertly. If the kidnapper gets wind of our investigation, my son's life will be in danger. So, be cautious. No one should suspect you or know that you're monitoring the teacher. If she's involved in Nic's kidnapping and has ties to the kidnapper, it could put us in a precarious situation," I explained.

I couldn't take even a one percent chance when it came to my son's safety.

"Don't worry, Dom. I'll be extra careful, and Nic will be just ne, alright?!" he declared rrmly, exuding condence.

"I hope so," I sighed, disconnecting the call.

I pushed down on the accelerator and navigated through the trac as I remembered overhearing Mariya and her friend gossiping about DM. The enigmatic Maa Don had become the talk of the town lately. Everyone was speculating and attempting to unveil the face behind the mask. But little did they know it wasn't going to be that simple.

Before long, I arrived at Benjamin's lavish residence. The security guards at the entrance informed me that Benjamin didn't want to see me. He thought he could escape trouble by avoiding me, but little did he know that trouble was determined to catch up with him. I smirked to myself, knowing that I was about to give him a taste of it.

Surveying the exterior of the house, I noticed that the security was concentrated solely at the entrance gate. This presented me with an opportunity. I leaped over the backside wall, skillfully avoiding detection, and entered his sprawling bungalow undetected. It was time to pay Benjamin an unexpected visit, one that he wouldn't soon forget.

Moving with the utmost caution, I evaded his security guards, silently making my way up to the balcony. Sliding the door open with a gentle touch, I slipped inside a room that appeared to be empty. Keeping my senses sharp, I methodically checked each room until a faint sound of laughter caught my attention. Peeking through a slightly ajar door, I found Benjamin, completely unaware of my presence.

He was with a girl in his bed, f\*\*\*\*g her ercealy. I burst into the room without warning, swiftly locking the door behind me. The girl let out a piercing scream, scrambling to cover herself with a sheet. I gestured for her to leave, and she hurriedly escaped into the bathroom.

Benjamin's face contorted in horror as his ugly d\*\*k dangled limply between his legs. His eyes widened in shock, his mouth opening in an attempt to call for help. Without wasting a moment, I shoved a piece of cloth into his mouth, causing him to gag. Seizing both of his hands, I delivered a swift kick to his groin. I didn't bother waiting for him to put on clothes; instead, I continued my assault, relentlessly striking him until his body became a grotesque canvas of purple and blue. He screamed, his face contorted in agony, but no sound escaped his stuffed mouth.

"Seems you enjoy observing a woman's skills in the bedroom. Care to witness a man's prowess? Allow me to demonstrate mine," I jeered, delivering several hard slaps across his face.

His mued cries emerged from behind the cloth as he tried to crawl away from me. I tightened my grip on his hand and landed a forceful punch.

"Have you learned your lesson, or shall I provide further instructions?" I smirked, punctuating my words with another blow. Benjamin nodded frantically.

"Excellent. Take Riya back to the show and make her the showstopper if you want to prolong your miserable existence. Furthermore, publicly announce her joining the show with the utmost respect. Should you entertain thoughts of deance, believing I'll simply let you go, you sorely underestimate how far I'm willing to go to honor my word. Let me assure you, even if you attempt to hide in the depths of hell, I will nd you and make your demise a torturous affair. It would be in your best interest to comply with my instructions. If you agree, nod your head; if you disagree, you only need to point to my gun. I will put a bullet through you right then and there," I warned, retrieving my gun from my waistbelt.

He nodded his head frantically.

"Good!" I patted his head mockingly, delivering another stinging slap to his face before making my exit. I removed the cloth from his mouth and handed him his phone from the bedside table. The girl remained safely concealed in the bathroom.

"Now, rectify your mistake," I commanded, directing him to call the authorities and alter his previous decision.

With trembling hands, he seized the phone and hastily issued orders to change his plans, appointing Mariya as the showstopper.

And so, the problem was resolved.

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\*Mariya\*

I was in the middle of packing my bags when my phone rang, and Daniel's name appeared on the screen.

"Daniel! I know I messed up the entire tour and your hard work, and it was a huge opportunity. I've already apologized for that. Now, what do you want?" I groaned, already feeling frustrated.

"Riya, you've been brought back to the show, and you're now the showstopper," Daniel informed me.

What?!

I was left stunned and speechless.

"But h...how?? I mean... I told you what happened with Benjamin. I thought he would never work with me again," I mumbled, completely surprised.

Although I was overjoyed, I wanted to be certain before allowing myself to get too excited! Oh God, I was happy and thrilled.

"I don't know what changed his mind. Maybe he realized his mistake and felt guilty," Daniel muttered, sounding just as confused as I felt.

I had never believed in miracles. But today, I couldn't help but call this turn of events a miracle. The fashion show was just a day away, and I had to attend the rehearsal and the dress trial.

This was the rst time Domenic accompanied me to the dress trials. I wasn't self-conscious about my body, but undressing in front of him felt slightly awkward. I felt.. aware for the rst time.

He stood beside me the whole time as the designer tried on different dresses and made adjustments to the tiny details. I could feel his intense gaze on me as I removed one dress to put on another. But when I discreetly observed his face, he seemed unaffected. Although I thought I caught a glimpse of him swallowing once, his expression remained cold and indifferent.

The designer was openly gay, and Domenic was aware of it. However, whenever the designer touched me while xing a dress, Domenic would move closer and stand by my side. My heart would leap in my chest at his proximity. For a moment, I thought he wanted to enjoy a better view up close. Unexpectedly, I glanced up at him and found his dark, enigmatic eyes xed on me. He didn't look away but appeared the same as always: distant and uninterested.

Was he gay?! Perhaps that was why he showed no interest in women. It made sense, I thought.

Yet, the growing bulge between his legs told a different story.

Finally, the big day arrived, and I walked the ramp as the showstopper. Thunderous applause lled the air. This time, the applause was for me. It felt like a dream come true, and I had secured the most significant breakthrough of my career as a showstopper. Daniel mentioned that I would receive more endorsements after this show, and there was even a possibility of becoming the brand ambassador for a famous beauty brand. I had worked tirelessly for this moment, and nally, my hard work was about to pay off.

Everything happened in the blink of an eye, and the show was a resounding success.

To celebrate the triumph, we had an after-party where stars from the world of Hollywood and modeling were in attendance. Domenic had warned me not to have more than one drink.

That bloody commanding jerk.

"Domenic!" A woman growled, and I turned to see Bethany, a famous actress and former supermodel, looking at Domenic with fury in her eyes.

Baed, I looked at Domenic. He furrowed his brows, glaring back at the actress.

"Domenic, where is Nic? If you're intentionally hiding him, I'll take you to court," she threatened, her voice lled with fury.

"Nic is at home," Domenic replied calmly.

"Stop lying!" she yelled. "I went to his school last week to see him, but his teacher told me he hadn't been coming to school for a whole week. So I went to your penthouse. But he wasn't there either, and you were missing and not answering my calls. So what the hell is going on? Where is Nic?" she demanded, her tone rigid.

"Relax, Bethany! Just calm down. I'll explain everything," Domenic assured her.

I looked back and forth between Bethany and Domenic, utterly puzzled about what they were discussing.

"No, I want answers right now. Tell me, dammit, where is my son?" she shouted at Domenic.

"You're overreacting, Bethany. I'm on duty, and... in case you've forgotten, he's also my son," Domenic replied through gritted teeth.

He seemed annoyed, and Bethany gave me a scrutinizing glance while wrinkling her nose.

I stared at him, wide-eyed, shocked to hear those words.

Domenic's eyes met mine, and he furrowed his brow.

"Excuse me, Miss Leonard! Give me a minute," he requested, and I instinctively nodded.

Taking Bethany with him, Domenic led her to a corner. Their expressions clearly indicated that they were engaged in an argument.

So, he had a son with a Hollywood actress!

That must be the reason why he never showed any interest in me or any other woman. He already had a famous girlfriend or wife!

Bethany was stunning, attractive, and incredibly well-known. I suddenly felt intimidated.

Standing at a distance, I observed them as they fought over their son. Bethany was being aggressive. Didn't she realize that the media and the public were watching them?

Nevertheless, I was consumed by suspense, eagerly awaiting the truth. But I patiently waited until we were alone. After arguing for a while, they parted ways.

"So you have a son?" I blurted out as soon as we left the party and found ourselves alone in the car.

He nodded.

"And she... umm... is she your girlfriend or wife?" I asked hesitantly.

"Ex-wife!" he bit out, scowling.

Oh!

So, he was divorced and had a son.

A hot single father!

My eyes involuntarily wandered across his striking face. How could anyone let go of a guy like him? He seemed awless in every way. I let out a sigh.

"Why aren't you two together?" I winced as my thoughts slipped out of my mouth, louder than intended.

"Miss Leonard, my personal life is just that—personal. As your bodyguard, I expect you not to pry into such matters," he replied with indifference.

"But I asked as a friend," I mumbled.

"You are not my friend," he snapped curtly.

"That was rude, dude, and I was only trying to be considerate and share your burdens," I narrowed my eyes at him.

"I don't need anyone," he replied harshly before depositing me in my room.

"Good night, Miss Leonard," he said in his signature cold tone.

Without responding, I entered my room. Shedding the beautiful maroon gown, I made my way to the bathroom for a shower. After changing into my pajama shorts, I prepared to sleep. However, lying in bed, I couldn't stop thinking about Domenic and the pain etched on his face when he spoke of his wife. Correction—his ex-wife. I closed my eyes, but sleep eluded me. I needed to check on him.

With a sudden determination, I got up and headed to his room. Biting my lip, I hesitated before knocking on his door. However, I froze when I heard him conversing with someone.

And that was the second shock of the day for me. Standing there quietly, stunned, I pressed a hand to my mouth, listening to him talk about me to someone.